

Yet even with its seemingly archaic status as a functioning automobile, the old Eurovan had been a necessary investment for that trip. There were many gray areas regarding where we would be passing the upcoming evenings, and a bed on the road was necessary. The Van provided one. The interior of the vehicle consisted of two traditional seats up front, one backward-facing jump seat behind the driver, and a collapsible bench seat in the back that flipped down to morph into a horizontal pad that we generously called a mattress. Two could sleep here while the other two could pop the top of the camper and climb up to a similarly uncomfortable sleeping platform above. A screw-on table could be attached in front of the jump seat, but this was rarely used. I think we actually lost that table at one point. We lost a lot of things to The Van.

Each of us had packed one large duffel bag, in which we stored all our clothes and various things that would be necessary for two months on the road, such as contacts, sunglasses, and lots and lots of deodorant. While driving, we would toss these bags behind the upright bench seat that, when not flipped down, created an accessible trunk area like that of a station wagon. With us we also brought two light sleeping bags, two blankets, some pillows, one red lawn chair, one yellow lawn chair, a white Igloo cooler, a few baseball mitts, a few balls, a two-burner Coleman stove, a small pot, a tiny frying pan, and a minimal assortment of cups, plates, bowls, and cutlery. It sounded like a lot, but The Van could handle it.

Beneath the shotgun seat was a hidden compartment where we stored valuables, such as cash, our passports (because the Blue Jays exist), tickets to ballgames—you name it. Meanwhile, the jump seat sat above a small sliding container that we used as a food cupboard. It was always stocked with pasta, marinara sauce, chips, and a constantly rotating assortment of flavored sunflower seeds. The white, flat-topped Igloo cooler would reg-

ularly sit beside the jump seat and hold bags of ice, drinks, cold foods, and this soft plastic water jug thing that we simply called “the Jelly.”

There were two other objects in The Van that, despite not originally being included in our list of things to bring, proved to be invaluable and pertinent to our success, enjoyment, and relief. The first was a Garmin GPS machine that Michael had discovered in his basement only two days before we took off. (This was 2011, when many teenagers—like us—still held flip phones, not the latest smartphones equipped with maps.) Suction-cupped to our dashboard for nearly every minute we were in motion, we named the GPS “Tina,” an acronym of the first names of girls we had crushes on at the time. (This was 2011, when teenage romanticism was still as sappy as it is today.) This name actually felt appropriate, however, as we each quickly developed quite the relationship with the feminine-voiced Garmin; arguments and professions of love became common iterations among the four of us and our dashboard girlfriend.

The other item was a translucent plastic carton that was mainly rectangular in shape, apart from a circular hole three inches in diameter that protruded from the top at a forty-five-degree angle. Near the middle of it was a small handle that allowed us to hold the carton up to our waist while we relieved ourselves into its depths—which, we were surprised to discover, could hold about a half liter of urine. This on-the-go piss bottle had actually been gifted to us by a friend as an ironic donation to the trip, but we used it with alarming frequency.

OK, away from the pee and back to our car.

As previously mentioned, the vehicle was a 1999 Volkswagen Eurovan. It was red—that is, before we got to it. One of the local organizations that had gotten wind of what we were doing was an advertising agency that approached us about four days before we took off and inquired about supporting the

Martinez Foundation. However, the representative had said that he wanted to do it in a way that didn't involve money.

"What if we wrap it for ya?" the longhaired man had asked Michael.

"Sorry?"

"Your car. I'm assuming you're driving, correct?"

"Yeah. We're driving a camper."

"Here's what we'll do." The guy leaned in, as if he was negotiating some drug deal. "We'll take your car in and put a wrap on it. That way, everyone'll know what you're up to and what the Martin Found—"

"The Martinez Foundation."

"—what the Martinez Foundation is all about. Sound good?"

"Uh." What else was he going to say? "Sure."

It sounded good, but it did not end up looking good. Before the wrap job, The Van had indeed been red. But after, it was . . . well, it was difficult to say. Logos, dates, and words about baseball and our trip were splattered on every part of the vehicle, all slapped on top of a gigantic, poorly pixelated image of a baseball diamond. We were not driving a car; we were driving a piece of expressionist art. And a bad one at that.

"Huh . . . where's The Van?" someone would inevitably ask in a joking manner as we returned to a parking lot after a game, only to see our camper stick out like a sore thumb, unavoidably noticeable, submerged in a sea of neutral-colored sedans and SUVs. "Oh yeah, there it is. The peacock among pigeons."

With its storage, sleeping compatibility, handheld urinal, and Jackson Pollock-inspired design, the car of course needed a proper name. We toyed around with this for a while and chewed on a couple of options—but while doing so, each of us began to naturally reference the vehicle simply as "the van." Repetition without resistance prevailed, and our steed officially

adopted this simple, two-syllable title. It was a superlative name in the highest degree; among all other vans out there on the road, ours was *the* van. With capital letters necessary to honor its official status, the car was and shall continue to be referenced as The Van.

~~The rainbow coating of The Van did, of course, make us quite a spectacle on the road. One of the first things we noticed as we continued motoring down Interstate 5 at sixty five miles per hour, not eighty two — was the number of people who honked at us. Nearly blinded by its clash of colors, drivers would obviously recognize our car and, after somehow comprehending what we were up to through deciphering the papier-mâché design, often shoot a thumbs up as they passed by or approached us at a rest stop to strike up a conversation. As we descended through Oregon, some guy even pulled up the sleeve of his shirt to flash a massive Mariners tattoo at us.~~

~~“Hey!” Andrew said, giving the guy a wave in return. “That’s some fan right there.”~~

~~“We’re better ones,” Frazier answered from the back, showing a rare rise.~~

~~“I’m not saying we’re worse, you ass,” Andrew replied, showing a normal rise. “I’m just saying that a Mariners tattoo on your bicep is pretty dope.” He then turned to me. “Also, why’re you going so slow? Did the ticket take away your gas pedal?”~~

~~“I’m not!” I retaliated, turning my eyes down to the speedometer, only to discover that we were indeed now rolling at forty miles per hour and slowly descending in velocity. “What the . . . I’m not sure what happened. I hit cruise control, and —” I repeated the motion, gunning the car back to sixty five and hitting the *Set Cruise* button, only to find our speed begin to drop again. “Uh. Does cruise control not work?”~~