

## Are We There Yet?

By Dennis Knight

One of us in our family Buick full of little Knights was sure to ask, “Are we there yet?” It’s the earliest rhetorical question of children everywhere, a bladder issue, and a tactful way of telling the old man to step on it. Our dad always understood that urgency and probably shared it. We could feel the car speed up, and the question needn’t be asked again.

I’ve been thinking the last few days about doing an essay on “Are we there yet” as a metaphor of life. The answer, as I would reveal it, is always soon, but never yes, because the meaning of life is in the voyage, and destinations are but waypoints. Frederick Bonfils, co-founder of The Denver Post, captured the concept when he wrote “There is no hope for the satisfied man”, and had it carved in stone over the entrance to the newspaper’s building in downtown Denver.

Having now run my gamut of deep thought and finding nothing to beat Bonfils, I move on. I remember long drives with my children. I would answer their requests for ETA with the stock “it-won’t-be-long-now”, and then sing an irritating little verse of “peas, peas, peas, peas, eating goober peas”. They got the joke but had to squeeze the old muscle down tighter, and the laughing just made it worse. I would redeem myself by finding a place to pull over. Only having sons meant I could be less selective about pit stops.

I have told the story before of one particular such moment. I had taken the boys on a learning and pleasure trip through the Midwest. We called it our “Mark Twain, Baseball and Hot Dogs Tour”, and it involved fireflies, a visit to Hannibal, a couple of overnights in St. Louis to see the Cardinals, a roundabout drive through the Ozarks, then Kansas City for a Royals game and a day at one of their great amusement parks.

While driving through the Ozarks we encountered a length of highway that went for miles in a close series of small hills quickly rising and sharply falling. Each drop left our tummies hanging in space and rolling in laughter. The boys were having a wonderful time of it and I was getting credit for a brilliant piece of driving when little Robert, then four, suddenly and urgently had to pee. I slowed the car and eased it to the edge of the road. Thomas, seven years the elder, hopped out, and as he opened the door for his little brother the right side of the car began to sink. What I had perceived as solid shoulder was only dense vegetation, mowed level with the pavement. The boys scrambled to safety as a concerned Missouri game warden pulled up. The right wheels gained tentative footing, and the vehicle rested at a twenty degree angle. It was a minor tilt, really, but it felt treacherous and looked worse.

The warden coached me back to solid ground. I got the boys belted in their seats, and we proceeded quietly, grateful for our friendly warden and guardian angel. The boys dozed off and I enjoyed the rolling green scenery for quite some time before I heard a sleepy plea from the back seat, "Daddy, are we there yet?" I selected a nice, safe turnout and we were all relieved.

This essay seems to have detoured, and in case you're about to ask, the answer is no, but we'll get there in a little while.

Perhaps Gertrude Stein was pondering our classic question when, after traveling to Oakland in search of her childhood home and finding it gone, she wrote, "There is no there there."

And that, my friends, is what we find as we pull into the driveway at the end of my piece. There is no there here, either.