

Destiny Rides Shotgun - Excerpt

An Epic True Story Adventure

Duane Eastman



Blackcoral LLC

Copyright

2024 Blackcoral LLC

Greenwood MO USA

ctdbooks.com

Copyright © 2024 Robert D. Newman Jr.

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form, including electronic versions, without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by US copyright law.

ISBN (electronic) 979-8-9868635-3-5

ISBN (paperback) 979-8-9868635-2-8

ISBN (hardback) 979-8-9868635-4-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024907402

The popular adage, “Based on a true story,” applies to this book as does “creative fiction”. Inaccuracies are inevitable due to time and distance. As a courtesy and to make the storyline more engaging, the author altered some events, names, and timing. That’s the true story part. This book is also a work of creative fiction—some characters, places, names, and situations are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously.

Destiny Rides Shotgun doesn’t fit neatly into the existing structure of book genre classifications. It wiggles into Amazon’s category of historical adventure fiction but needs some space for its timely splash of potential science based solutions to near future social and climate issues. The publisher suggests a new hybrid book genre: neo scifi.

Duane Eastman was and is an avatar before avatars became a thing. Duane gets blamed for most of the mischief and a lot of the fun. He’s just out of sight in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

Dedication

I am fortunate to have the resources and good health to survive the ordeal of writing a book. I give thanks and am forever grateful to the following:

Mimi and RD, my parents. Hank and Grannyo, my grandparents.

My siblings—Deré, Melissa, Jeb, Leigh, and Maureen. I am blessed by your love and support.

My beautiful, loving wife Arielle, who was there for me along the way.

My loved ones and friends.

Whom and Those who have provided such a wonderful life to me—my eternal gratitude.

Print Versions

You are holding a physical link to the past, a book printed on paper. Books are part of the evolution of humans, and an important vehicle to express intellectual development.

For eons, books have been bound in paper of one sort or another. Paper has unmistakable qualities that trigger human acknowledgement, affection, and respect for its place in history—both culturally and personally. Paper evokes a wonderful, almost magical attachment triggered by the tactile turning of the pages, the aroma of the printing ink, and the intimate and satisfying ability to control the pace of reading and absorption of the content. Many people treasure and revere printed books, including me.

But you can't click on the links!

You will notice links to songs and lyrics at the beginning of each chapter and Interlude. The music of the era was a rallying call to the youth and a worry to the adult establishment. It defined my generation and was a crucial reference point for the story's events and mood.

I urge you to visit the website www.ctdbook.com. There you will find easy access to the music and song lyrics. The “ctd” in the address refers to Connecting the Dots. Dots are an integral part of this book and my life. Even if you don't yet recognize it, I submit they were and are in your life, too.

Besides music, you will also find more relevant, behind-the-scenes information, and a fascinating trove of photographs.

Muchas gracias for your purchase of this book. I trust you will enjoy it.

Duane

Contents

Prologue	1
Introduction	5
1. North Africa	9
North Africa Photos	24
Interlude One	25
2. Afghan Primer	29
Afghan Primer Photos	33
3. The Road East	35
The Road East Photos	48
4. Afghanistan	49
Afghanistan Photos	56
About the Author	57

Prologue

Santana *Soul Sacrifice* • Lyrics

During my twenty-second lap around the sun, Scott, Dave, and I were standing on the hot and dusty tarmac of the Kabul International Airport.

We scrutinized the ground crew as they loaded freight aboard a Pan Am flight to Frankfurt, Germany, with an ultimate destination of Cleveland, Ohio, USA. We were also attentive to the ongoing commentary of the Afghan Pan Am Ground Agent named Mohammed.

He had been skillfully paying airport workers according to their status from the wad of Afghani currency (known as *afghanis*) that we gave him. Mohammed guided us through the terminal, past immigration and customs, and out into the bright sun of a warm summer day in Afghanistan of 1973.

Mohammed was a scholarly man and excelled in bribes. Like less fortunate street hustlers, he was fluent in English, Farsi, Pashto, and in multiple European languages. I also heard him converse in Afrikaans. He was sharp and clever—often a person to be wary of. We'd already encountered some textbook examples of that type on the road to Afghanistan.

In the coming months, Mohammed proved himself honest and capable, a valuable resource, and a fine human being.

Noor recommended him to us in Kabul. We spent months at Noor's carpet store enjoying tea, hearing tales, and choosing carpets to ship back to the US.

Oriental carpets are beautiful and timeless objects of art. We knew they were very cool, and all things Afghani were popular in the West, due in part to John Lennon and other rockers wearing "Afghan" coats. However, we knew those coats were from Turkey, not Afghanistan. We came to appreciate the origin and beauty of carpets in those months, sipping chai and learning how to identify fakes as Noor schooled us from abject novices to knowledgeable rookies. He also sold us a lot of his carpets.

It required a keen and experienced eye to identify an antique carpet from a just-woven carpet. And countless "antique" carpets jammed the local market. One day, Noor escorted us on a field trip to the northern part of Kabul on a congested and dusty road that was filled with trucks and buses. Through the choking cloud of street dirt and debris, Oriental carpets littered the road. The traffic wore down the nap of the new carpets, dirt provided authenticity, and the shiny new colors dulled. And that, Noor firmly pointed out, was where so many "antique" carpets originated.

Carpets were fun, and we hoped profitable to import to the US. The trip from Amsterdam to Kabul through Frankfurt was a trial run for us because we had a secondary purpose in mind.

For Scott and me, Afghanistan materialized on our radar screen as the source of the unquestionably best hashish known. We were aware of and had indulged in the other top contenders: Kashmir from northern India, Nepal bordering India and China, and Chitral in northern Pakistan. But

in our minds, there was no argument—Afghani was the best. And we intended to go there, find it, smoke it, and facilitate making it available to others.

The sun beat down relentlessly and the temperature rose steadily as we stood with Mohammed on the tarmac. We were a strange sight: three long-haired Westerners gawking as the plane taxied to the runway to prepare for takeoff. The engines roared, and the plane lurched forward and began its journey west.

As the wheels retracted into the fuselage and the plane soared skyward, we turned to walk away. Mohammed gestured at us and said, “*Na!*” (No, stop!) Following his lead, we waited until the plane disappeared from sight. Then he smiled, turned, and led us back into the terminal. We exchanged no words, contemplating what just happened. The lesson presented was unmistakable—never trust without verifying.

And thus we received a brief course in International Business 101. A timely tutorial, and valuable for our stated aspiration.



Noor & Helper in Kabul carpet store

Introduction

Rolling Stones: *2000 Lightyears From Home* • *Lyrics*

Here's the thing. You must truly get your mind wrapped around the era to feel the absolute joy and sense of freedom underlying this book. And music was at the heart of it. Rock 'n' roll was front and center, defining Western culture in its image and values. The era defined individual tastes in clothing and hairstyles, often classifying friends into two musical camps—The Beatles or The Rolling Stones. Without hesitation, I was in the latter camp. Some of my friends were in the former.

To me, the choice was like fishing. The Rolling Stones music was the bait on a hook with a lead weight to sink it into the deep water to catch the older and clever big ones. On the hook was an earthworm—alive, earthy, and active, like the blues and jazz that were the roots of the Stones' music. Their music grabbed you and shook you, made you move and feel the beat. Their music was edgy and naughty. They were the rebels of rock, constantly flirting with danger and often in the midst of it.

The Beatles' music was like fishing with a bobber. It floats on top with a piece of bread as bait to catch whatever might come its way. The bread would disintegrate swiftly, leaving nothing on the hook. I liked some of their songs, but they didn't last long as a group. They may have

developed into more of what I liked had they the staying power of the Rolling Stones.

Even if you don't remember, like, or care about rock 'n' roll, it played an important part in the cultural and political evolution of the Western world in the 70s. Wait a minute, think about it. Like life itself, music has evolved. All in existence now has at least traces of previous generations. Rock & roll has prominent jazz and blues DNA. The music of your generation shares the family tree. Give thanks and listen to the music, dear reader.

For the benefit of those who may still scratch their heads in wonder at my assertion of the power and influence that music held over me and my generation, I submit the chart of relevance below.

Rolling Stones vs Beatles	Year	Albums	Shake That Thing	Rebellious	Scare Parents
Stones	1962 - 2022	38	Hell yes	Yep	Oh boy!
Beatles	1963-1970	12	Seldom	Sleepy	Nah

Rolling Stones vs Beatles

The chart lacks scientific evidence, displays bias, and might be slanderous (unintended). It vividly illustrates the musical foundation upon which this book is written. Each chapter and interlude have a hot link to a song and its lyrics from a [Spotify](#) playlist. They're some of the most influential sound tracks of my life and events in this narrative. If you listen to the music and give the lyrics a read, you'll drift into the vibe and feel the era. It was a remarkable time, and I appreciate having survived it. If you were there, you might feel the same.

If you passionately seek enlightenment of the relevance of each song played, you can easily do that online by visiting one of the many websites that host song lyrics. I suggest you use the search bar at the top of

Genius.com. Each song rocked me one way or the other, but all resonated with me as I chose them for my book.

While reading, it's important to note that it was during a golden era, the early days of widespread use of "soft" recreational drugs. At least that was true in my experiences, and especially so if you identified as a hippie.

I'm talking about marijuana and hashish and, to some extent, LSD. No hard drugs like opium, heroin, and, in later years, cocaine.

It was also a tumultuous era full of youthful optimism shaded by inexperience with the sledgehammer of history and violent social upheavals. Change was on the horizon, and it was slowly creeping toward us like a fog obscuring the playing field. The "love, peace and happiness" of the 1960s was drifting into the '70s, toward a more traditional American aspirational reality of growing up, having kids, and buying a house.

It was a time before the nasty side of drugs took hold and the underbelly of human behavior—greed, violence, and money—became the norm. A time before soft drug distribution became a ruthless and dangerous behemoth of organizations employing traditional vice activities that are harmful and opportunistic.

But to my good fortune and good luck, this book takes place in a sweet spot of time. That brief era was a flurry of adventure and travel in a world still untraumatized by social media, digital everything, fake news, the internet, and a burgeoning population of humans on an evermore crowded planet.

This story occurred when a good number of pot and hashish merchants had a sense of purpose and took pride in seeking the very best quality and delivering it to an informal distribution network of individuals—not unsavory organizations. That unfortunate aspect was to come later.

Scott, Dave, and I adhered to the credo of *Pride in Workmanship*. We thought in terms of what now are called “Personal Shoppers,” seeking the best quality in the best places. A philosophy we took to heart.

In these early days, if one fervently desired the best and had an adventurous streak, one would go to the sources. For blond hash, that was Baalbek in Lebanon. For green hash, Ketama in Morocco. Black hash in Nepal or Kashmir in India. Chitral in Pakistan. But the best hash of all? Afghanistan. And the epicenter was Mazar-i-Sharif.

We wanted the best, and we were up for an adventure. Road trip! Adventure, risk, and profit were the reward for originality, clever thinking, and getting up off one’s ass and going out into the world.

People still highly regard the traits mentioned earlier and now call them *entrepreneurial qualities*. I invite you to listen to the music, digest the story, and tune into an era that was instrumental in the upheaval of societal norms and expectations.

Chapter One

North Africa

Crosby, Stills & Nash: *Marrakesh Express* • *Lyrics*

Africa, holy shit! When I signed up for this trip to Europe, that itself was venturing into the exotic and the unknown. But Africa? That's a leap beyond the pale.

I referred to my trusted map of Europe that guided me to Switzerland, the Matterhorn, and the introduction to Scott. Looking more closely at the very bottom edge of the map was a sliver of geography that illustrated the northern portions of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. I noticed the larger and bold word *AFRICA* just before it cut off the rest of the continent.

It clearly indicated that our destination was far from being a quick trip. The distance between Zermatt and the tip of Spain, the crossing point from the European continent to Africa, spanned 2,000 km (1,243 mi).

Scott said, "Morocco has some excellent hash, but it's hard to find, even there. If we can make it to Ketama, we might get lucky."

I trusted Scott's word, lacking the experience to form an opinion. But the shot at adventure sealed the deal and we hit the road. I hadn't been in Europe for even two full weeks and now was moving on to Africa. That was cool, but I knew that there was plenty of adventure waiting for me in Europe when I returned. And Amsterdam was at the top of the list.

The journey to Morocco from Switzerland resulted in not only a progressive change of weather (warmer), but also a radical transition from the calculated tolerance of Swiss governance to that of an authoritarian dictatorship. We serendipitously splurged and took a train through Spain, avoiding the potential wrath of Francisco Franco's supporters while hitchhiking. We endured a 12-hour train ride in second class on a crowded train to Madrid, followed by an overnight train to Malaga. The crowded train was not a fond memory rerun of the train to the Boy Scout Jamboree. The crowded cabins reminded me of the "jerk contest" on that trip, and I made a point of avoiding sleeper cars.

There was an upside. The unpleasant body odor, stinky socks, and unwashed clothes in the crowded train cars provided a perfect cover for the smell of the hash that Scott hid in the rolled-up cuff of his field jacket.

Fellow travelers further informed us that Spain had a nasty habit of coming down hard on drugs. *Generalissimo* Franco was the reality in Spain, and his stranglehold on the country personified itself in extreme views on what qualified as acceptable social behavior. Having long hair like mine was a step too far.

We arrived in Malaga a couple of days before January 1. We planned a normal day or two as tourists, enjoying the warm sunny day (compared to that of northern Europe) and a New Year's celebration at the tip of the European continent. Instead, we faced a steady stream of taunts and near threats about our appearance, meaning our long hair and youth. We

spent New Year's Eve holed up in a cheap pension, eager to get the hell out of Spain and into friendlier territory.

Long before the internet, we depended on news and travel alerts that emanated from word of mouth. Word on the street from travelers along the way, and confirmed when we arrived in Spain, was that you couldn't get into Morocco with long hair. *No problem. Buy a short hair wig!*

Scott's hair was borderline long. When he tucked it behind his ears, we deemed it passing length. Mine was a different story. I bought a cheap short hair wig, and it looked the part. It also looked ridiculous on me.

We took the ferry to Ceuta and crossed into Morocco. The customs agent looked at me in the short hair wig and my passport photo with shoulder length hair, then I heard the soon-to-be familiar sound of the bureaucratic *whomp, whomp!* The official government sound of approval stamped on paperwork, then my passport. I was in Morocco. We laughed with a sigh of relief. It soon became apparent that long hairs were everywhere, and short-haired wigs were easy to come by at youth hostels.

We hitchhiked south from Tetouan with the intention of a visit to Ketama, a small village on a slope of a mountain range in northern Morocco famous for its hash. Ketama was in the Rif Mountains, a region with a long history dating before the Romans and long settled by the Berbers. A rugged region with rugged inhabitants. During our journey to Ketama, we stopped at Chefchaouen, where the old town's pastel blue walls were a sight to see and later became an Instagram trend. However, we heard rumors of the military blocking the road to Ketama. We weren't having any of that, but the news was consistent among hippies and, well, it also rang true. Ketama and the Rif Mountains region were usually under guard by military patrols and checkpoints. To have the military close access off was something more serious.

Our immediate attention switched to Marrakesh, so we continued south to Fez, then over to Rabat, skipping the tourist routine. Low-price accommodations kept us within our budget, the idea of which was to live as cheaply as possible. We lingered in Rabat, then ventured due south to Casablanca—a beautiful city with lots of our people around. We took the train, the Marrakesh Express, to its namesake destination. And yes, like Crosby, Stills, and Nash sang, there were chickens, ducks, pigs, noise, and lots of locals in *djellabas*, not to mention a motley throng of tourists.

We were with our people! No one hassled us for our hair or appearance. Everyone got along and we relaxed and melded into the hippie scene of the early '70s in Morocco. It was a fabulous transition from the haggard feeling back in Spain of an uptight, myopic society. That was more generational—not the people our age, but the political environment put a lid on the freewheeling “love, peace and Woodstock” vibe we enjoyed. The train ride was joyous, if not crowded, and the cars seemed to rock and roll serenely as we *click-clacked* along the rails toward our destination. I didn't encounter any “jerking” on this train ride, except the sudden application of brakes from time to time. The railroad tracks in the desert were a collection point for animals and humans. I don't know if those jerks involved any fatalities.

Marrakesh! Damn, here we were in the fabled city of rock 'n' roll lore. We were out of smoke, sure; of course it was easy to come by, but of disappointing quality. We persisted and eventually scored some sweet blond Moroccan—soft and resinous with a promising aroma—and surprisingly cheap. We hung there for a couple of weeks and found our share of adventure while avoiding the authorities.

Even in the distant past, as far back as the era of this book, most people knew the Sahara Desert is in Africa. And quite a few of those folk realized places like Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia bordered that enormous and

desolate region. Even I imagined that reality, but hadn't situated it within my immediate surroundings.

Formally, the Sahara Desert is several hundred kilometers south of Marrakesh. It holds the title for the biggest desert with a "hot" climate (not all deserts are tropical) and covers 9.2 million square kilometers (3.5 million sq. mi)—slightly smaller than China. However, the Agafay Desert is a small regional desert, only 50 km (31 mi) from the center of Marrakesh. We took a local bus, seeing oases with palm and date trees, people in white robes and turbans, and many animals, both wild and domesticated. Donkeys pulled rickety wooden carts upon which were animals in cages, or tied over gunny sacks of farm produce that was to be sold at the market. And sand, lots of sand. If you were far enough away, you could observe the heat shimmering above the sand, warping the distant signs of human life and conjuring mirages stirred by one's imagination... And, in our case, by hashish smoke.

Have I mentioned camels? Lots of camels. Without these very fascinating creatures, desert dwellers would have a harder life. Camels did it for me. Just their presence made me confront the reality that I was in the freaking desert! They also smelled cool. Some might call it a stench, but smell signals authenticity. They were big, and too many ugly creatures that were chill while living in a hot and threatening environment.

Scott and I decided we needed a couple of those. We could cruise the desert in search of cool stuff—go places you couldn't hitchhike to. Be part of a camel train. See the real Sahara. We were kinda high, so the idea wore off rather quickly. The smell brought us around to reality. Can you buy a camel? Yep, you sure can. Do you want to own one? Nope, definitely not.

By nature, most are docile, but they are very large and very strong, and they also know how to defend themselves. Camels can bite with sharp

teeth, kick in all directions, spit large quantities, and run faster than you. They often develop an affinity for their owners and handlers, but if they develop a dislike for someone, you need to be cautious. They recognize people and have long memories.

A word of caution: Stoned humans with a curious nature who come too close to an irritated camel will find evidence that they can indeed kick in all directions. I still have a crooked nose from a camel's kick. Known as Ships of the Desert and Beasts of Burden, they deserve respect, as they don't take any shit from bothersome humans. I came to know them as Beasts of Hurtin'.

As the weeks passed in a blissful stoned state, we lived frugally. However, one day, with even less to do, we discovered we had about US\$80 left between us. We were living on oranges, Moroccan green mint tea with sugar, and the occasional bowl of couscous. It's low in calories and rich in protein. Nowadays, it's often included as part of a weight loss program. Our weight loss department didn't need any help, but the protein was critical. We had to be careful and stay away from lamb. Trouble arose early on due to our sensitive digestive systems, quickly transferring its aftermath through our intestines with scant warning. What was more concerning was the balance in our travel fund account. That was a bit of a shock, but not much of a worry to the savvy travelers that we fancied ourselves.

Nonetheless, we thought it a prudent idea to head back to Europe, where we could replenish the bank. We packed up (having gifted my short-haired wig long ago to someone in need) and started hitchhiking from Marrakesh in a northeast direction. The plan was to pick up the coastal road east across North Africa, with not a thought about the fact that the next country we would enter was Algeria, an ally of North

Vietnam. Scott had fought on the opposite side in Vietnam, and I was a long-haired American that likely offended Allah in all possible ways.

We blitzed through Morocco and discarded the remaining hash we had as we neared the Algerian border. Algeria was a world apart. It was common knowledge that Communist countries took harsh measures against people having fun. Possessing even soft drugs, or indulging in them, was dangerous and resulted in stiff prison sentences. Private automobile traffic had considerably decreased, making it more difficult for hitchhikers. The vehicles were also much older and not well maintained. Algeria was a socialist country and lacked the benefits of capitalism that we were used to. We were fortunate that an Algerian university student picked us up hitchhiking and took us several hundred kilometers toward the capital Algiers. But it shocked us when he pulled over in the middle of bloody nowhere and said he couldn't take us any farther. Our Arabic was nonexistent, and his English was as bad. He seemed nervous, which further alarmed us. Even more concerning, we were in a hostile area with no town in view, and it was already dark. Great.

Do Guardian Angels operate in Communist countries? The answer would come soon enough. The reality of our situation fully realized, we began walking with no other obvious alternative. We had just walked past an unpaved road, not much more than a trail, when an ancient farm vehicle of unknown variety lumbered to a stop behind us. The driver appeared to be of the same vintage as the vehicle. With a full-on Arab beard and ragged clothes, there was also a reserved smile on offer. He motioned us to climb in back—a flatbed with side rails similar to a pickup truck bed—and we did so with some hesitation. We had no other options, so we decided to ride it out. He backed up and turned right down that dirt path. We bumped along, going farther and farther from whatever bit of civilization we may have been near on the coastal

highway. Despite the beautiful star-filled sky, apprehension prevented us from enjoying it. Were we headed to trouble, or to a safe harbor for the night? Our uncomfortable bumpy ride seemed to last much longer than it did. We could only judge by the stars and the enveloping darkness. Our decision committed us, regardless of the outcome.

The vehicle topped a small hill and we could see the outlines of some huts. Starlight glinted off the smoke emanating from one of them. We pulled into the compound and an older woman greeted us. We thought her the wife of our driver. Both warmly welcomed us into a mud brick hut with greetings in Arabic and a little French. I remembered from my days as a Vietnam War protester and the related reading of counterculture books that Algeria achieved their independence from France in the early '60s. Such an important event only a decade ago would loom large in the memory of these people.

There were only two rooms. The one they led us into was obviously the main sleeping and eating area for the family. The outer room had a firepit in the center. It conjured up a resemblance to the often-portrayed medieval scene, with the pot hanging over a fire being stirred by an old woman. The smoke from the fire hung in the room before escaping through a round hole in the arched, but low ceiling. Goats roamed the room, while straw covered the sandy floor. A mixture of odors wafted through the space; not unpleasant, but definitive. Odors that were rich in layers of time. Even the smoke from the fire was complex, like they had deliberately aged it before being allowed to escape. The small space concentrated the air, imbuing it with a vintage scent. The elements of human life were prominent, with their animals contributing nuance. It felt welcoming and safe, the result of our arrival in a secure location for the night. The pungent odors were therefore much easier to accept.

The smell of mint tea was also inviting, as was the small portion of couscous that was offered. We felt humbled and honored at his outpouring of hospitality. In due course, we retired into the adjoining room, where an old gentleman, the elder of the family, was sitting on a raised platform—a bed of sorts. His smile was genuine, and you could feel his sincerity and glee in meeting us. Our appearance and likely national origins were a nonissue with him, as well as our hosts. Conversation was not in the cards, but communication by tone of voice, body language, and a few scattered French words created a warm and friendly engagement. The elder had a few scraps of newspaper in French, with headlines about the end of the successful Algerian revolution. He then showed us his rifle. Scott and I each held it with appreciation, and he nodded to each of us when we handed it back. The reverence was clear without words spoken.

With that, he rose and gestured that he was leaving the room, and the resting platform was ours to use. He parted with “*Bonne nuit*,” then “*Allah akbar*.” They had so little to offer us, but gave us everything they had. It honored us to be their guests.

We slept well and rose early the next morning. They were firm that we were to be driven back up to the highway, which allowed us to view the area: the land was barren desert scrub. We noticed subsistence farming of grain crops, sheep, and chickens before we left the compound. We arrived at the highway in short order—the trip back seemed to go much quicker—as Scott and I were in a contemplative mood. We said our *au revoirs* and watched them drive away.

Guardian Angels don’t need passports, can speak all languages, and do not heed the predilections of humans, like political beliefs. Ok, that’s settled. But are Guardian Angels assigned to a human to oversee? Do they cover a zone, like in sports? Can they disown an assigned human for unacceptable behavior? Are they independent contractors, or do

they have an employer? They have no need for compensation. It seems like there's a link, or at least some kind of relationship, between karma and good or bad vibes. My intuition informs me so. Therefore, we add Guardian Angels to the growing collection of subjects to consider in my hypothesis to explain Dots.

So, we started the day back at the same location on the road we left the night before. We were some unknown distance west of the capital, Algiers. With thoughts of gratitude and having gained an inspiring knowledge of human nature, we began walking and sticking our thumbs out at the occasional passing car or truck. Eventually we got a ride, and about an hour later, we were passing through the capital. Even though we were in an Arabic country, it had a Communist government. The official buildings and many others had that same unimaginative, dull look of Eastern European Communist architecture, with an Arabic twist. We were happy to be let out on the eastern edge of the city. It was about 2,300 km (1,429 mi) from Marrakesh to Tunis, where we intended to catch a boat to Italy. We were now about two-thirds of the way there. It would be another 1,000 km (621 mi) from Italy up to Munich, Germany. We'd have to improvise—we couldn't carry enough oranges to last the distance.



Travel is the best education. It's higher education, university level all the way. No age limitations and no entry exams, but no diploma awarded to hang on a wall. The reward is a cornucopia of experiences and exposures to vastly different cultures and points of view. It's a life-changing series of studies that lays a foundation for personal growth and encourages one to challenge the norms of their birth country. In the short time that had

elapsed since I joined the school of the road, I'd absorbed enough to set the wheels in my head churning.

One never graduates from travel if they're fortunate. The number of improvised classrooms, countless subjects, and exam equivalents is vast and thrilling. The lessons learned are not just memorized; we absorb them like vitamins and sunshine. It feels good in the moment, then sinks in over time to nurture wisdom and knowledge.

Travel can throw a lesson in your face, like being discriminated against because of your color, appearance, clothing, religion, or nationality. Lesson learned—not everyone thinks or looks like you. There's always more than one side to a story or situation, and you learn by asking questions without harboring a hidden bias.

However, there's a particular branch of street schooling that is easy to get into, but tough and treacherous to survive. It's a school that millions are born into without choice. They hold classes in inner cities, third world countries, and poor rural areas throughout the world. Students are ill-prepared for the curriculum and not given second chances. *Smart* is not the same as *intelligent*. You need both attributes to survive that school, and only the sharpest thrive. Each of us has no say in who our parents are, or where we are born. People understand this well. I consider travel a privilege that carries a responsibility to respect those who were not born with the advantages many of us take for granted.

In the bazaars of Morocco, I witnessed youths approaching tourists and shaking them down with a glance. The way they dress, their shoes and walk, and the language they speak tell the young people where they're from. A polished casualness in their approach effortlessly transitions into a greeting in the foreigner's native language—more times than not, they're spot on. In the following second or two, if they sense they've used the wrong language, they switch to the next best guess. I've heard

them start with German, then Russian, Hungarian, Finnish, Dutch, and Afrikaans. Some of these street kids can't even read or write.

So is that intelligence or being smart? I believe it's both, with a survival component. Their instincts are honed early in life, driven by hunger and desperation, and eventually the tough edges are worn off and they become perceived as educated. Like all animals, humans' first order of business is survival. Most people on Earth do not begin with the advantages with which I and many others have had. I learned that a little compassion toward those on the street is in order. Appraise the person and situation before responding to a hand reaching out from dirty ragged clothes. In countries like Algeria, even travelers down to their last few dollars, pounds, francs, or marks are wealthy compared to most with their hand out. While there are exceptions, acknowledging my good fortune is a humbling reminder.



In Algeria, governmental policy attempted to restrict—or at least discourage—contact between locals and visitors. The metropolitan areas were the most controlled. Our ride took us through Algiers and let us out on the eastern edge of the capital. We were grateful for that and avoided most of the city, figuring it would have been tough to thumb our way out of downtown. However, we were in a bleak and rather dingy part of town—the wrong side of the tracks, so to speak. We walked, since no other option presented itself. We approached a group of young guys just hooting and laughing, taunting each other and posturing, in case a girl was watching. Even though that was not likely in an Arabic country.

Their attention shifted to us and they absorbed the unexpected sight of long-haired Westerners striding down their street. Either they ac-

cepted the Communist doctrine that foreigners were to be suspect and reported to the authorities, or they were just looking for some trouble. Scott and I were veterans of this situation, and knew that engagement would only egg them on. We reshouldered our backpacks, walked a little straighter, and moved past. None spoke a foreign language, except we could make out “heepy.” It was mildly tense, but they didn’t challenge us.

Traffic was going by in both directions, so that helped us to get out of their sight and attention. We got a series of rides in the back of trucks, watching the scenery change from urban to rural to full-on desert. It was warm, but not overbearingly hot. We made it about 300 km (186 mi) that day.

As night approached, the temperature dropped, as it does in a desert, and our last ride let us off as close to nowhere as you can get. We needed to secure a place for the night and were delighted to find a culvert that ran under the road. Apparently, it only served a purpose in the rare instances when it rained. The night was clear and star-studded, the desert an empty expanse, bereft of any human presence except for the desolate highway. We settled in for the night, thankful for our goose-down sleeping bags and some oranges.

With a new day beginning after a cold night, we checked that the area was as empty before, hoping to catch a ride before the sun became too hot. After being picked up, we rode for hours until we reached a roadside stand in a small village owned by our driver’s friend. We enjoyed some delicious mint tea and couscous, courtesy of our ride—another unsolicited act of kindness that we were very grateful for. As a bonus, the little village was a rest area for long-haul drivers. There was a lot of traffic (for Algeria), which buoyed our spirits further.

We then figured out that we were close to the Tunisian frontier, and the border between Algeria and Tunisia. The next ride could be tricky, we knew, as we'd been down this road before, so to speak. If the driver let you out before the border to avoid any hassles for themselves, then we would have to approach the customs area on foot. That would inevitably lead to more scrutiny, more bureaucratic hassles, and a long wait.

Not long after, a sedan with only a driver—no passengers—stopped and gave us a lift. He was a Tunisian doctor on his way back to Tunis and spoke some English, so we had a pleasant conversation as we approached the border. Our driver reassured us there would be no difficulty with the formalities. He crossed this border frequently for his work—just let him do the talking. Scott and I mentally exchanged “No problem there” glances. It went down just as the doc said. We expressed our gratitude and Scott and I promptly dozed off. When we woke up, the good doctor informed us we were nearing Tunis and asked what our intentions were. We did our best to say we wanted to get a boat to Italy. He correctly understood our desire, and not long after, we saw the port come into view! He dropped us in front of the ferry terminal. We were effusive in our praise and thanked him for his generosity. We bought tickets aboard the Tirrenia ferry to Naples, Italy, leaving the next day.

Travel—at least what had become our extreme kind of budget backpacking—was really cheap. In our case, it was “practically free,” to quote the street hawkers. Our 10-day journey had covered over 2,000 km (1,243 mi), and we still had some (not much) money in hand between us. Enough to buy the cheapest class tickets to Italy. We achieved such a feat only by the generosity and kindness of many people—none of whom knew us, and most didn't speak our language or even share the same cultural background. It's a safe bet that the little money we had was more

than the average person of Algeria, Morocco, or Tunisia would earn in a month. We were blessed and shown kindness throughout our journey.



Specifically, we covered a distance of 5,000 km (3,107 mi) by land from Zermatt, Switzerland, to Tunis, Tunisia. We walked (not much), hitchhiked, took trains and buses, and rode a ferry from the southern tip of Europe to the northern tip of Africa. Then we hitchhiked across the breadth of North Africa to the eastern limit of Tunisia.

Hitchhiking to Europe was not an option from Tunis. We switched to water transport and boarded the ferry to Naples, Italy (600 km, 373 mi), and then hitchhiked from Naples to Munich, Germany, about 1,000 km (621 mi). It was a helluva a good time, and Scott and I made it without any major issues between us. We proved to be excellent traveling companions.

We departed Africa, arriving back in Europe nearly broke financially, but rich in experience. At least, that's what we used to rally us into recovery mode.



Marrakesh, Morocco



Discarding hash at Algerian border

Interlude One

We've All Done It

Led Zeppelin: *Ramble On* • *Lyrics*

I have great news for you. You were right! And you knew it all along, with a gut feeling about it. But why did you end up making a bad decision—again? Thankfully, it was a minor thing. You knew better, but chose wrong.

Who am I to rub it in? I live in a glass house, so I shouldn't throw rocks—right? It's not only me and you who have gone against our intuition, but every human also born in the last thousand years, or more, has done it.

Intuition isn't the same as instinct, but we instinctively seem to dismiss intuition.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *intuition* as “the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference.” It defines *instinct* as “a largely inheritable and unalterable tendency of an organism to make a complex and specific response to environmental stimuli without involving reason.”

The issue is a human thing. It makes little difference where you were born, what language you speak, or your religion or ethnic origin, intuition is shared by all. Everyone has said or heard someone say phrases like, “I should have listened to myself,” “I had a gut feeling,” “I knew better,” or “I had bad vibes about it, him, or her.” Usually we learn this after an outcome that was not what we desired.

Which statement occurs more often: “I’m glad I followed my instincts” or “I wish I had listened to myself”? Surely, it doesn’t matter. Either phrase acknowledges the same fundamental reference to intuition.

Human intuition was already in place when we were still foraging for food on the savanna. Ignoring an intuition then could prove fatal. Now it’s commonly believed that disregarded intuition is frequently accurate, but it’s rarely a matter of life and death. Ignoring intuitions that have proven reliable is close to the definition of insanity: doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result. Perhaps that’s strong, but can we lay the blame on societal conditioning? Why do we habitually disregard our instinctive feelings?

Intuition is hardwired into the human brain. By that I mean it’s included in the DNA of *Homo sapiens*,² and perhaps our forbearers, *Homo erectus*.³ It’s a shared mammalian characteristic that humans needed to survive before we developed reasoned decision-making.

Did intuition atrophy as humans became more societal and gained knowledge and intelligence? Did genetic code edit intuition in humans?

Time is distance, and distance allows opportunity for change. The period from the emergence of *Homo sapiens* to the 21st century is about 300,000 years—about 15,000 generations: enough for genetics to have its way.

Malcolm Gladwell wrote an immensely popular book, *Blink* (published in 2007), about intuitive decision-making. He reportedly “drew

heavily” on the research of Gerd Gigerenzer, a German psychologist and director of the respected Planck Institute For Human Development.⁴

We’re talking respected authors here, and bona fide scientific research. Some feel the path to understanding intuition taken by these and others veers from the traditional principles of rational decision-making. Although that’s a respected opinion, it’s not reason enough to dismiss alternate explanations out of hand.

The Interludes in this book explore my nascent hypothesis that a causality connection exists between inexplicable events or situations and human instinct and intuition. I should clarify, out of respect to science, that I’m advancing a hypothesis, not a theory. But *Hypothesis of Dots* sounds clunky and boring. *Theory of Dots* sounds, well, like science. Let’s go with “Theory.”

I further consider the pursuit of scientific knowledge to be the most beneficial form of adventure. So I ask for forgiveness from the scientific community as I continue using the word *theory* throughout this book.

It took time and distance for me to reflect on the events in this book and how they relate to my theory. The process was jump-started by looking through photos of my journey. I literally have thousands. When I began digitizing the selected analog images, they transported me back in time. As I assimilated the visual information, the story in front of me emerged.

I became engrossed in my photos, drawn into the scenes with memories swirling. Each gave me clarity, with a hint or a suggestion to identify this event, person, or place, connecting later to other situations, which fueled my theory. I had a gut feeling there was far more to discover.

Some photos resembled a reflection in calm water that emerged after someone threw a pebble into a pond and the waves dispersed. The adage, “Still waters run deep” applies here. The inhabitants of my still

water pond grew as I continued to search. I saw human emotions and feelings created by intuition and instincts. Inexplicable timing of events and fortuitous happenings. Also, Guardian Angels preventing disaster or coming to the aid of someone (usually me), good or bad vibes, gut feelings, luck, and coincidence. But I had a feeling that coincidence and luck were perhaps not in the same league as intuition, and needed closer scrutiny.

I explored the Guardian Angel interventions, coincidences, good luck, and timing of unexpected meetings. I felt they were not all independent events. The relationship was becoming clearer, though still hazy. A conundrum, for sure.

Destiny loomed large in my thoughts—the idea of life events being foreordained was intriguing.

Karma was a recurring explanation. Is it the water in the pond?

There is still much to learn about intuition, gut feelings, vibes, and Guardian Angels, and their connection to reasoned decision-making.

The pond is deep and has more secrets to share. We'll dive to greater depth in the following Interludes.

Chapter Two

Afghan Primer

Bob Seger: *Hollywood Nights* • *Lyrics*

Amsterdam had us primed for Afghanistan. We had imagined the trip there many times while sitting in the Vondelpark, smoking a chillum of hash with travelers who had just returned. Despite knowing some of them might have embellished the dangers, we were aware the journey would be long and as perilous as one would make it. It wasn't a train ride—unless you considered the Siberian Express to be a direct route. Public transportation was doable, with a minimum requirement of extreme patience and no deadlines. Commercial air travel was an option, but no way for a real traveler to get there, and expensive for the Europe on \$5-A-Day type. The Magic Bus was the dream of dirt-cheap travelers on a shoestring budget. The bus's planned journey was Amsterdam to Goa, India, via Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nepal. Passengers had to pool their money and do repairs when the bus broke down, but it always made it to Goa.

We had graduated from the U of H (University of Hitchhiking) and would take the high road—or at least a road of our choice—to get there:

in our car and our itinerary. That's not to say we studied thoroughly, mapped the route, and primed diligently for the trip. We were having a blast in Amsterdam hanging out, and weeks just slipped away. Life was good, and we were a little reluctant to move on. So we lingered in Amsterdam—not much of a hardship.

Amsterdam operated on a higher level of adventure travel expertise than any other city on the Continent. It was the ultimate hippie destination, a traveler's clearinghouse for the exchange of pertinent intel. News, useful tips, and potential threat warnings for the Continent and all destinations east were as up-to-date as was then possible. The Dam Square was crawling with experienced travelers and interesting people from everywhere. It also harbored fakes, scoundrels, people on the run, and police and Interpol undercover agents. They were easy to spot. You only had to look at their shoes. If they had laces and a shine, smile and move on.

The coffee shops, bars, youth hostels, and the street were the places to glean useful info...if you took care to apply common sense to what you heard. A traveler's experience was their street cred—how long they'd been on the road and where they'd been. The longer the better, and a CV that included Nepal, India, and Afghanistan put that person in the top tier.

Amsterdam had it all—cool vibes, tolerant authorities, and millennia of history as a merchant center. It was world headquarters for travelers. Dave blew into town about the same time that Scott and I arrived. We hung out at the Branderij Bar near Nieuwmarkt, at the corner of Koningsstraat and Kromboomssloot, near the Red Light District.

Scott, Dave, and I had all traveled independently in previous years and we each had encountered contrasting spheres of travelers. We each gleaned useful knowledge and applied it when the opportunity present-

ed itself. That was the way things worked on the road. When the three of us gravitated together in Amsterdam, we did the same thing among ourselves.

The universe decided it was time to introduce another important player. Hawk was both personable and engaging—knowledgeable but not overbearing. He'd been there, done that, but was circumspect in talking about it. He was the quintessential traveler and personification of Amsterdam's reputation as a trading country. Hawk was a merchant of the ancient tradition disguised as a hippie. A deep thinker but quick to action, and a get-things-done kind of person.

Hawk helped to open the Sapsalon fresh-squeezed juice bar up on the Koningsstraat, only about 50 m (54 yds) from the Branderij. Hawk was a decade senior to us, which automatically gave him higher standing in the travel pecking order. He was ostensibly American, and his friend, PK, was Canadian. They had a bus and had been doing the back and forth from Amsterdam to Afghanistan, India, and Nepal for a couple of years. The profitability was marginal, but Hawk and PK had alternative motives in wanting to prepare for a more lucrative operation. In later years, Hawk enthused to me that he supplied nearly all the best Afghani hash to the North European market via Amsterdam in the 1970s. His methodology was inventive and effective; he never lost a shipment.

They knew the route and hazards for the drive to Afghanistan by heart—there was no internet to Google! We lapped that info up while smoking Afghani hash.

We learned Afghanistan was a loosely organized country of many tribes, ruled by a king. It was desperately poor, with little opportunity for individuals to climb out of poverty. Despite that fact, some did well for themselves. Education was the key, as is often the case, and being born into a situation that allowed schooling overseas was at the top of

the list. There were also exceptionally intelligent youths with a knack for languages and took advantage of it. Cleverness, drive, and opportunity were the steppingstones for this group of people. They were the ones we were most likely to meet, as they gravitated to where the money was—tourists.

The landlocked kingdom had resisted invaders for centuries, from Genghis Khan to various European powers. Afghanistan was a poor third world country, but wealthy in undeveloped natural resources. A nation of tribal origin rich in culture and human character and long in history, it had a storied past of explorers, adventurers, invaders, and evaders. It was a place to respect and be on your toes, with the best hashish in the world.

But hearing so much for so long about Afghanistan ceases to be a thrill. Enough time had passed—we were finally ready to hit the road and see for ourselves firsthand.



Hawks pet python freaked out border guards



Costa del Sol sexy boat



Hawk's bus in the Desert of Death



Sail Away

Chapter Three

The Road East

Steppenwolf: *Born to be Wild* • Lyrics

The VW two-door sedan we had previously discovered in the used-car lot in Frankfurt seemed cavernous compared to the Schultz rental VW Bug. One owner, excellent tires, clean condition inside and out with an exterior color of sky-blue, representing the open road that we were about to embark on. As you might imagine, it didn't stay clean, inside or out, for very long!

We had a collective intuition that the VW sedan was the right car the moment we saw it. We still felt that way when we returned to buy it. It could've been that we were desperate to get on the road, but the fact that all three of us sensed it made an impact. And our due diligence inspection supported our initial conclusion. That kind of intuitive reaction is something everyone can relate to, but there was something else. That "one owner" detail involved karma and would surface later with a vengeance. No spoiler here, but was our intuitive decision to buy the car related to the karma that manifested itself and came back to us in due course? Intuition, instinctive behavior, and karma are all human

reactions to events that fall outside of mental reasoning. They appear to be connected, but in what way? What would that look like?

We'd seen karma, as I define it, illustrated in the many kind gestures that benefited Scott and I during our journey between Europe and Africa. Karma was also apparent in the interventions of Guardian Angels. Similar to my assertions that your behavior, good or bad, toward others as a traveler will stitch the fabric of your travel experiences, so too with karma.

We liked the VW. It was solid, and we were eager to get on with it—didn't even haggle over the price much. We paid in cash and eagerly waited for the paperwork to be processed so we could hit the road. We brought little in the way of personal effects—we figured we'd be dressing like Afghanis soon, anyway. What was most important was the Sony portable cassette deck to blast tunes as we left a trail of hash smoke across Europe and Asia. We calculated and brought as much hash as we figured we'd smoke before we could replenish the stash in Afghanistan.

Our music selection reflected our state of mind (besides being stoned): young, restless, and eager to move. We didn't even want our shadow to keep up with us, and it was rock 'n' roll all the way. We hung each speaker from the clothing hook on either side of the back seat—crude, but effective. We blasted everything from Van Morrison to Edgar Winter. Loud and fast. Like us, usually.

Tot Ziens¹⁰ Europe

We bolted out of the used car lot in our tricked-out VW sedan. That's a generous description. The exterior looked like an automobile your grandmother would love. We liked that about it too. A nondescript vehicle that would not draw attention to itself. I thought of a dorm room

when I looked at the interior. The mechanical aspects of the sedan were good, and the heater and windshield wipers were about to be tested. The weather was typical in that part of Germany—cold and rainy. We dragged mud into the ride while getting it ready for departure, and the dirty interior soon reeked of illicit smoke. Before we roared out of that secondhand car lot, we rigged up our Sony cassette player: speakers hung from the coat hooks over each rear door, wires tucked in along the window frames, and the player resting in the front seat. Scott pressed the Play button and Van Morrison launched into “Glad Tidings.” We were on our way to Afghanistan! The Autobahn was nearby, and we were soon passing the Frankfurt Airport. Dave, Scott, and I were alert for any potential scrutiny, especially when we passed the US Rhein-Main Air Force base on the south side of the airport. The area was swarming with police and security personnel.

The facility was bustling, as the headquarters of Military Airlift Command was coordinating transport for military personnel to and from Europe. The C-5A Galaxy airplane was one of the largest military aircraft in the world, and they were prominent—the damn things were HUGE.

Commercial flights and military planes sometimes shared the taxiways near the air base. If you had a window seat in a Boeing 707 that was taxiing next to a C-5A, a giant tire—one of the 28 required to handle the weight of the plane—filled your vision. Crane your neck up and up, looking through your window to see the fuselage underbelly. The monster C-5A was fascinating to watch. I couldn’t believe that it could get off the ground.

This was Scott’s point of entry to Vietnam; he had lived in this area, and around Heidelberg. Like many Vietnam vets, he talked little about his experiences there and not much about his time “decompressing”

around here—except for all the partying. He was happy to drive right past the airport on the Autobahn, barely glancing at it as we drove on to southern Germany, the gateway to cross the Alps as we sped toward the East.

Music festivals in Germany were prestigious events. Woodstock may have been bigger, but the festivals still had big-name headliners. We skirted Heidelberg, with our sights set on the Black Forest and then Stuttgart. We passed near Germersheim, where the British Rock Meeting Festival took place in May of '72. The bill at that time included Pink Floyd, The Faces, The Kinks, Humble Pie, Buddy Miles, and The Doors (sans Jim Morrison, who died the year before). Scott recalled the organizers acknowledged his contribution to the party atmosphere over the festival public address system as “good stuff.”

The German Autobahn did not have a speed limit. Drivers of fast cars loved it; the fainthearted feared it. We, of course, occupied the former group and drove the wheels off that VW. It was a novel concept to drive as fast as you wanted and not worry about a speeding ticket. There was an unofficial limit—drive within the operational safety margins of the automobile and your personal driving skill. It only took a time or two to be going 120 kph (75 mph) and have a Porsche flash past at 220 kph (137 mph) to realize that you needed to stay alert... Don't drive in the far-left lane, it's for passing only. Look for flashing headlights in your rearview mirror; you're about to be passed by a vehicle at high speed. Get out of that lane quickly.

The Black Forest intrigued us, so we jumped off the Autobahn south of Karlsruhe, avoiding France, to the west, and Switzerland, farther south. We spent some time marveling at the dense forest of nearly identical trees. When we pulled over and turned off our stereo and the car, we found it to be quiet, intriguing, and worth exploring farther. But

we hadn't been on the road very long and wanted to get some distance between us and Germany.

It's important to note that France had a thing against smoking Mother Nature, enforcing severe penalties for possession of hash or marijuana. Switzerland was much the same. There was a reasonable distinction between small and large amounts of drugs in both countries, and throughout Western Europe. However, we were hailing from Amsterdam, which had skewed our perception of the difference between large and small amounts. We grasped the difference between kilos and grams, but our daily usage of hash was considerably greater than most typical tourists—or even the locals. We smoked a lot of hash over quite a long time and our tolerance grew as we smoked ever larger amounts daily. When we talked about quantities among ourselves, we referred to a “chunk” or a “slab.” We left Amsterdam for the flight to Frankfurt with a sizable chunk of superb Afghani hash. Enough, we thought, for us to get close to the hashish motherland.

I digress. Hence, we didn't want to cross into France and absolutely not Switzerland, as they were at the apex of technical ability to detect contraband at their borders. They were quick to enhance their border points with the latest and greatest tech X-ray, dogs, scales, and even mirrors that rolled under the car while the agents watched on a screen. This was prior to computer capabilities, but they had ledgers with vehicle weights, dimensions, and chassis specs for the most popular cars, trucks, and buses. If it rolled, they could compare the specs with what they were looking at and determine if there was a discrepancy worth pursuing. They were very successful at discovering double doors, altered vehicles, and even spaces in boats that were being towed. However, for unusual vehicles—vintage military trucks, World War Two vehicles, military ambulances, expedition vehicles, and large construction machinery—they

were less successful. That gap in the vehicle ledgers was a convenient area to use when selecting the transport of many varieties of contraband.

The Black Forest, designated as a “mountainous” area, was beautiful, but from where we were, it seemed more like high hills. There was the odd pointy hill, so we ignored the details. The genuine mountains, the Alps, were on the horizon to the south, and there were snowcapped peaks that gave full definition to their designation as mountains. However, they were clearly in Switzerland, so we stayed to the north, veered east in southern Germany through Austria, and then swung to the south.

The secondary roads we drove took us through picturesque villages, where we had time for a beer or two and a smoke. We concluded that the Black Forest earned its name from the thick pine trees that cast the lower elevations into perpetual darkness. While the cool scent was refreshing at first, it soon became stifling. No wonder the cuckoo clocks make that crazy sound time after time! When night was approaching, driving on the Autobahn was easy, as it was well lit. These tiny rural roads were not. We found a little inn and called it a night.

We were more than a week out and less than a 1,000 km (621 mi) from Amsterdam, but it was never very far away from our actions or thoughts.

After a good night’s sleep, we rose early and hit the road, keeping to the north of Switzerland, driving east on the national highway toward Austria. We had traded the superfast German Autobahns for the narrower, slower, but more scenic roads of the other European countries.

We had relentlessly played hard driving rock ‘n’ roll music as we left Frankfurt and sped down the Autobahn. The hours of driving in that atmosphere left little space for quiet contemplation. Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, and The Who were right on and matched our mood. Slower-paced national roads would favor Crosby, Stills & Nash, Van Morrison, and Grateful Dead. They fostered, at least in me, time to

think and mull over thoughts and questions fermenting in my brain. Or maybe it was being stoned and absorbing all the unfamiliar sights, smells, and sounds of travel to new places. Probably both.

We motored eastward, more or less parallel to the majestic and beautiful Alpen mountains. The real Matterhorn was several hundred kilometers south, but as I drove, I considered the importance of the miniature theme park Matterhorn ride in my life and how it connected to my current situation, immersed in the majesty and beauty. Lots of questions were bouncing around in my head. All of us seemed to be lost in our thoughts as we drove ever closer to the end of Western Europe and the beginning of Eastern Europe—Communist countries that suppressed and controlled their populations. No doubt there was little fun to be had there by guys like us.



Frankfurt to Istanbul. Map data ©2024 Google

That passage hugging the Alps was the first time I took advantage of the lull in action and allowed questions to surface that had been lingering in the recesses of my brain. For the last couple of years, I had been running fast, enthralled by travel, peddling fast to absorb and respond to new cultures, languages, and perceptions. It was a heady time for a young man from the Midwestern United States. I was a student of the road and loving it all.

Travel profoundly changed everything for me. My perspective of the world and my place in it took on new meaning. I saw and accepted reality with a much broader input of information and experiences, which evolved effortlessly with time and distance. Travel provoked a deeper curiosity in myself and the concept of time and space. But it wasn't only travel that launched deeper thought.

When Jimi Hendrix released *Are You Experienced*, in 1967, many thought the songs were a reference to LSD trips. Allegedly he hadn't dropped acid yet. Nor had I. But popular culture made him and his music an anthem for LSD and psychedelic art. My experimentation with LSD didn't happen until years later, but it was definitely a catalyst for expanding my thoughts.

We had to drive around 800 km (497 mi) through scenic but slow routes from our location near Freiburg, Germany, to reach the stunning lakes and woodlands of Klagenfurt, Austria. The surroundings were bucolic and retained the charm and architecture of an old city from nearly a millennium in the past. A few dozen kilometers south from there was the border with Yugoslavia¹¹—a Communist country.¹² We didn't know what to expect. And even worse, we were low on hash!

We crossed into northern Yugoslavia without incident and hustled 200 km (124 mi) south toward what we hoped was a sunny and warm coastline.

It was pristine and majestic! We were on the Dalmatian coast of Yugoslavia (now a region of the Republic of Croatia) and winding our way south. The road rose and fell along the narrow two-lane highway, where vehicle traffic was scarce. The crystal-clear waters of the Adriatic Sea were stunning. There were pockets of beach here and there, but mostly the water sparkled as it met the vertical cliffs, producing a marvelous symphony of sound. Pure harmony with the azure-blue of the afternoon

sky, the drifting cotton-ball clouds hiding the sun momentarily as they scurried off to gather force so they could water life farther inland.

The air was fresh and invigorating. The Black Forest's somewhat stifling nature made the unexpected contrast all the more welcome. We embraced the feeling of adventure and the absence of humans, imagining ourselves to be balanced on the brink of danger as we skirted disaster careening around every corner. In fact, we drove slowly to enjoy the scenery, stopping often.

Countless islands lay offshore. Some had spectacular structures, built like medieval castles that seemed to rise from the stony surfaces into edifices that mimicked the rocky geology.

We were amazed to find that the Communist country had managed to maintain its ancient buildings and renowned history, contrary to our expectations. However, as we entered the city, it presented us with the unimaginative architecture we labeled "early penitentiary"—dull, ugly utilitarian designs that matched the hardships in life endured by the "comrades" living the drab life that they were born into.

Was it the simple misfortune of being born there? Surely, they did nothing to deserve this life. Are there alternate realities in which those unfortunate people could have been born, but by chance or design, they were not? Thoughts and questions like those circulated through my mind. Were they triggered by my hallucinogenic experiences, blurring my reality with an expanded sense of the self? Was I experiencing a flashback that was touted as one danger of LSD? Nah, I didn't think so. I was just letting my thoughts run free—a harmless and interesting pastime.

Yugoslavia was uncharted territory to us—there was little tourism then and very little information trickled into the scuttlebutt knowledge

base in Amsterdam or elsewhere. The country was under the hardcore fist of Josip Tito as president of the all-powerful Communist Party.

Yugoslavia was an outlier in the bloc of Eastern European countries. Tito threaded his way between the Soviet Union, Western Europe, and the US. He did not include his pragmatism in politics in his social policies. He crushed political opposition and fostered a stark life for most citizens. Our experiences with the people we met—only a few of whom spoke English—were fine. They warmly welcomed us with understandable curiosity, but kept at a distance. As Western visitors, we were obliged to stay in hotels designated specifically for us. We were hoping to pull into one of those castles and stay a while. Not to be, though. We enjoyed our drive down the shoreline, staying one night in Split, the other in Dubrovnik, but we didn't enjoy the architecturally bankrupt cement edifices or the unimaginative cuisine.

It had been a spectacular drive down the Adriatic seaside of Yugoslavia. The rugged coastline was dramatic and reflected the character of the people, while the clear and inviting water of the sea calmed our souls and spirits. The shift to a different reality from Western Europe was effortless. The sense of adventure propelled us forward like a friendly hand in the middle of your back. We weren't reluctant, just a bit cautious.

We faced a decision just past Dubrovnik. Should we take the most direct route to Greece and clip the northern part of Albania, or the longer way around by jogging up and around Albania but staying in Yugoslavia? We lacked any knowledge of Albania, yet assumed it was more Communist than Yugoslavia. Maybe the coastline was equally beautiful or not. We were eager to pick up the pace, so we went up and around Albania, dropping into northern Greece in a day or so of driving.

That part of Greece was a region known as Macedonia. It had been a part of Yugoslavia, so we could hardly tell the difference between where we were then and where we were now. Does that make sense? We did the logical thing and took the most direct route through Greece to the border of Turkey.

Boom! We left Europe—where we knew the people, roads, and signs well—and were about to enter Asia, where everything would be completely different. We didn't see it as any big deal at all. *Let's go, pedal to the metal!*

Another question was drifting around in my thoughts: How could religion—Christianity of Europe and Islam of Asia—cause such a difference in social traits? Was that the right question, or was there more to it, as there usually is with anything to do with humans? Traveling seeded questions that created new patterns of thought, forcing me to think more deeply. Some kind of shift was brewing within.

Dag¹³ Asia

We crossed some risky borders in Europe, into and out of both Western and Communist countries. And we had knowledge from reliable sources that there were two to be very careful with—the one we were approaching, Turkey, and the following country, Iran.

Some think the bridge over the Bosphorus is the border between Greece and Turkey. Not so. It's the point of division between the two continents, Europe and Asia. We crossed from Greece into Turkey about 250 km (155 mi) before that defining bridge.

Both Greece and Turkey were notorious for meting out harsh punishment for drug use. The infamous movie *Midnight Express*, which didn't come out until 1978, was about the jail in Istanbul, Turkey's largest

city. We drove past Sağmalcılar Prison (later called Bayrampaşa Prison). Unbeknownst to us, it would become famous and shine a harsh light on Turkey. However, the location we saw was not the prison depicted in the film. They used a more imposing location on the island of Malta.

Once in Turkey, it was a long haul across the mountainous backbone of the country. From Istanbul to the eastern Turkish border with Iran was close to 2,500 km (1,553 mi), with the capital, Ankara, about a quarter of the way. The road was narrow, two-lane, and often treacherous, with small villages along the way. Snowcapped mountains lurked to the north, and the rural population was tolerant of our appearance. Although Turkish is the predominant language, Islam is the predominant religion. Turkey, like Arab countries, has a history and responsibility to provide hospitality to travelers. Only on rare occasion were we escorted out of a village among a rain of rocks, encouraging us to move on.

East of Ankara, the weather turned cold and windy. After slowly motoring through a small village, we came upon an old man bundled up and carrying his few possessions in a sack. We had been blasting Edgar Winter on the stereo, and we all noticed the man at once. Someone turned down the tunes and asked if we should give him a ride. The nods gave a consensus so we pulled over and opened the door, motioning him to get in. He scrutinized us, seemingly comparing the warmth of our car to the chilliness outside, and grinned. He got in. We turned the tunes back up and cruised. We were quite curious to see how he would react. Within a few minutes, he was nodding his head and making a few movements to the beat of the pounding rock 'n' roll. It was brief and not overt, but he responded, and not negatively. I doubt he had heard Edgar before—and maybe not R&R—but we all smiled as he departed, and he got a ride to the next village.

As we approached the border with Iran, the imposing Mount Ararat loomed over us on our left shoulder. Scott and I would view it from the air when we winged west on a Pan Am flight from Kabul to meet up with our Afghan carpets in the US.

Our route would cross from Turkey into Iran in the far northeastern corner of the country, skirting Mount Ararat and what is now Armenia.

The Shah of Iran was still in charge and holding court, although we doubted he would invite us to visit. It's a big country with an ancient history and beautiful scenery. Tehran was called the "Paris of the East" then and was home to an educated population—Persian, not Arabic. The contrasts were astounding. The architecture was beautiful and extravagant, hosting a variety of vehicles and pedestrians. Compared to what we had seen so far, the city was up-to-date, with a strong Western feel. Foreigners were welcome, and hordes of young people thronged the streets. All fascinating, but we had a destination in mind, so we hit the road. Tehran was 1,000 km (621 mi) from the border with Afghanistan.

We were rocking and rolling unabashedly in our mobile sound studio...or, more accurately, the VW sedan that had safely and dependably propelled us across Europe and into Asia. We had traversed Turkey, and then the breadth of Iran to the border of Afghanistan. Herat was just across the Afghan border—a welcome sight, or so we thought. Ahead of us lay the final 1,000 km (632 mi) stretch of road to Kabul.

What we didn't know when we left Herat was that about halfway there, our rolling would nearly cost us our lives.



Near Kandahar - dashing out of a poppy field



We stopped for a Buzkashi(14) match. Click photo for video

Chapter Four

Afghanistan

Jimi Hendrix: *Highway Chile* • Lyrics

We entered the Afghan government customs facility at the border near Herat, crossing from Iran. A white late model VW bus with prominent Swiss plates was pointed in the opposite direction and leaving Afghanistan, or attempting to leave. We could make out several Western tourists in the typical clothing of people who had been hanging out in the country for a while. Several guards had them grouped together, away from the bus. The place was abuzz with activity. The commotion around the bus was punctuated with Dari (an Afghan dialect of Persian) and Pashto chatter from the Afghans, with only occasional muttering from the foreigners. A group of onlookers milled about, peering and pointing at the activity. They were likely the customs area occupants and hangers-on, but distinguishing the tourists from the guards proved to be a challenge. The rest of the crowd were Afghan, some of them with the look of authorities. The vibes we picked up were intimidating, and it definitely had the makings of a bust.

To describe this place as a “facility” is much too generous. The squalid, dirty, smoky encampment housed the dregs of officialdom. Discard any thoughts of competency, release mental images of an organized entry procedure to Afghanistan, and think near chaos, bloated bureaucracy, and unbridled graft. As the scene around us further unfolded, the main attraction was the group of unfortunate former occupants of the VW bus. We weren’t even on the playbill as we slowly drove forward into the abyss of that scene, unsure of what to do.

Time slowed as we watched in fascination at the growing melee. However, our focus snapped into clarity when the man unmistakably in charge froze the action with his arrival. His enormous smile belied his complete control over the destiny of those foreigners. His uniform was sharp, but only compared to the slovenly look of his subordinates. We could clearly see the masked look of menace he harbored, even though he was 10 m (33 ft) away from us. His perfected look of composure scarcely disguised it.

At that moment, one of the throng noticed our car—apparently a customs official based on the sidearm that he was wearing. He waved us over to a parking place and motioned for us to wait. We certainly weren’t going anywhere, now trapped in a compound with a crowd blocking the exit. The unfolding drama enthralled us, anxious about its outcome and what it might mean for us.

As the dark man advanced toward the vehicle, the crowd split, and we could spot the partially disassembled bus. The doors were open, and they had pulled the door panels off. Men were lying under the car, tapping here and there; the attendant was finger-pointing and shouting at the discovery of the hidden hashish. Like leaf-cutter ants, a procession of ragtag workers removed similar sized parcels from the car and piled them on the ground a few meters away. The boss glanced in that direction as

he approached. Four foreigners, with looks of despair and an obvious sense of foreboding, stood together in a group, guarded by armed men in uniform. Their furtive glances toward us were telling—they had indeed been busted.

Each of us solemnly took stock of the situation. We were “clean,” but our appearance and a cursory check of our car’s interior would surely uncover plenty of evidence that we had only recently shed some of the natural substances that those guys a few meters away had in abundance. These crazies could easily set us up and deal with us in any fashion they thought appropriate. Allowing overt actions on our part to look around or otherwise appear concerned would likely only worsen our fate.

So we turned our attention back to the movie-like show outside our car just in time to see the dark man walk toward us. The look of satisfaction was still there, but now supplemented with a smile like you’ve seen on a crocodile’s face.

He waved us out of the car and said, “Come, come, gentlemen, to my office,” with an impersonation of a British accent.

The border and frontier were indistinguishable in this part of the world. A country’s border demarcates the officially registered and protected line where one country stops and the other starts. The frontier is the undefined zone on either side of the border. In this parched and sparsely populated desert, you could be in Iran or Afghanistan and not know the difference. That’s exactly the way the nomadic populations considered the entire country. They divided it up among tribes, with feuds and unsettled grudges having more sway than governmental regulations. It was impossible for a visitor to identify the tribal area they were in.

It became evident now that the petty mindset and perceived authority of our host, Mr. Croc, authorized him to declare and execute the local laws and regulations.

We were several kilometers into Afghanistan proper and about 75 km (47 mi) still to go to Herat. The buildings were little more than shacks, built with sun-dried mud bricks from the not-too-far-away muddy creek that passed as a river in this desert. The interiors were poorly lit and had open fires for cooking, and in the winter, heating. Animals also commonly shared the tiny, cramped living spaces, which had a particular odor that we would soon become familiar with. We'd been in deserts in North Africa, and now in parts of Asia—they all shared a common trait. You would be in the middle of nowhere with no living creature in sight, but do something, make some kind of noise or distraction not common there, and suddenly, there would be people... Lots of people. It was eerie and abnormal to the Western psyche. You got used to it, though.

We, of course, accepted the invitation to the office and walked at our own pace. It seemed we were unguarded, but guessed we were being watched and behaved accordingly. Back in Amsterdam, Hawk had stressed that we should accept any offers of hospitality graciously. To insult a local that was abiding by the age-old custom of hospitality to passing travelers was a huge faux pas, and dangerous.

Mr. Croc greeted us at the door and showed us in. In comparison to the typical hut, this one had electric lighting and an old ramshackle desk. A gesture was made for us to settle on the sand floor, on top of Oriental carpets. He sat cross-legged, so we did too.

He introduced himself as Chief Custom Inspector of the Herat Region. We were ceremoniously welcomed to Afghanistan and asked for our passports. As he set them aside, we wondered if we would ever see them again.

His continued dialogue gave us some reassurance, but his smile made our wariness gauge needle peg at maximum.

We were intensely curious about what had transpired in the customs area and what might be the fate of those guys. I think our host knew that well and let us simmer about it.

He segued into his authoritarian government persona and said, “You should know that possession of substantial quantities of hashish is illegal. Our neighbors (in this case, Iran) are quite upset when it passes from our country to theirs. Therefore, it is our duty and responsibility to see that doesn’t happen.” Another practiced application of his OK British accent. At that he smiled, followed by a chortle. “As you saw, the visitors we welcomed into our country attempted to exit with about 100 kilos [220 lbs] of our excellent hashish.” He shrugged his shoulders and scolded in a nonchalant tone, “Unfortunately for them, we knew of their pending departure from our country and knew where to look. But you gentlemen are arriving and can expect to be treated well.”

With that, he waved his hand and one of his underlings brought him a chunk of hash, at least 100 grams (3.5 oz). It also looked like excellent quality—could be from Mazar-i-Sharif. A couple of other custom agent types entered and prepared a hubbly-bubbly (hookah) with a mixture of tobacco and hash.

All kinds of alarms went off for us. They had just busted a car loaded with hash, and presumably the occupants were about to spend some time in an Afghan jail—not a place one wants to visit, let alone serve time. And now they were inviting us to get high with them like old friends. Shit! This was too weird. But we were on a fast train going somewhere not designated and we had better make ourselves comfortable and enjoy the ride. Double Shit! The hash smelled excellent, which confirmed our visual appraisal. These guys knew their way around a pipe and could

inhale like pros. They were imbibers, not just putting up a façade. When it was our turn, we knew we were being judged by a jury that had the power to treat us as they saw fit.

We clearly passed the test, whatever that was, because the Big Guy handed us that chunk of excellent hash, stamped our passports, and said we could leave.

Shit, shit, shit! Now we were really screwed. We were gifted a chunk of hash by the Chief Custom Inspector upon entering Afghanistan and smoked it with him. The same guy that had busted a bus loaded with it in front of our eyes. He, who told us those poor bastards had been set up and allowed to drive across the country only to be snared a few kilometers from freedom. Of course, they also had to pass through Iranian customs, which also could have spelled doom. The obvious deduction on our part was we too were being set up.

Should we politely refuse? Refusal was not an option in this part of the world. Accept and discard it later? Could work, but also a clear insult if discovered. If it was a setup, they'd simply plant the hash on us anyway.

But most of all, it was a chunk of excellent Afghani hash, and we were out. We weren't about to give it up!

"That's very kind of you, and we appreciate it greatly. Thank you for your gracious hospitality," we offered as we left the office. But we couldn't resist any longer. "What's going to happen to the people you just busted?"

The expected smile said it all, but he offered, "They will suffer the consequences of their poor decisions."

Questions lingered in our minds. Why was an educated and well-spoken man holding court in such a remote and dead-end location and job? Punishment or opportunity? What decisions led to the dreadful

outcome of those guys in the VW van? Did any or all of that have anything to do with us?

And decades later, as I reflect, I wonder if their Guardian Angels were off duty, or otherwise not protecting them. Everyone has Guardian Angels, right? Was their karma bad? Was it simply bad luck? We had already prodded and pushed our “luck”—and our angels, no doubt. We also hadn’t given due acknowledgement for their kind services. Time to pay more attention! We might not have fully understood karma, intuition, instinctive decision-making, or even luck or coincidence, but we certainly could see there was more to it than met the eye. How did all of that fit together?

We were thankful to get our passports back (mine had the visa with the car stamp, which meant I had to leave the country with the car). That was of no concern at the moment. We were free to drive on into the country that we had driven about 7,500 km (4,660 mi) to reach.

We apprehensively drove out of the customs area and headed south to Kandahar, concerned about what the next few kilometers had in store for us.



Herat Border - A friendly welcome to Afghanistan



Herat - Afghani customs people

About the Author

The Who: *My Generation* • *Lyrics*

He was born in the Midwest of the United States in the middle of the last century. He was fortunate to have highly intelligent and enterprising parents, whom he promptly dismissed as impediments to having fun. Several decades passed before it dawned on him that perhaps he was a bit quick to judgment and in fact had loving and supporting parents who gifted him five incredible siblings.



That notwithstanding, it took another decade or so to fully get it. Along the way he traveled, learned and forgot lessons, had a helluva lot of fun, and heaven forbid, gained some wisdom. One of the most important insights he gained was humans are all different in the way they look, think, and behave—and no particular way is the best. And those differences make the world a very interesting place to live. He currently resides in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.