

I Quit My Career and Moved Into An Econoline

(A Motorcycle Memoir)

by Kyra Sacdalan

I wouldn't say it was a swift transition. Over a period of six months, I took work here and there to cushion the blow. We were pretty much living off of one income while I tried to transition into my new job, new home, new life really. For a few years I'd felt too close to the metaphorical ceiling, already, at my nearly ten-year long career. But as with any first real commitment, the one you've worked your hardest on to date, it's hard to let go.

Justin and I met by chance. I had finally taken the plunge (sort of) and moved south from Washington to attend a short dance program in L.A. - taking the odd Rigging job to pay for my lifestyle. A mutual friend of ours whom I had met years ago while working in Seattle remembered me during a gig in Los Angeles. This friend invited me out one Sunday night to a jazz club in Santa Monica to hang with him and a few good friends who were visiting to film a surf movie. I declined. It was a long trek, and I had to work the next day. Long story short, upon a lot of insistence, I met the friend-of-a-friend that would change my entire life. Justin and I bonded over travel and motorcycles in that smoky, dimly lit club speaking closely to overcome the loud music.

Fast forward a few weeks: he and I are living in a tiny apartment in Los Feliz while I finish my dance program. He worked remotely so the move to my apartment from his van (in which, prior to meeting me, he had decided to take up residence) was seamless. We spent long nights talking about world travel and dirt roads. And so it was decided. We were going to pick up some dual-sport motorcycles, and I was promptly going to learn how to ride off-road. We were, after all, planning a month-long trip to Baja in the fall, and there was no question that I needed to be ready.

Since then, our days were spent considering every detail of the upcoming adventure and how the nuances of our everyday life needed to change to suit the new titles we were going to take on: cultural anthropologists by way of motorcycle. Catchy right? We thought it sounded respectable - and broadly described what it was we wanted to do. Travel. Observe. Simplify. And simplify we did. When I completed my term in Los Angeles, we packed up what little we could in "Fargo the Cargo Van" - an appropriate name given by someone who was once very close to Justin - and pointed the compass North.

Little did I grasp that this was the beginning. That the next year would be spent in this van listening to raindrops against the roof, freezing my ass off or baking like a chicken, listening to bad rap music, or playing cards, dominoes and "Around the Horn!" Justin asked me early on if I would ever live with him in the van and traverse the coasts in search of surf and excitement. I said "yes" almost without

thought. Within months the daydream was realized and not once have I regretted it.

Let it be known, that as "free and easy" as living the life nomadic might seem, it's not for the faint of heart. I was lucky enough not to have to pick my vessel, but I've gleaned that it takes a lot of research and deliberation. The Volkswagen Vanagon is a popular overland iteration because of nostalgia and aesthetic. You picture it on a Super 8, overexposed, with tanned surf bums and smiles peering out of its draped windows. It's the freewheeling travel wagon of the 60's and 70's, and in its prime, was the best option out there. Or at least most popular. But it's finicky, expensive and typically unreliable. Over and over, we see VW's pulled off on the side of the road. Hell, they needed to start a club so they could keep their vans running, right? I kid! Sort of...

Justin went with the Ford Econoline because it packs a V8, it'll run forever, it's tough, and it's spacious. It just looks like a windowless carpenter's van, so to the untrained eye we appear unsuspecting as handymen (or pedophiles). This keeps the slummy types from snooping. With a bare interior, if you have the time, the Econoline can be molded into your perfect four-wheeled abode. Plus, it can carry all your life's belongings, a rack of surfboards and tow a trailer with two dual-sport motorcycles. Win.

One of the (many) things that moving into a "moving" vessel has done for me - and for us - was to instill patience, for obvious reasons. To not overuse unused space, but instead cherish it when I have it. We learned to work out our problems quickly and thoughtfully, or else we'd be left to stew in our issues not more than two feet away from each other. Also, stuffing your life in a small space forces you to rid shit that's useless and consider the true value of sentimental items.

Keeping your bits and pieces in tip-top shape is important, but for all you OCD'ers out there, organization is the most satisfying part of van living (outside of gaining insight and seeing new places and becoming cultured and all that, of course)! Whatever essentials and luxuries you did decide to bring will need to find their place inside your (mobile) home. If you're like me, then clutter drives you crazy. Plus, it minimizes the amount of usable space in the van so picking up after yourself shouldn't be an option; it is a requirement.

You think less about trivial things since you're often forced to focus on where you'll park for the night, if there are bathrooms, or a shower. You have to decide whether you're eating at a restaurant or busting out the camp stove. Sometimes, after hours of searching for a safe quiet neighborhood late into the night, a cop taps on your window just as your eyes close and threatens you - albeit often apologetically - to promptly leave the ritzy street in which you made the mistake of parking a white, relatively conspicuous cargo van.

What mobile living also affords is flexibility. You fire up the van at the order of the police officer then just re-park on the nearest cross street when he's out of sight. More than that, the van (or camper or VW, whatever) allows you to pick up what little you have and move on to a new mysterious land. To hear rumor about a decent swell or remember the Reno Air Races are but a few weeks away - an event you've wanted to witness since childhood. It's also allowed us to drag our motorcycles to the desert or the mountains and rip around on trails.

We aren't tied down to rent or a mortgage. Now that we both work remotely, it's not a matter of scrounging. We don't live in a van out of necessity - unless you consider the deep unwavering urge to see the world and try new things a "necessity." In the van, I don't have to worry about drapes and furniture. Tidying an entire house or fixing the leaky pipe. These are things that I'm happy to be without - for now.

The luxuries that are more difficult for me - and probably many others - are the inability to cook or bake on a whim, to hobble into a bathroom in the middle of the night, or to stand up while I change. We can ~~steal~~ borrow Wi-Fi from the parking lot of coffee shops, libraries and 24-hour gyms. We're not without entertainment and our cost of living shot considerably down, but the truth is, I'd kill (literally kill... some bugs) for a proper bed - even just the mattress! Without a proper bed, you can spend months or years developing long term back,

hip and shoulder issues. Just because you're dialing back on frivolity, does not mean you should sacrifice comfort or even your health. I'm serious! And Justin and I both suffer this, in various stages, now. Chronic back pain is not worth being frugal. Your vessel is still in fact your home and depending on who you are, it might not be temporary. Blow up mattresses and foam padding are for campers, not van dwellers!

Since I quit my career, met my love and moved into a van, I've co-founded a company to do the kind of work people (including myself) have only dreamed of. I've traveled through the furthest reaches of the Pacific Northwest and learned to surf (ish). I've crossed borders on my XT225 alongside Justin and his father in order to document the Baja 1000, then turned around and completed my first 500 mile organized dual-sport ride from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. I've said "yes" to things like hunting for abandoned WWII bunkers, or leaving the van behind in the United States in order to travel to Japan, Italy and the Philippines. We even lived in an apartment... For a month. And because of all this, knowing when to say "no" has become more apparent, too.

I've developed a whole new appreciation for when "I have" and when "I do not have." Mobility generates freedom and feeds curiosity. It can be an utterly self-fulfilling trap - after all, when you're "free" and you're "curious," you have the groundwork to do anything or go anywhere according to your whim. I've had to pull myself out of a slow

closing hole a few different times to avoid becoming smug or too proud of something that only really matters to me and mine. It's easy to feel good on the road, to never feel restless because you never stop moving. Though, always *kind of* feeling tired only to be re-energized immediately by the prospect of spending a solid week in one location (Please?).

What I've learned from Justin (as well as other such "wandering fools") is that to make this work, so-to-speak, is to try. And then try harder. Living on the road isn't a cakewalk! It's not always hard, but there's no cake without the baking. Experiences so far have taught me that your responsibilities - personally and socially - don't stop once you enter the "free" zone. They're just tailored and twisted to suit a nomadic lifestyle: income and finances, health and hygiene, comfort and luxury, making friends and dodging the law... it's the same in some way.

Is this the life you want to live? Good. Have a plan, and then forget the plan! Okay... It's good to have a 'game plan,' what kind of weather you'd like to be in, what kind of activities you need access to regularly, places you want to go, people you want to see. Make *that* a plan, nothing specific. Find multiple places you'd be willing to go and allow opportunity (jobs, events, people, surf) bounce you from place to place. Don't be afraid to get comfortable in one place for a while. Just because your home is mobile, doesn't mean you always have

to be. If the opportunity arises for you to be happy in one place, then go be happy in one place.

July marked my one year anniversary with 'The Road.' And so far we've had a really good run. Will we last forever? Probably not. But we'll remain good friends. We'll get together for holidays and plan new mini adventures together when I tire of my existence with my other good friend, 'Home,' only to come crawling back to her weeks after my forays. I won't give up adventure once Justin and I settle down. It's unlikely we'll ever slow. Til' the end of my life, I know I will never regret trusting my gut, my Honey and the mighty cargo van. They changed my life.

About the Author

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