

# Road Trip!

MIZZOU magazine readers steer us through their rose-colored memories of collegiate road trips, complete with car thieves, cross-border jaunts, ravenous bunnies and repairs made with chewing gum. Put on your seat belt, and enjoy the ride.

Compiled by Dale Smith

Illustrations by Deborah Zemke

\$25 fare to Mexico

In 1958, my junior year at MU, one of my friends had a 1957 Chevy convertible and an itch to drive. One day he asked me if I'd like to go to Mexico. Cost: \$25. I thought he meant Mexico, Mo., just north of Columbia. But no, he was planning a long weekend road trip to Durango, Mexico, more than 700 miles south of the border. He figured that four buddies chipping in \$25 each would cover the cost of gas and oil. I was in. We left Columbia Friday after classes and drove—and drove, and drove. We stopped only for gas and restroom breaks. The trunk was

filled with spare tires, as the originals were getting a little thin. It was a good thing, too, because we had four flats on the trip.

Forty hours later, we rolled into Durango. One of our group had contacts there, including a highly placed government official. We found ourselves in the governor's mansion. The governor was out, but we met his mother. We also bar-hopped and attended a late-night party at a local home. At the party, we got to use our college Spanish, which got better as the night wore on.

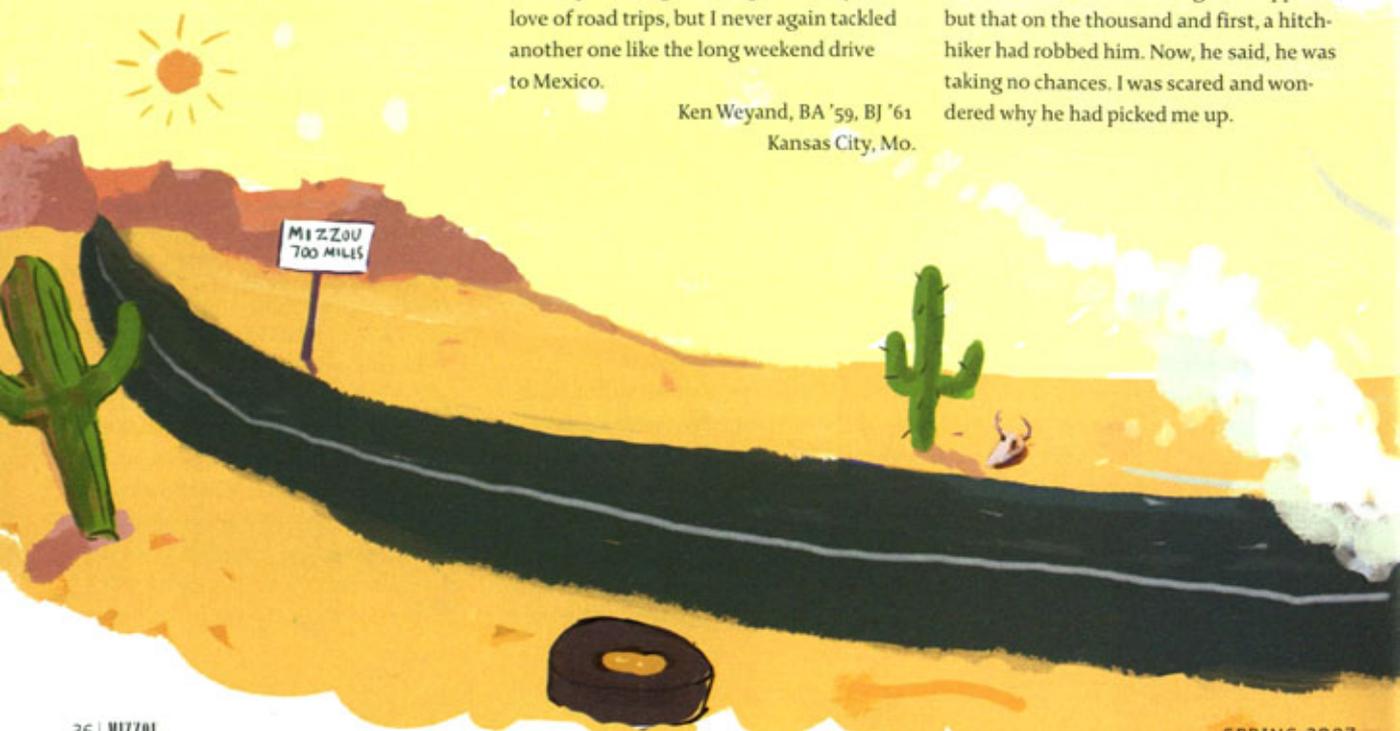
The next morning, we piled into the Chevy and didn't arrive in Columbia until Tuesday morning. I never got over my love of road trips, but I never again tackled another one like the long weekend drive to Mexico.

Ken Weyand, BA '59, BJ '61  
Kansas City, Mo.

All for journalism

In 1940, while studying journalism at Mizzou, I was told there probably was a job waiting for me at the Topeka, Kan., *Daily Capital*. So, I hitchhiked during Easter week to Topeka. A car picked me up outside of Leavenworth, Kan., on Highway 40. Kansas was a dry state. The driver said, "Just a minute while I clean off the seat for you." When he did, a half-empty bottle of liquor fell on the floor.

As we rode along, he opened the glove compartment and pulled out a pistol. He said that he had picked up hitchhikers a thousand times and nothing had happened, but that on the thousand and first, a hitchhiker had robbed him. Now, he said, he was taking no chances. I was scared and wondered why he had picked me up.



Then he asked, "Are the cops after you too?" I asked why they were after him, and he said he had been riding up and down the highway at 100 miles an hour. At this point, all I wanted was to escape.

About an hour later, he stopped across from a diner and told me to go in and ask if the police had been there. I went inside and made my escape by leaving from another door.

Hy Turner, MA '40  
Clearwater, Fla.

P.S. I did not get the job. It was being saved for the publisher's son, who was then at Dartmouth.

#### In the name of science

There's no road trip like a research road trip. The scenery can be great, but using the scientific method to make the world a better place is no party. I spent the summer months of 1987-88 trekking to the Thomas Baskett Wildlife Area near Ashland, Mo., every week and taking predawn readings on plants undergoing 48 different treatments. The question: How much stress could they endure?

You want stress? Make a 112-pound

graduate student — me — load a 4-foot-tall cylinder of compressed gas in the back seat of a Nissan Sentra. I called that cylinder "the bomb," and dreaded every bump in the road.

The 16-mile drive at 3 a.m. was easy enough. But then I had to get out of the car alone on a gravel road and open the gate to the wildlife area. This was scary for a city girl like me. The wildlife noises I grew up with in St. Louis consisted mainly of the occasional chirpy robin in the lone pear tree overlooking our alley.

I passed through the gate without incident all those dark early mornings, but I wish I could say the same for my journey through the research project at the greenhouse out there in Ashland. For starters, I had to move 600 potted plants around the greenhouse and place them on a grid, according to a random pattern. This was hard work, and I could've made more money working at McDonald's. Luckily, my husband helped me, but he'll do anything for cookies. A few weeks later, a local rabbit made a road trip of its own up through a drainpipe and into the greenhouse to dine on my plants. My research methods class didn't cover hungry bunnies!

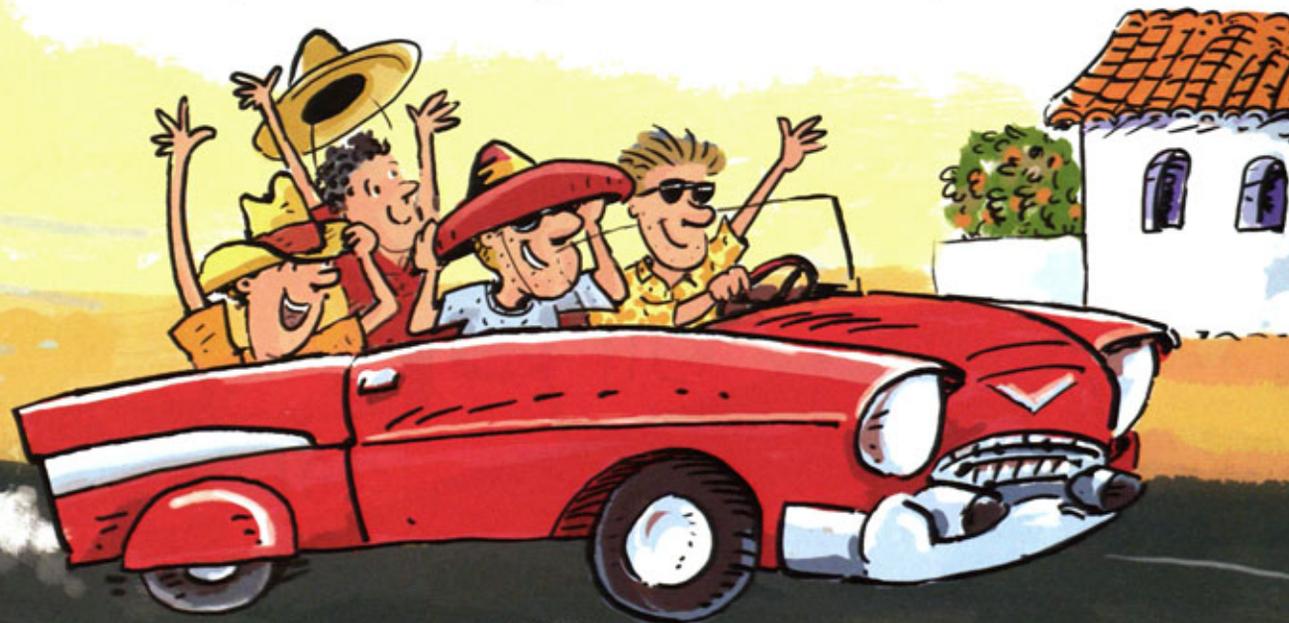
How did I get through all those trips and long lonely nights? I wasn't exactly alone. I played Van Morrison tapes over and over to drown out the owls, snorting deer and other unidentified night sounds. If anyone would like to know how this adventure ended, you can find my master's thesis somewhere in Ellis Library. It is in pristine condition, no doubt. Oh yeah, and there is a copy in my basement I can let you have for cheap.

Joan Smith, MS '89  
Columbia, Mo.

#### Flag nabbing in Lincoln

I was a freshman in 1973 when the football Tigers beat Nebraska for the first time in about 25 years. The fans went wild, and they retold the story of the game that night in bars all over town. About midnight, someone suggested we drive to Lincoln and see how depressed the Nebraska fans were. Of course, none of us was quite sure where Lincoln might be, but off we went.

Near dawn we found ourselves in Lincoln, wondering what to do next. Cruising past the football stadium, we noticed the Nebraska state flag flying, and, in need of a good souvenir, we hauled it



down the pole and hit the road quick.

When we arrived in Columbia that afternoon, our residence hall buddies refused to believe our story until we unfurled our prize. It hung for the rest of the year in the study lounge, a fine trophy from a misguided but memorable road trip.

Ric Telthorst, BJ '77, MPA '79  
Jefferson City, Mo.

### Got gum?

Four of us were returning to Columbia from St. Louis after spring break. The car was an old one, and we were lamenting the fact that the radio didn't work. So Bill, an electrical engineering student, piped up from the back seat: "Let me take a look at it." As we sped along Highway 40, he climbed over the seat, turned himself upside down and stuck his head under the dash. He was quite a sight, with his legs dangling over the seat.

After a minute or so, Bill asked for a flashlight. I rummaged around the glove

box and handed one down to him. For the next several miles, Bill worked in silence. Then he asked, "Got any gum?" I pulled a fresh stick from my pocket and handed it down to Bill. "No," he said, giving it back, "Chew it first." I gave the gum a thorough chewing and handed the wad under the dash. We drove another stretch while Bill kept working. Finally, he righted himself and said, "Try it now."

We happily listened to the latest pop tunes all the rest of the way to Columbia, thanks to Bill and a stick of chewing gum.

Tom Kiske, BA '67  
League City, Texas

### Selling gas

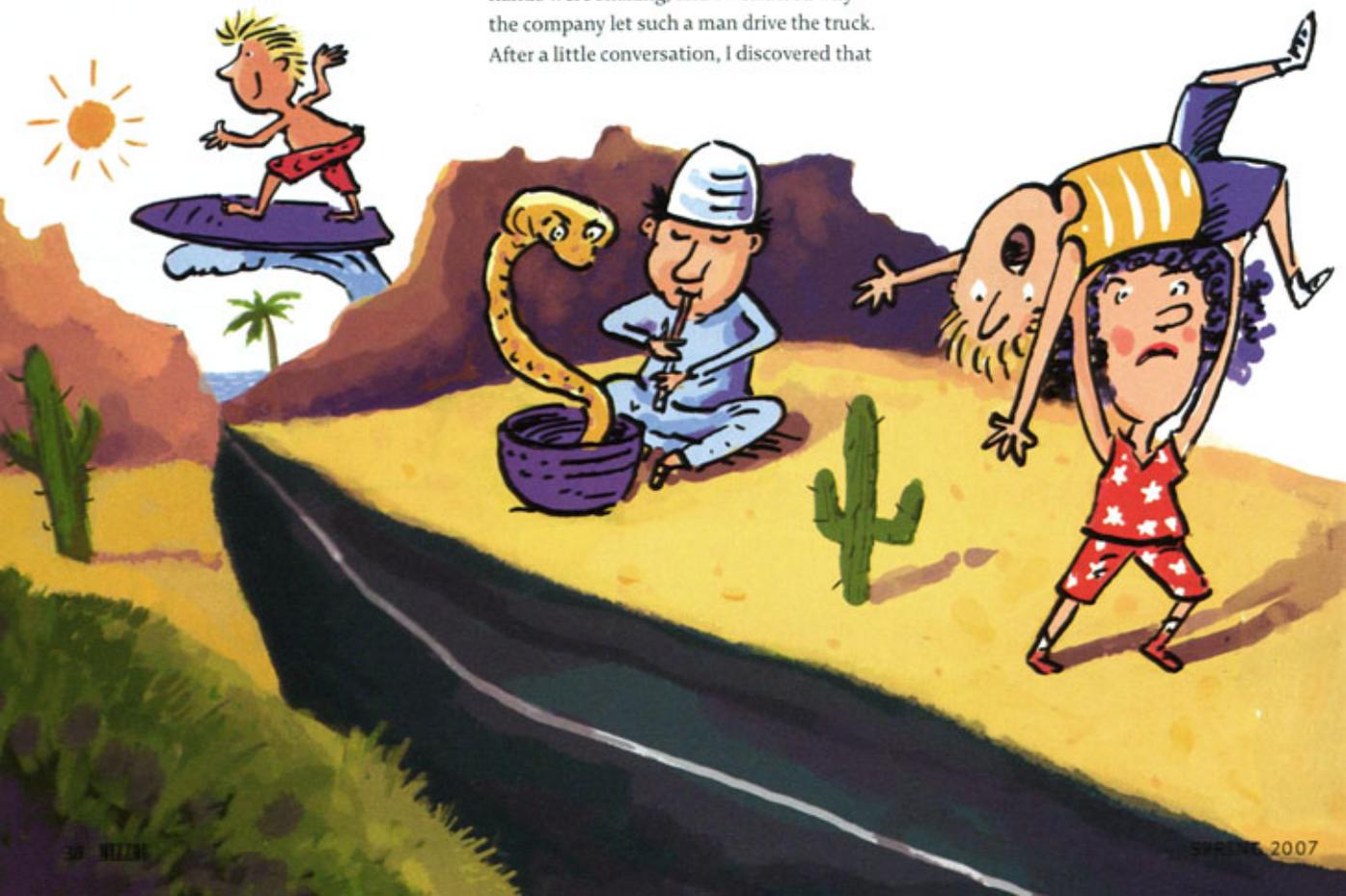
When I was an engineering student on the GI bill, I thumbed rides between school and home near St. Joseph, Mo. Once I got a ride on North 63 in a large Bowser Oil Co. vehicle. Bowser Oil was then a chain of gas stations in north-central Missouri. The driver's hands were shaking, and I wondered why the company let such a man drive the truck. After a little conversation, I discovered that

this was Bowser himself! He said he had graduated from MU in 1930 with a degree in geology. He got into the oil business, not because of his degree, but because he worked in a gas station while attending college.

North of Columbia the highway made a jog, and an orange billboard seemed to appear in the middle of the road. As we approached, we could see a dot in the middle of the sign. When we got really close, we could see the name Bowser in its center. Another sign in that area said, "Truman ain't mad at nobody." I took advantage of my situation to ask what it meant.

With a chuckle, he replied, "My first name is Truman." He explained that many people stop at his stations to ask that same question and buy gas. At Macon he parked the truck and took me in his car to my next highway junction.

Duane Denny, BS EE '50, BS BA '53  
Wichita, Kan.



### The travails of art sales

In the summer of 1948, I drove a tiny Crosley across Kansas to Colorado Springs, Colo. My objective was to meet Bob Simpich (BA '48, MA '52), an MU art major, to help him sell his paintings. The car's top speed was 40 mph, and the gas tank opening was so small a station nozzle wouldn't fit; I had to use a funnel. When the carburetor got too hot, it locked up and had to be doused with water from a can I carried with me. I reached my destination — but couldn't sell Bob's paintings. He did pencil sketches of tourists for a dollar. We lived on beans. It was a happy time!

Howard Ray Rowland, BJ '50  
St. Joseph, Minn.

### Huck Finn revisited

In the spring of 1970, I was a freshman on the Tiger football squad that had just played Penn State in the Orange Bowl. My best friend, wide receiver John "The Jet" Henley, invited me, a St. Louis boy, to his home in sunny California. To me, California was the sun, surf and movie stars. Everything sounded great until I asked how we were going to get there. Jet stated that we were going to hitchhike the 2,000 miles. My jaw dropped.

But we did thumb all the way to San Bernardino on Route 66. Along the way, we met a female professional wrestler, drug runners from New York City, snake charmers and a cast of characters that could only match the tales of Huck Finn and Jim floating down the mighty Mississippi. It was a dangerous coming-of-age adventure that I will never forget. Huck and Jim would have loved the ride!

James Dierker, BJ '73  
Encinitas, Calif.

### Midwinter's nap

At the Christmas holidays in 1942, I hitchhiked from Columbia to my family home in Little Rock, Ark. A lone driver gave me a lift, and I went to sleep in the back of his car. It was a state policeman who shook me awake. He asked the driver, "Who's this guy?" The driver, who turned out to be a car thief, said, "He's just a bum I picked up."

Harvey Walters, BJ '43  
Moultrie, Ga.

### No free ride

It was spring of 1941, and I needed to head home to Newton, Iowa. After packing some belongings and the cash I had saved to buy a typewriter, I walked out to Highway 63 north of town to hitch a ride. The sun was hot, and no one was offering rides. About 1 p.m. a car finally stopped. The driver was a salesman going to Davenport, Iowa. The town was on a bus route to Newton, so I accepted the ride.

On the way, he managed to sell me a \$1,000 life insurance policy, which I paid for with my typewriter money. I arrived in Newton about dark.

I wasn't able to get a new typewriter for several years, but I still have the \$1,000 insurance policy!

Howard Harris, MA '42  
Bellingham, Wash.

