

Pass It On®...

Road Trip Across America.

A discovery of what unites us.

The early morning sun shelters behind the Rocky Mountains, and it's not until you reach Wyoming that it's up full. Seeing America by car has re-emerged. Perhaps pent-up travelers want to move about with no schedules and restraints. In doing so, you discover things that can't be seen from 30,000 feet. It is time for the classic American road trip — a journey that so often reminds us that despite our differences, we are family.

In Rawlins, Wyoming, a father, his son, and the teenage grandson stop at the convenience store for a mid-morning donut. They kick the dirt off their boots on the running board of the pickup truck. They are already sweating. The young man grabs the door for his elders, smiles and heads straight for the chocolate milk. Somewhere west of North Platte, Nebraska, farm families and workers have gathered at weathered picnic tables surrounded by the haze of a smoker stuffed with brisket. By Iowa, it's evening, and small town streets are buzzing with kids on bicycles and teenagers lined up at burger sheds while their parents stretch out on the grass.

The next morning, the wind is blowing, laundry is out on lines, truckers are moving to the right lane to let you pass. Each stop for gas and food reveals more groups on the road. Old and young, pillows on the dashboard, bicycles strapped to the back, stiff-legged drivers making their way to restrooms. At first glance, it's like a family reunion. Seems everyone says hi or howdy or how's it goin'?

Diverse in looks and backgrounds, united in the common need to reconnect, to belong, to talk about the rain, traveling with kids, where the best burgers are, and where everybody is headed. In Indiana, Amish folk work the fields and tend to the horses while a few young children play hide-and-seek in the corn. Chicago rises out of the alfalfa fields of Illinois, and city dwellers spray the streets from fire hydrants for the community's children. A fuel stop in Albany leads to the best ice cream stand and more waves and "safe travels" from the adults. There are stops in Massachusetts where college kids are returning to school—moving tubs of clothes and small mattresses accompanied by their parents.

They borrow rope and buy duct tape, and everybody smiles at them, remembering the freedom of youth.

Up the coast in Maine, the hamlets are teeming with families from Camden to Kennebunk. The most crowded spot in small-town bookstores is the children's book section. Inland, on the byways to Rangeley, Maine, lemonade stands appear at the edge of long rolling lawns, and there's a creamery along the fenceline of every dairy farm. It rains, but people still gather. Neighbors and tourists, family vacationers and retirees, orchard keepers and maple-syrup makers chat and get to know each other because after all, everybody has come from somewhere, has a friend or family member somewhere, and that's good to talk about. It's what we want to talk about.

At the top of Maine, just a few miles from the Canadian border, is a small lake. Families gather there in the summer, some from many states away. The sun breaks through the trees in the morning, becoming a million points of light all scattered on the water's surface. It won't be long before the stillness gives way to the echoes of children laughing, and people gathering in groups they'll call family no matter where they're from. And all of them will breathe a sigh of regret when it's time to go back to where they came from.

Family...PassItOn.com

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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