



*Tim Johnson*

## Finding Direction on Father-Son Road Trip

**Michael McAuliffe** *Thursday, January 12, 2023 - 1:45pm*

Instead of downing strong coffee at my family's home in Chilmark, I stand on the outside ring of concrete at the Baltimore airport (Friendship for the very oldest of you reading this), waiting for my son Adin. I'm cold and it's raining. I've braved not the weather, but the airline (Southwest) to arrive in Baltimore early enough in the morning to help Adin on the second day of his drive from North Palm Beach, Fla., to Hanover, N.H.

Adin and a friend completed the first day, ending in Lynchburg, Va. My son's relative lack of driving experience, and the, let's be candid, inconsistent judgment of a 21-year-old had convinced me that his intended solo car trip through Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia

and New York (with the added maze of southwestern Connecticut) was not the best plan.

Surprisingly, my flight arrives without incident or delay. Adin, however, has not made it to the airport yet. Traffic and a later departure from Lynchburg (where his buddy lives), have delayed his arrival by car.

I get some breakfast. I then remember our depleted refrigerator when Adin (a junior in college and a member of the crew team) is home, so I buy most of the remaining Chipotle food offerings for carry-out. It doubles my luggage burden, but I know it will be consumed within minutes of our rendezvous.

A blue Grand Cherokee appears and I'm relieved. However, it's the wrong vehicle or least the right vehicle with the wrong driver. The car is driven by a woman looking for her own child. A teenager hops in while I watch and wonder where Adin is, whether he is minutes (or months) away still.

Eventually, he pulls up with a sleepy grin which worries me. Why I worry is unclear as he's made it to BWI — two hours late, but at least I can offer him his 20 burritos and a hug. He saunters in the direction of the airport terminal to use the restroom and takes the car key with him. I'm stressed by the prospect of an airport cop shooing me away without key or son. After an interminable wait (the iPhone shows four minutes), Adin returns. I grab the key FOB with the determination and force of a robber.

In addition to the companionship of rain, a fog settles in all along the interstate. The Waze travel app directs me to Hanover by way of California it seems, so we miss the city centric traffic congestion. The western route through Pennsylvania, New York and Vermont adds almost a hundred miles to the trip, but I'm with my beloved son so I don't care.

Except that Adin falls asleep within minutes. However, he hasn't eaten the Chipotle for which I invested so much of my net assets. I resolve to embezzle some of the bounty later. Adin's feet are hanging up, not down, so they obscure half the front windshield. This seems to me like a bad move especially for our survival. I make up a story about not kicking the windshield out going 80 miles an hour. He doesn't seem to get the hint and falls back into dreamland.

We cross Vermont in the dark. The fog envelopes the vehicle and I'm struggling to maintain speed in the potentially icy 33-degree environment. The trucks are aiming at us and it's a game of chicken I don't want or need to win. I will confess to a few uttered curse words during this part of the night's passage over invisible mountains (more accurately, hills, but I'm not quibbling at this point).

Hanover welcomes us with indifference. Adin's apartment is a dump, even in the starless midnight. I consider refusing to help him empty the car, but that will simply prolong my exposure to the New England winter. Adin seems happy. He spends the night in the hotel with me, but I suspect he'd rather be with his friends.

In the morning, my Cape Air flight from Lebanon to Logan (and then on to the Vineyard) is canceled by a cursory email with an hour notice so I buy a bus ticket that leaves with even less notice. I lean over and kiss my son's forehead. Luckily, he doesn't mistake me for his girlfriend.

"Love you, son."

"Thanks for everything, Dad."

I leave, wishing the road trip could last longer.

*Michael McAuliffe, a father to three, is a more than seasonal, less than full time, resident of Chilmark.*

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