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In the first person: Roadtrip Nation

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We were told on the night of April 1 that we had been given this thing. I was literally on the steps of Cox walking out of Lewis' chemistry class when I checked my voicemail and a stranger told me that we were going to know each other very well. That I had been chosen, along with my two friends from UM who had applied with me on a whim, out of the applicant pool to take a road trip.

Roadtrip Nation is a movement that, like the best movements, had started out with a few people who believed in something and wanted to see it through. The idea, which has spawned a book series and a PBS TV show, is to send students on a road trip, where we eat, sleep and live in an RV for six weeks. We travel around interviewing personal heroes to help us figure out what it is we want out of life.

As the Miami Dream Team, we had written the essays and taped the 11 minutes for our application in a way that led us to believe we had somehow tricked them into choosing us. We had met freshman year, recognized the potential in one another for cool things and went through life with the different of ideas, skill sets and majors. But we had the common ground of passion and love.

Tim McNaught was the engineer turned Spanish/economics major who loved film; Sean Murphy was the biomedical engineer who was good at everything and was not sure he would be fulfilled by only being one thing; and I was the English major who, after philosophy classes and tests, had decided I wanted to be a physician.

After the initial excitement of being selected wore off, we struggled daily with our academic and extracurricular schedules to meet up once a week for our conference calls with production. We mapped the route: A cross country trip starting from Miami, up the east coast, across the top of the United States and all the way to the west coast to end in California. This was a trip that would later be described as epic.

We're booking our own interviews, unglamorously getting turned down, stuttering and trying our best to not betray the truth that we are nervous college students. We don't know what we want to do with our lives, but this guy seems like he might have it figured out, so would he mind sitting down and talking with us? Nothing compared to the high you'd get when you had just booked an interview with a person whose magazine you'd been reading since age 12.

We left for the trip from Miami. We learned to drive the RV in a day, a 40-foot-long bus that turned like a brick on wheels. We mentally prepared ourselves for the showers we wouldn't be taking, the A/C that wouldn't be working (in the middle of the summer) and the musty, mildewy futons that turned into beds, which had us sleeping five inches away from each other every night for a month and a half.

We got used to waking up on camera too. We interviewed about 30 people, a list that ranged from CEOs to actors to politicians and artists and architects. While it would be impossible to list everything we learned-you can sit down with any of the three of us if you'd like to hear-the experience made us optimistic, grounded in the clichés we'd heard before: Follow your heart, pursue your passions, all of that. It made us realize, with proper justification, that at age 20 or so, there is no better time than now to jump in to something, recklessly, passionately, if you can stand behind it.

There is nothing scary out there that could rival the regrets that could be in your heart 30 years from now when you wonder, "What if?" The importance of luck, persistence and talent, and the possibility of doing what you love to do for the rest of your life, made only a possibility and not a reality by this fear of nothing. And the philosophy aside, the beauty of Roadtrip Nation was its exquisite blend of the interviews with the road trip itself.

From the interviews themselves to the skylines and highways, everything was touching: The sunset on the night of the drive to Chicago, where the land was flat and the sunset stopped at the horizon but it looked like it went further than across corn fields; the 12-hour driving days; the mountain passes where we couldn't see five feet in front of us; the dream catcher road stops in Illinois and huckleberry stands in Montana; and the defining moments in the friendships of the people you were lucky enough to travel with.

As the three of us have found, it is astoundingly difficult to pinpoint what changed in us, even though we all changed. The thing is everyone finds themselves faced with the task of confronting new places and new people. It allows you to figure out what it is you love (and hate) or love to do (and hate to do.) So whether or not someone's filming you or footing the bill (although this is preferable), take a road trip. Find yourself on the open road. Now. Seriously.

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