

It was fall, 2015 I think, and I was at a Horizons Unlimited event in North Carolina. It was a nice night. Well there might have been some drizzle but a hurricane had passed by the week before so a slight drizzle wasn't anything to notice. I was hanging out by the fire with a cup of wine, friends, and a woman I was going to be marrying soon. The event organizer brought over someone to meet me. This person, whose name I am ashamed to have forgotten, wanted to start long distance, overland motorcycle traveling. He had some questions, and Mike (the organizer) thought I was the guy to ask.

Thinking this was going to be a quick conversation, I ducked out from the fire and we all started talking. It wasn't a quick conversation. The three of us moved around the venue, looking at motorcycles, going in and out of drizzle when it worsened to rain. Questions were asked and I answered them all as best I could. At the end, Mike apologized for pulling me away, but he'd thought I was the best person to help this new rider, and I was honored he'd thought so. I'd been making it a point to learn everything I could about Overlanding, doing what I could to encourage people to start traveling, showing it was nowhere near as difficult, dangerous, or expensive as so many people thought.

As we split up, Mike mentioned, perhaps next year, I could do a class on how to start overlanding - all the stuff someone wants to know before that *first* trip - all those things we wished we had known before our first trip. Since I liked the topic and didn't think it through (because overthinking is a terrible trait in an Overlander), I said sure and went back to find my future wife already in bed and more than a little upset at my disappearance. Obviously, we have made up. But that night in the drizzle was the start of this book.

I do remember my first trip. It was in the early 90s, before cell phones or the modern internet. I had a 1980 Yamaha SR250, blue, which I'd already crashed once and rebuilt the front with a SR500 (which had a larger front wheel and disk

brakes). I didn't know much about motorcycles, and while I'd read some books from the library, it was still a topic there just wasn't much available about (beyond stories from the road). I had read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* in High School, and since then I'd wanted to travel on a motorcycle. Now it was after college, and my mother (who thought motorcycles were death machines) could no longer stop me. I had been living with them, so I got the quiet recrimination and disapproval parents are good at, when their children have grown past the point they can be bullied or browbeat.

The morning I started was cold and damp. I left before anyone was awake, or at least up and moving. I thought that would make it easier, and I suppose it did. I wasn't out of the city before the rain started.

I didn't have good riding gear. I had a helmet, a school letter jacket (which wasn't waterproof, at least not waterproof enough). Khaki pants and hiking boots. My luggage was simply two backpacks I'd sown together, with my sleeping back in a trash bag behind me. The rain soaked me to the skin, and I got cold. Very cold.

I stopped in a rest area off the freeway, outside of the city. I had only been on the road for a bit more than an hour. The sun was, technically, up, but everything was gray and damp. I didn't have a stove, so sat in front of the heater vent in the building, trying to drink a cold coke, wondering what I was doing. I mean, what *was* I *DOING*? I could go home. Maybe leave again in a few days when the weather was better, or after I had better gear. There would be hot food, warm drinks. That I'd come back, and so quickly, wouldn't be mentioned, and I could prep better and leave again.

But I wouldn't leave again. Not on a motorcycle. Not on a trip like this one, open ended to where I wanted to go and see or end up. I knew that too.

So, I went back out, and got back on the motorcycle, and kept going. Through the rain and cold, heading away from home.

By lunch the sun had come out. I was further south and west by then, and it warmed up so much, when I stopped to camp that night, everything was dry. I found a pay phone and called to say I was still alive, and about where I was. I didn't mention the rain or doubt, but I didn't forget.

Every overland motorcyclist I've had this conversation with, has had *this* moment - usually early in their travels. That time when their experience, their equipment, their knowledge and confidence wasn't up to the challenge at hand. When the whole idea of overland travel seems terrible, and home and bed is calling.

Austin Grossman wrote a book called *Soon I will be Invincible*. The book has a line which goes something like "when you are faced with something you can *not* get through, but you get through it anyway, the person you are afterwards isn't the same. It's the person who *could* get through it." Of course, he was talking about someone turning into a super villain, but the basic idea is sound. It's why experienced Overlanders are such a competent bunch. Over and over, we are faced with things we can't do, but we have to do them anyway. Getting through borders, finding food and lodging, dealing with breakdowns and injuries, things which we learned to deal with because there wasn't a choice, until we became the people who could do them.

I don't know if this book will be able to elevate you to that level of confidence. Perhaps not. But I hope it will show you it *can* be done, and that you can do it.

In the end, all the books in the world won't make up for actually getting out there and traveling. So, no matter how great this book is it can't make you into an Overlander. I hope this book will give you a start, get you moving in the right direction, and give you confidence to overcome that first challenge - sitting in a

rest area in the rain, wondering if you should just turn back. The road, the whole world, isn't behind you - it's forward. Just Go.