

# Perspective

In the fall of 2014, we drove our eldest daughter from our Kootenay home to a student residence at The University of Victoria (UVIC). It was an eventful day, full of new experiences, including the convenience of a pop-up Bed, Bath, and Beyond. As we walked along with the campus tour, I kept noting how wonderful it would be to spend my days attending lectures, reading books, and writing papers. I was giddy with envy for my daughter's upcoming life: living where she worked, literally rolling out of bed and into classes, no responsibility, no heavy lifting, seven cafeterias, and a *huge* library! Bliss.

All my daughter kept saying was that she didn't know how to make friends; she hadn't had to do that since kindergarten. She was less excited for her future than I was. Maybe I was so enamoured with the vision of student life that was presented for us on 'move-in day' at UVIC because my own undergrad experience was far in the past. Reflecting on it, I must confront that my *own* undergrad was not a journey blissfully detached from the real world. In truth, I couldn't wait for it to end.

From the first day at Simon Fraser University, I felt like a person out of place, and I was eager for it to be over. I arrived with a plan: I wanted to be a teacher. But I didn't arrive with much confidence. It didn't help that on the morning of my first lesson, I couldn't find the largest lecture hall in the institution. Somehow, 399 other first year students managed it, while I awkwardly haunted the hallways and walking paths of the athletic facility, trying desperately to look like I was in this space on purpose. I didn't even like PE! How could this be the only classroom I could find!

Obviously, I missed my first lecture – an auspicious start.

Then, there was parking. It might have helped if I had done just a bit of research to understand how the

parking worked. Without a pass, and not wanting to be ticketed or towed, I parked in the 'mud lot' located half-way back down the mountain. This meant a trek up to the quadrangle for class. Thinking I was being conscientious, I brought all my texts and books with me in a hockey bag (borrowed, as I had never played hockey) so that I could take advantage of the hours between scheduled classes to study. First year biology texts are very heavy.

I parked in the mud lot for a week before I figured out the routine, bought a parking pass, and retired the hockey bag for a backpack. A win of sorts, but it did not do much to bolster my confidence or sense of belonging. English 101 was no help, either. The assigned reading was typical first year material, and the other students seemed so into it! I'd heard of Fitzgerald and Salinger but was more interested in King. What was I doing here? These weren't my people. I didn't speak their language and, at any moment, someone was going



# DRIVIN'

*by*  
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to discover that a fraud had sneaked past the gates. Then came a dark moment as I neared the end of my first year: calculating needed credits and projecting into the future, I realized I would be at school for one year longer than originally planned. Had I not been working the counter of a record store when I did the math, I would have slumped to the floor sobbing. At least it was a quiet Thursday night at Valley Fair Mall, and there were few customers to hear my muffled whimpering over the extra year of my life poised on the back burner.

When we cannot wait for a journey to end, it is hard to be present in the moment. When our eyes are set on the horizon, ever anticipating the approach of our destination, paying attention to what is immediately before us can seem a distraction. Even if the journey is not unpleasant, it can be easy to fix upon that distant point on the horizon, allowing it to eclipse all else.

In the summer of 2016, a yellow highlighter traced a path on a map laid flat on a table. The line started at my address in Invermere and extended clear across the country, ending at a coastal town in Nova Scotia. It was August 1, and I had exactly two weeks to travel this winding yellow line and drive aboard the ferry.

That point on the map was the horizon on which I was keenly focused.

We made this trip as a family, crammed into Norman. Norman was a 1989 Dodge Islander camper van; we were a family of four, committed to living in each other's pockets for the next several weeks. We found the van in Port Alberni and, on the day we drove him home, our eldest christened him 'Norman' for reasons unknown. With Norman, we would finally make the cross-country road trip<sup>1</sup> we had been planning for years.

I had meticulously worked the schedule, reverse-engineering the time and distance we needed to cover each day in order to arrive on time. My wife had a schedule of her own to keep, with time and distance of her own engineering. Inspired by Terry Fox, and out of love for family and friends battling cancer, my wife Brenda intended to run the equivalent of a full marathon in each province as we moved across the country – it was a detail shared with me mere days before we departed. The first of these personal marathons was scheduled for day one of our journey: the Continental Divide in Kootenay Park to Banff,

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Meet Norman at [bit.ly/StormNormCda](http://bit.ly/StormNormCda)

***When we cannot wait for a journey to end,  
it is hard to be present in the moment...***

Alberta. Forty-two kilometres through the beautiful Rocky Mountains, basking in the August sun, and dodging the odd grizzly bear.

Day after day, as we worked our way east, my wife rose each morning with a clear objective for the day. In each province, my daughters also ran alongside Brenda for ten kilometres. I did not run: I was the pit crew, leapfrogging five kilometres down the highway to wait for the running figures to appear in the rear view. Depending upon the arc of the sun, I might have prepared a 'mug up'<sup>2</sup> for my girls. Sometimes they just needed dry towels and a few moments to warm up, seated at Norman's dining table.

The days began to take on a rhythm: wake up, runners head off, pack up Norman, drive a little while, check-in with runners, drive a little further, runners take a break, drive some more, runners catch up... and so it went. All in all, with breaks and snacks and changing shoes, it took about six hours for me and the crew to travel forty-two kilometres closer to that distant ferry on my horizon. My calculations required that Norman cover more than 500 kilometres each travel day. With a top speed of ninety kilometres an hour, this meant

that following each day's run, Norman and I had many hours to go before sleep. Many run days were back-to-back and spent in this pattern, with Norman's parking brake finally engaged and my head hitting the pillow at midnight.

And without my noticing, I'd fallen into a pattern of my own, driven by the driving. My wife was differently driven. She was galvanized by loved ones who had lost their battles, and loved ones still fighting them. She was inspired with each step, taking in the countryside passing by, breathing in the air. She couldn't help but feel the moment. On the other hand, I was watching the road, but not seeing anything. My mind was well ahead at the next community, the next gas station, the next campsite, the next province... calculating minimum kilometres per day, allowing for meal breaks – short ones – contemplating what-ifs, like "What if Ontario never ends?!" And it was on a rest day in Ontario, with no pressing distance to travel, that Brenda asked me if I was ever going to join them on this journey across Canada.

The world has now passed the two-year anniversary of its initial lockdown, with an enduring hope of containing and ending this pandemic. Dr. Bonnie Henry assured British Columbia that this was

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If you are a 'come from away' - [bit.ly/Def\\_MugUp](https://bit.ly/Def_MugUp)

***Even if the journey is not unpleasant, it can be easy to fix upon that distant point...***



not forever, but it was for now. We have been travelling down this road for twenty-four months, eyes to the horizon, straining to see the end of this marathon. We have learned we can do hard things, but enough already. For the last two years, we have been collectively holding our breath, waiting for life to come off the back burner. Living life perpetually braced for impact will take a toll; when each day is a step in a countdown, the days wished away cannot be recovered. It is important to find the means to be present in this life as it is, tapping into strategies that may help us adjust the view<sup>3</sup>, and be *in* the world now as we move through it. Doctor Henry was probably right, in that this struggle won't be forever. But it will be with us... until it isn't.

Halfway across Ontario, Brenda reminded me that the journey is the destination. That point on the horizon will remain: I can take my eyes off it, and I can see the forest. It will still be there if I want to glance up and check, now and again, and it's likely to be a bit closer than before but perhaps hard to tell by how much. And soon after, in living colour, I walked through a cathedral filled with jazz music and thousands of vinyl records for sale in Old Quebec City, I marvelled at the depths of a rocky gorge and ate amazing poutine in New Brunswick, I watched my daughters dance on the red sand of Cavendish Beach in Prince Edward Island, and I felt the ocean spray and heard the foghorn blast at the lighthouse on Cape Anguille in Newfoundland.

Then, right on time, we boarded the ferry in Nova Scotia – but not until we had breakfast with an absurd pair of campground chickens, and my amazing runner traced forty-two kilometres in a downpour of rain... laughing and smiling in this marathon, number eight.

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Visit [bcpvpa.org](https://bcpvpa.org), Resources/Health to find out more about our ReCharge and ReFresh health series



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***Darren Danyluk is the  
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