Dorothy had it right. Who knew?

Marsha Henry Goff

We're baaaack! Husband Ray and I just spent three weeks making a 4,500 mile loop of the western United States by automobile. We discovered that adults — when not distracted by small voices asking "Are we there yet?" — can learn a lot about life from vacations.

For example, only a couple of idiots — whose long-distance trips are customarily by air — will think it reasonable to drive from Lawrence, Kansas to Cheyenne, Wyoming in a single day. And if you think it's difficult to wend your way down an aircraft's narrow aisle only to find the cramped bathroom occupied, try getting from rest stop to rest stop with an average-sized bladder and a thermos of coffee in the car.

Another painful lesson we learned is that when rest stops are 50 miles apart, the one in the middle is generally closed for remodeling, making the wait an impossible 100 miles. I color Ray brilliant for figuring out that almost every small town has a really neat park with clean public restrooms. One such park offered the bonus of an ancient steel bridge from which we could watch trout in a clear mountain stream.

Traveling through mountainous terrain, we observed that drivers of motor homes get more one-fingered salutes than any other driver on the road. And no matter how fast you drive, you are guaranteed to be passed by faster vehicles (but NEVER by a motor home).

In Yellowstone, we learned that some people are dumb enough to try to pet buffalo. Not me! While walking to Morning Glory Pool, we found ourselves scant yards from two mammoth buffalo and a young calf. Ray was cool about it, but I reacted as if they were rabid pitbulls. Fortunately — unlike the bulls of Pamplona — buffalo do not chase screaming, fleeing women.

On Yellowstone's Firehole Lake Road, I learned that it was not necessary to rush to photograph a lovely blue bubbling thermal pool because I now know that thermal pools may be relied on to stay put. But, then ignorant of that salient fact, with camera in hand, I raced back to the pool ... tripped over the curb, catapulted through the air, skinned my knee, shredded my palms, bonked my head, scraped my cheek and embedded gravel in my chin.

A nurse from New Jersey seeing the USA in a motor home hurried to my assistance, along with an 11-year-old Boy Scout packing a first-aid kit. And where was Ray? If you are a Seinfeld fan, you may recall the episode where Elaine was waiting for her boyfriend

at a movie theater and was notified that he had been taken to the hospital after being injured in an accident. Their relationship fizzled when he realized she stopped to buy juju fruits at the concession stand before leaving the theater to come to his side.

On his way down the steps to his bloodied wife, Ray paused to pick up the batteries which had been flung from my camera. I stared at him in stunned disbelief. “Isn’t that like stopping to buy juju fruits?” I inquired accusingly.

The experience taught me that limping makes walking the rough trails leading to Oregon’s beautiful waterfalls more difficult, but didn’t keep me from doing it. However, the impairment did prevent me from attempting to climb a mountain behind our friends’ home at Foster Lake. Ray climbed that mountain and I am pretty sure I’ll never hear the end of it!

We both decided it’s a bad idea to drive across the Golden Gate early in the morning because fog will likely obscure the top of the bridge as well as the water below. I have the photos to prove it (the camera healed faster than I did).

It was a no-brainer to conclude that the best day to be away from home was when CNN broadcast ad infinitum that Lawrence — at 107 degrees — was the hottest place in America. Even hotter than Las Vegas, where we learned ONCE AGAIN that the deck is stacked against novice gamblers.

Ray discovered that it is actually possible to drive through Utah without getting a speeding ticket. And I learned that one can travel by auto through 12 states and not once be trusted to sit behind the wheel.

We could have taken Dorothy’s word for it, but we didn’t. We had to learn for ourselves that — as wonderful as it is to visit regal mountains and windswept beaches, colorful canyons and rolling prairies, pristine lakes and breathtaking waterfalls — there really is no place like home! Yep, we’re baaaack. And very glad of it!