

Larry Statham, RV Life on the Road

What was the impetus that started your RVing?

A little history will describe my yearning to travel. After WWII one of my dad's first jobs as a tire store manager was in Perryton, TX, a small town in the northeast Texas panhandle. It was small and dusty, not too exciting, so my friend Ricky and I decided to leave it and our parents and families. We were running away to the big town of Amarillo, TX, down the road. We were only 5 years old then. We packed our cheese and crackers in a bandana and walked out to the highway to hitchhike. The sheriff saw us and took us home again. The travel for adventure bug had bitten me at an early age.

Growing up I was a Cub Scout, Boy Scout, and outdoors-type fellow in my native Oklahoma. I could roam outdoors anywhere and everyone was kind and helpful to the local kids whether they were cutting across backyards or through their front yards with their dogs or on bicycles. There was always an adventure to look forward to over the weekend usually with a friend(s) coming along. I went to scout camps and stayed in tents with campfires and hiked everywhere. Didn't every guy?

In my teens my dad was promoted to manager of the store in Wichita. We moved there in January, 1955, and suddenly my life changed. No friends, the backyards were on busy streets where strangers lived, city streets with buses and new schools. It was a big adjustment but along the way I found new friends, the big city library, bus schedules and that my Oklahoma 'twang wasn't always the first topic of conversation.

But I missed my friends in Oklahoma. Passenger trains connected to a nearby town, Lawton, OK, so when summer vacation time began I took the train to visit a close friend whose parents met me at Lawton and we spent a great month catching up. That friend only 14 years old but he was already driving an old pickup truck that his grandfather had given him. Together with his dog Smoky, Kirk and I explored the surrounding towns on rural roads in Tillman county daily except when he was on duty as a life guard at the Frederick municipal swimming pool. I had taken swimming lessons there when we moved there from that tiny Texas panhandle town, Perryton, in 1948. Our natural competitive natures were well established in sports during grade school and junior high so we had swimming races almost daily. That led to my interest in the Wichita Swim Club in Wichita, which I joined after 8th grade. I enjoyed the trips to swimming meets in other communities and states. New places and new faces became fun adventures. How about a transition comment from childhood to adulthood?

When I was single I had been an assistant Scout Master, so after I married my wife and I enjoyed tent camping in Nevada, California and Colorado. It became a regular routine. But then we encountered foraging Colorado bears, wild fires and particularly strong mountain winds. So, we took the first step to RV travel and bought a 23 ft slide-in camper. The pickup I bought was

specifically for carrying the camper. Diesel truck, 4 wheel drive, 4 doors, long (8 ft) bed. There are pluses and minuses for that type of RV. (I'll discuss that in my other notes.) Nonetheless, it led us to take the next step after I retired. Next we bought a 32 ft 5th Wheel trailer with 3 slide-outs. We enjoyed the RV trips and determined that we wanted to make it a full-time life style. The risks of being an absentee owner renting home long-term was one we didn't want to try so we sold the house in only 8 hours and hit the road, eventually making it an 11-year trip around America.

What are the benefits of traveling this way?

Seeing places you thought were interesting when you looked out the window of your plane flying over the country. A movie or book that revealed a special attraction. Taking the backroad to an out-of-the-way place instead of driving on the Interstate all the way to a destination. Always coming back "home and sleeping in your bed" at the end of the of seeing a special destination. Meeting people, making new friends, always having an interesting conversation about travels to new locations. The call of the road is seeing what's around the next curve or hill on the road.

Although it is not as inexpensive and some believe it to be, it is less expensive than hotels or planned tours. And always, you can choose to spend more time or less time as it suits you. You will still need an adequate income to travel with an RV. And it doesn't get less expensive as the years pass. RV's, parts and maintenance and always higher costs at RV parks or campgrounds every year are the norm.

What if your favorite part of RV life?

Every time you get on the road it's a feeling of freedom, knowing you are on your way to a new adventure. The day is yours to spend as you please with no business agendas, meetings, phone conferences, annoying media calls, etc. Stop where you want to for lunch, admire or photograph beautiful scenery or stop at an antique store or any quaint attraction along the way. Other RV'ers are really helpful and friendly (maybe a few grouches) and will assist you whenever you need help. It's a vacation day every day.

I loved to drive from the first time I got behind the wheel, even from an early age. I would drive day and night to get home, visit a relative, go to a distant vacation site. That isn't the best way to travel with an RV. First let's say you are more than 60 years old so you simply don't have the same energy and chances are that your night vision isn't so great for 24 hours hours of driving. But my rule after doing RV'ing for a few years was to prepare to travel the night before and be ready to travel after eating breakfast. Travel until about 3pm and plan to arrive not later

than 3:30pm so you have daylight, energy, time to check-in and set up your rig (allow at least 60-90 minutes for a 5th wheel). Then you have time to relax and eat dinner before going to bed. Summer's longer hours of daylight makes that easier than shortened hours during winter months.

Do you think that RV travelers tend to be in particular age groups or socio-economic groups?

In our 11 years on the road we met young families with grade school age kids doing home schooling while traveling full time; 80 year-old widows driving motor homes and "boon docking" (no electric, water or sewer hookup); Germans, Brits, French, Dutch visiting the USA and of course lots of Canadians winter visitors. In general Canadians retire earlier than Americans and we met much younger retirees. Because of their 180 day limits out of their country, they tend to visit the USA during our winter, to escape their own long brutal winters.

If you choose full time RV'ing you may have found a favorite place to stay in the winter months, returning for a number of years. That means it's like a reunion every winter with old friends. In the Yuma, AZ, area the folks who came annually were generally aged 55+ and without children.

Many of the RV resorts have permanent "park models" (34 ft + or - 5th wheel size without wheels) that they rent to visitors. Some RV'ers choose to stop traveling, buy a park model and put it in their favorite RV park and it becomes their home. They still pay annual rent and utilities.

An interesting thing we discovered about full time RV'ers is that they really don't care about your socio-economic background, probably because you chose to leave it and are not that bank executive or business owner any longer. They seldom ask what you did before you retired unless you form a particularly close relationship with a couple or with a group. Then you will be more intimate and candid. Groups often tend to get together more frequently about 4:00 pm to socialize which usually means bring a folding chair, a snack to share, your choice of beverage, sit together and just talk and tell stories. It may last into the late evening but usually there is a 10pm curfew in parks to keep the noise levels down. Anyway, at those gatherings you may be asked to relate a story about your former life. In my case, as it usually is, no one really knows much about Air Traffic Control, so it's interesting to hear what they think controllers do. One woman told my wife she thought I stood at the end of the runway with flags. Their stories were quite amusing, at least to me. They seldom understood the full extent of what the term "controlled airspace" entailed to the airplane pilot and all the responsibilities of the air traffic controller.

What have you learned from this kind of travel that you would not have learned at home?

There are many, many people who love to travel by RV. They are a helpful and friendly lot of people. They have lots of stories and will share them if you just give them a chance to sit down and talk. Stories from other times, other countries, other walks of life and all love the adventure of travel.

For those who seldom travel by car, you may immediately (hopefully) learn that stripes on highways have specific meanings, road signs are not just names of a city, town or an exit but also measure distance N, S, E and W in the state you are traveling; hospital markers, food and fuel (by type), hazardous cargo restrictions, and the RV'er may find RV Camps or a black water disposal site.

It's hard to believe that a car entering a highway could not see a 55 ft. long vehicle, the length of my pickup and 5th wheel trailer, but it's even more frightening when they suddenly look up and "see" you. The look of bewilderment and they realize they can't accelerate to get in front of you and won't fit in behind you because there is another vehicle behind your trailer. We learned to use both of eyes to search the on ramps, count the number of cars and adjust our speed to account for the unobservant drivers. Our truck and trailer weighed in at about 25 thousand pounds. It doesn't just zip up to highway speeds entering the highway and sure can't stop on a dime. State laws require trailers of a certain length have brakes and those need to be serviced annually along with your wheel bearings and shackles.

So the questions about learning is really open to what your interests were in life, for retirement adventure, and what you may discover after you get on the road.

I remember asking my mom and dad about places they had visited. Curiosity found me often reading articles in National Geographic magazine or similar about places that had historical significance, such as Revolutionary War, Civil War, Indian Wars, National Parks, etc. In putting together a travel itinerary we always tried to encompass as many sites as possible along a route to a destination, taking into account the possibility of summer storms, aggravating road construction and detours, and always planning refueling stops (gasoline vs. diesel). Some accidental treasures may be discovered along your path. We discovered Springfield, IL, after a bill board which beckoned travelers to see Lincoln's law office, grave, and home for 14 years, as we were on I-70 heading east. We stayed 4 days and were intrigued. Cahokia Mounds just east St Louis is likewise a historical treasure that we found and visited numerous times but the first visit was not a planned but an accidental visit.

There is far more to see and visit if you are a full time RV'er than the summer or vacation weekend traveler. And after 11 years we still are not finished and know that the USA hold many more interesting places we want to visit, not just drive through. Unfortunately, Washington, DC, was not as open to the tourists during our travel as it had been a few years before we began to travel due to 9/11 and security restrictions. Likewise the pandemic led to

many closures as well. Federal budget constraints have impacted National Parks availability. Even state governments have closed travel rest stops and some state parks, and private RV camp grounds have closed or added restrictions. Complete planning, even calling ahead, can prevent disappointments.

What are the challenges?

First rule (Rule #1). Don't buy an RV until you have rented one of comparable size and taken a trip for more than a weekend. Can you get along together and enjoy your life's companion in a small space? Not every couple can do that. At the laundry one day my wife encountered a woman who was in tears. She told my wife that she didn't know her husband could be so mean. Relating her story my wife learned they had bought an RV without ever being out together on a trip. As difficult as it may be under normal circumstances to not get in one another's way in 80 sq. ft. or so, when things go wrong and you have spats or need a little privacy, where do you go? I know not all couples even sleep in the same bed together at home. Best find out if your compatibility will survive the tiny house test.

If you made it through a long weekend under ideal circumstances, try it for a week (or more) before you buy. Talk with friends or family who have an RV and determine whether the challenges that they encountered are what you can handle. A truck camper being the smallest, then the pull along trailer or a Class B (expensive for the sq footage), the Class C, then Class A, the big motor homes. And remember that you are subjecting your house to driving down a road at 55-75 mph and it can be bumpy. Repairs are not inexpensive nor are they always quick or convenient fixes.

The RV industry went through a rough time which resulted in my name brands going out of business entirely or eliminating some models. We call those orphans because if you buy a perfectly wonderful RV but then find there are no available parts or repairs, you have a big problem. Check out dealership service availability before you buy. Remember Rule #1? Well those people may sell their RV almost immediately their new units at a big discount. Among them are those who have experienced the Corollary to Rule #1 which is all new RVs will have headaches repairing the poor quality controls in manufacturing and preparing RVs for new customers. During the first year most of those repairs are done under the first owner's warranty, still a headache being in the shop for repairs but paid for by the dealer. After a year, the repairs are normally paid for by the owner maybe with a little discount for that 2nd (occasionally 3rd) year. But an orphan? Nope, you're out there totally on your own UNLESS a different manufacturer has assumed that task and bought the parts warehouse or whatever so that repairs can be made on orphans. But there is no warranty if the company doesn't exist.

Ideally a couple itching to buy their first RV can find a unit that has already been through that first year, all the repairs because of poor quality control have been repaired, the unit is fully

functioning as it should be when new, low mileage, all required servicing was done on time, and the owners have either decided to upgrade or get out of traveling, or tragically, one of them has passed on and the survivor doesn't want to travel alone on the road. Those deals can be especially attractive to buyers. Used, broken in correctly, records of service, and ready for the new owner to take on the road. BE SURE TO GET ALL RECORDS and MANUALS & TOOLS when you buy it.

Time is always a challenge. For the RVer consider that you are at the mercy of the seasonal weather. It's said that many just follow the sun.

A night of unexpected freezing temperatures can cause damage to your entire water system. If you are caught with an early fall freeze, you may leave and avoid the freeze. I was chased out of South Dakota on September 21 when snow, wind and sleet hit just after dark when camped about 16 miles south of Rapid City, SD. We made the decision to run. At the time I was in a pickup camper so it was easier to disconnect water, power and sewer connections, pull the slide in and arrange the interior for travel. It took only an hour and we headed south, acknowledging that we needed to get fuel and we were not on an interstate highway. We found diesel just before the truck stop closed and drove all night, stopping in Cheyenne, WY, to sleep. A few years later we woke up to find 8 inches of snow and below freezing temperatures at the same camp ground on September 8th. We had anticipated a possible freeze (hard freeze is 26 F) planned for it, disconnected the hoses but nature had the last laugh. The fresh water hose was frozen on the ground; we run out of propane for the furnace in a few hours. Clearing the snow to access the propane bottles (2ea 7 gallons tanks) and the truck (5th wheels needs a truck) to drive out for propane we found the camp was not selling propane and sent us down the road where it was available at a premium price. Lesson learned. Check WX App for getting in bed for updated forecast of a hard freeze. Always keep one propane tank full.

Summer storms can bring tornados and hail, high winds and dust that can severely limit visibility. A WiFi signal is necessary to access local wx advisories. WX Channel app on my iPhone with radar has helped me circumnavigate a fast moving storm with tornado warning, hail and high winds.

Lucky for me I had some weather knowledge from required ATC experience and I was able to stay out of trouble while driving a parallel route behind the path of the storm.

But what about high winds? Almost every RV is a slab-sided vehicle whether a truck camper, Class A, B, C or 5th wheel. The first time I saw several semi-trailers on their sides off the road was in Colorado. Yes, winds can blow over trucks and trailers weighing tons. When the NWS (nation weather service) notifies people that they are closing interstate highways to travel, be assured it means your RV shouldn't travel either.

But you need to find a safe place, hopefully in a lee, to hunker down and wait. But what if you suddenly become aware of the wind condition?

SLOW DOWN, sudden gusts can pull your vehicle to one side quickly. The faster you are driving the more severe the result of that reaction.

In New Mexico, northeast of Santa Fe, the surrounding mountains and strong winds can grab control out of your hands. If you have to reduce speed, drop down to about 40 mph but show your emergency flashers to alert drivers behind you, and keep searching for a safe place to stop.

Corollary: Never leave your awning out if you leave your RV. If your awning is hand-operated it will need a keeper attached to avoid the wind pulling it out when you are on the road. You WILL see someone who didn't follow this rule on the side of the road. Awnings are not going to last more than about 8 years and will need to be replaced due to sun and heat deterioration. It takes two to three people to replace one. If electric or manual option when you buy, always buy the electric operated one. The motor will hold the awning in when you are traveling on the road.

If you are a seasonal RVer then chances are you will store you RV for winter. That means you need to prepare it for winter. Drain all the water, blow it out, add RV antifreeze. Then reverse the process plus sanitizing after removing antifreeze for spring, summer, fall travel. You will need to have a battery tender to keep you battery(s) charged and that means you will need power at the storage site for the tender. Covers' effectiveness depends on local sun and wind, dust under covers will scratch your paint/chrome finish). Heat and direct sunlight will damaged any rubber or rubberlike material. Cover your tires whether winter or summer if you are staying a week or more, put your tire up on a platform of some kind to avoid ground contact and water damage.

Your RV will have some kind of hot water tank. If you're lucky you may have the instant hot water type. It's great. Most don't have that.

They come in 10-20 gallon tanks. Some operate on electric or propane. Nice option. But most also have a sacrificial lead piece that screws into the tank. It saves your tank from eating holes in itself due to bi-metal electrolysis. They should be checked every 6 months. I always carried a spare and change them yearly. You must drain the water tank to do that. Be sure to turn off the park water before starting it. Different manufacturers use different sizes. Check first before buying replacements or spares.

RV water systems are not like your house or apartment. They use flexible hoses. A Water Regulator should be attached to the park water system to restrict water pressure coming into your RV. Some are preset at specific pressure 35-55 psi. Others have a PSI meter on the device. Also you should filter the water coming into your RV. Not all water systems are alike and some are very hard, others may have sediment.

A small cartridge may be handy and cheap but an acceptable system with two large cartridges and a holder is much better. Check, clean or replace every 6 months. Or if you are suspicious of low water pressure it could be the filters, the regulator or a loose connection.

Almost all RVers have learned the lesson of not following a check list for getting ready to travel or setting up after travel. The reasons are the same as a pilot going through all his pre/post flight check lists. There are as many check lists as types of RV's. Don't leave it to chance. You will see an RV with its TV antenna all bent up soon. It's always the last thing on most the check lists. It always the first thing you forget and tear a hole in your roof. "I thought your put it down, you were still watching TV while I was getting hooked up." I bought a one button automatic TV satellite up/down and search for signal unit after my first year on the road. It was great, expensive but saved me hours of time and best signal.

5th Wheel rules: In all cases before taking a 5th wheel on the road, check the air pressure in ALL TIRES, both truck and trailer. THAT INCLUDES YOUR SPARE TIRE. You won't be able to go very far with a spare that doesn't have the necessary PSI. Oh, for sure get a quality truck air gauge to check the tire pressures. Your passenger air gauge won't even go high enough to measure the pressure in a 5th Wheel tire, or Class A or Class C RV.

A word of caution on tires: Your new RV probably has the least expensive tires the manufacturer could get. Those tires may have been made months earlier than the RV and the RV may have been on the lot months before you bought it. Check the date of manufacture. Regardless of the tread wear, a 3 year-old tire is not safe. Sun, heat, road and moisture all degrade rubber and the walls of tires. Not until about my 4th set of tires did I know that I could buy a 14 ply trailer tires (2018 \$600) rather than the 10 ply tire (2016 \$250). My trailer tires failed in about 18 months due to road heat or slow leaks that always results in heat and failure. On a 5th wheel you won't even notice if one tire fails until you are notified by the frantic car driver telling you about it, or you stop for fuel or rest and you can smell the burned rubber and see the mangled steel cords wrapped around you axle or you brake line. GET 14 PLY tires and prolong the life of your tires and reduce the risk of blowouts. If possible avoid buying trailer tires made in China. The 14 ply tires I mentioned above are made by Goodyear for Canadian oil fields vehicles and NOT made in China. I firmly believe the Chinese tires' quality is less than US made and the Goodyear tire dealer advised me of that difference. Check the tire side wall where it's written. Some well-known tire brands are made in China and not all of a manufacturer's tires may be made in the same country.

The jack that came with your trailer or RV is likely to be as inexpensive as those tires, usually just a jack screw. As a minimum, carry a 20-ton bottle jack as a spare. It can safely raise the trailer axle enough that wheels are off the ground when necessary to change a tire. On one occasion a fellow traveler and I had to use both of our bottle jacks to rescue a traveler who had lost a tire in the mountains of Wyoming on my way to Cody.

Corollary. You will need an air compressor when you don't carry one with you. A hand-held air compressor won't do the job of putting 100-125 PSI in trailer tires. If it does, it may take you 3 hours but I'll bet it burns up from overheating the piston in the cylinder first. I recommend one small enough to fit in your through-understorage area. Electric operated about \$200. Must be rated to get 110-120 PSI.

FOLLOW MAINTENANCE INSTRUCTIONS or risk it seizing up from heat.

Get two A/C's in your 5th wheel or motor home. One unit is usually not capable of cooling both living and sleeping areas. And in hot temperatures, the unit will usually only cool to 20 degrees cooler than outside air temperature. In Nevada and Arizona temperatures can exceed 110 F. The units will overheat and shut down. When temperature goes down below 100 F, if the units have been allowed to cool off for several hours, usually after sunset, you can reset them. Hopefully you haven't gone off and left them on unattended. Be sure to clean their exteriors, keep the dirt, dust and leaves from clogging the exteriors. And a cover or tarp for the unit if you store it for winter.

Don't forget in a 5th wheel that a small electric heater, 15 AMP max, will save you bunches on heating your RV. Again, don't leave it unattended and best put far away from anything flammable but in sight of the user. Personally I don't recommend leaving one on at night.

Check the torque on your trailer wheel lug nuts and shackles holding the axle (usually 4 nuts at bottom of u-clamps holding frame to axle). Particularly important because one loose nut will vibrate and eventually loosen more and the u-bracket can release the axle to slam back into the wheel well, destroying tires, wheel well, or if the tire explodes, damaging trailer floors and walls.

Turn off your propane before going on the road. Many states require it and all tunnels require it. Each year check your propane hoses and regulators. They can leak. Propane is a flammable and can explode.

The challenge is having a plan B when plan A fails. Insurance is of course essential to your financial plan for RV travel. But you should think about what you do when you can't stay in your RV during repairs. Or if it's a 5th wheel or pull-along trailer, what you do when your truck needs repairs for several days. And yes, I have more stories there but why tell them now. Just plan ahead for that possibility of being towed to a facility and renting a hotel or motel room for a week or two in a town that is not on your travel tour agenda.

When you use a 5th Wheel for RV'ing you have an advantage of having a truck to go get groceries or go sight-seeing. With a truck camper, you can leave the camper on jacks at your site and drive the truck. If a Class A, you usually tow a car behind and detach it for those

purposes. A small Class B you can drive out of the campground without too much preparation but you still may need to detach fresh water hoses, power, and sewer lines. Class C usually have a toad (a towed vehicle for running around). Anything you drive will need a tag, insurance, maybe annual inspections, and scheduled maintenance.

Money is probably a consideration if not a quickly checked for health care. There are many ways to travel. RV travel is just one of the ways to accomplish the aim of seeing America. We chose to try the truck camper first.

Favorite places you have visited.

VA: Williamsburg and surrounding sights, Colonial Williamsburg, Yorktown Battle Field and Victory Monument nearby. Norfolk nearby, Hapton Rhodes nearby, Richmond nearby, Charlottesville with Monticello nearby, Fredericksburg Battle Field, nearby and a gateway to Kill Devil Hills, NC, for Wright Brothers Museum, NC

FL: Key West, Truman Winter White house, beautiful white sand beaches, Ernest Hemingway House/Museum, and crazy naked walk around the streets in that town. Beautiful sunsets in the Square

ME: Bar Harbor, Kennebunkport, Acadia NP. A total surprise how beautiful Maine is. Be careful of very narrow roads.

VT: Bennington, Rutland, Montpelier, Middlebury, Vergennes, Waterbury, Stowe, Burlington, Shelburne

SD: Black Hills, Mount Rushmore, Custer State Park, Deadwood and Historic Homes and Museums, Lead, Spearfish trout fish hatchery

Montana: Bozeman, Livingston, Billings, Glacier Park, and the nearby cities of Kalispell, Whitefish, Eureka, Somers, Lakeside, Polson
Yellowstone Park and east entrance area, Ennis, Virginia City and other ghost towns, fantastic fly fishing rivers.

WY: Little Big Horn Battle Field, Sheridan, Buffalo, Devil's Mountain, Cody, Worland, Thermopolis, Greybull, Jackson, Teton Natl Park

TN: Nashville, music attractions and many museums and old buildings, Franklin and the many Civil War attractions there.

Memphis and blues music history. TN is divided into East, Central and Western by mountains and highways. There is much to see

NY: Niagara Falls from the Canadian side is beautiful, Finger Lakes Area, Syracuse, Binghamton.

Note: Having lived in so many states already and availed ourselves of travel, we visited other areas. There are still many waiting to share treasures that we want to see or see again.

Crazy happenings.

My wife and I decided to rent a car to drive from Colorado Springs to Rapid City to renew her Driver License in June of 2018. I had just got out of the hospital after a 3-day stent so she was planning to drive. She didn't like to drive my Dodge Ram 3500 diesel. So we left our 5th wheel and pickup at our campsite in Fountain, CO. We returned 3 days later to find a catastrophic record hail storm had hit the day after we left. Cars, trucks, trailers, houses, restaurants, any in the path of the storm were heavily damaged. There is nothing you can do for your truck, motor home or trailer if 4-5 inch diameter hail falls from the sky except protect your head and your body. Stay inside.

After such storms your insurance company will assist with repairs or declare it a total loss and pay you off. Our insurance adjuster inspected all the damages and gave us a checks for repairs, one for the RV and one for the truck. Such a community disaster means there are hundreds of people getting repairs at the same time. We were fortunate to already have an appointment for later that month for some repairs. We just added the adjuster's report and check to the service order quickly and held our place in the queue for repairs. The RV dealer's lot was full of damaged RV's that needed repairs also. Our RV and auto insurance was \$500 deductible for each event but paid only a trivial amount of the costs of hotels while it was in the shop for repairs. We also had to rent a car (also only a trivial payment 2 or 3 days; the truck required 58 days to repair. We drove to Indiana to stay at a relative's lake house until the trailer was repaired.

We returned to Colorado 34 days later. The repair facility agreed to tow our trailer into our space in the RV park since we still didn't have our truck yet. The RV park was only a few hundred feet away from the dealer's facility. As we began the setting up again, opened our slides and turned on the A/C to cool it down we noticed there were still many damaged RV's that hadn't been repaired yet. There just aren't prepared for that many RV's at once. We had to buy new hoses because the hail had destroyed those too (insurance doesn't pay for those items). Once we were all set up again inside we went to lunch at our favorite Mexican restaurant about 6 miles away.

Before our lunch was served we heard very loud thumps and watched people rushing to the windows. Another monster hail storm was occurring. We went to the front door and looked

out, staying away from glass that could be smashed by the large hail stones (again). Car windows broken, door, hoods, trunks full of big dents, shingles flying, broken trees limbs covering the ground. We dared not to go out and see the damage to the rental car. We ate our meal, including a big Margarita. We whispered our hope that the storm hadn't hit the RV park again. We waited for the storm to pass and then saw the rental car was still drivable (damage everywhere but could see through the cracked windshield). Dollar signs flashed in my head. \$500 deductible on the car rental and another \$500 deductible at least for the 5th Wheel.

We notified our insurance agent by phone of a second catastrophic hail storm; she already knew about it after receiving other calls. She said our agent would be calling ASAP. When we arrived at the RV park, the damage was as bad as the first storm and it was raining too. I had to get tarps to cover the two broken A/C vents on the roof and another for the broken cover on the roof refrigerator vent. The entire roof, the sides, lights, hoses, were all severely damaged just a few hours after leaving the RV repair shop next door. At the Colorado Springs Zoo, 7 animals had been killed and over 3000 cars damaged in their parking lot.

Once we stopped the rain water from coming inside, we drove our damaged rental car next door to tell the RV repair technician to book us again ASAP. We would bring the insurance check and insurance over as soon as we got them. He asked about damages and I provided him verbally my list of the damages and he grimaced. Fortunately for us, we had a close friend in Denver who lives in a high-rise apartment building with an extra bedroom. She was kind enough to offer it to us for the next month or whatever we needed. That repair lasted 36 days.

At last all was repaired and we were scheduled to leave for our winter RV park. We had to notify them we would be a week late due to repair delays but confirmed we were coming. Along the way, just outside Deming, NM, we stopped for fuel. As I got out and put the fuel hose into our truck I noticed the skirt of our trailer was hanging away oddly away from where it should be. The repairs of the skirt had not been done competently, the sheet metal was not secured to the braces and the slip stream and wind had pulled the screws through the metal. My heart practically stopped. I immediately called the RV dealer who had completed the repairs and reported the obviously poor workmanship and he assured me he would cover the costs of complete repairs wherever I could get them done.

There was one small trailer repair facility in Deming whose manager was gracious enough to take pity and stopped his project to put us together so we could continue our trip without further damage. I asked him to check all of the repairs, giving him a description of the repairs that had been done. He found a couple of other places that needed attention and made temporary repairs. The rest of that story was I convinced him to do all my repairs after his busy season if I would drive back to NM. He agreed and although it took a day or so longer due to the winter snow which hit unexpectedly slowing the paint drying process, he completed the job

and was paid directly by the Colorado Springs dealership. I only had to pay the cost of the trip and several days in a hotel.

The story was that unexpected weather and poor quality control by name brand dealer's service bays all added up to the decision to end our adventure of full time RV travel. The 5th Wheel was restored to practically new: roof, A/C, vents, paint, lights, etc. The only thing on the truck that had not been replaced or painted was the left rear door. It looked like new, too. I was always being asked if I wanted to sell it anyway.

The decision was made and we negotiated a deal in Prescott to trade in both the truck and the 5th Wheel. On March 29th, 2019, we were owners of a new Subaru Outback Touring Model with a 3.6 R engine for mountain driving in Colorado. We drove away with all our household belongings in a rental van and the car was delivered to us in Colorado Springs about 3 weeks later.

First timer mistakes.

Buying something without knowing anything about your options:

Options for 4 season RV's versus the summer time vacation type.

A big unit but no slide outs. Those slide outs make the unit much more comfortable.

Learning how to pull a trailer, back a trailer, drive a truck pulling a trailer, driving a big- rig motor home. I never bought a motor home but I can tell you the 5th Wheeler dealers don't even offer to teach owners about hooking up, unhooking, parking or backing a 5th Wheel. They suggest going to a big empty parking lot with orange traffic cones and practicing. Suggestion: Find a friend who has one and let him teach you. Try to use your own rig or if not a similar size rig and don't go on the road until you are confident to turn corners, enter and exit freeways, and back up.

Many sites at campgrounds are only available to back into the space. Check for black or red ant in your site. Lots of RV'er like to hang hummingbird feeders. That brings bees and the dripping feeders leak nectar to the ground and bring ants or mice. A tale can be told about getting rid of black ants who infiltrate your trailer or even more horrendous the mice you discover after winter storage. They can enter through an opening as small as a nickel or quarter.

DON'T FORGET TO ALLOW DISTANCE FOR OVERHEAD TV satellite dish or a crank up TV antenna.

DON'T FORGET TO ALLOW DISTANCE FOR YOUR SLIDE OUTS. Cut a yard stick to the length you need and carry it. Use it to be sure you fit correctly in your site .

On the highway, keep your eyes on every car and truck that is around you within 100 feet. Expecting the unexpected is good for any driver but you are now in a situation that means reaction with your rig isn't instantaneous.. Remember the following distance you need to stop to avoid hitting the next vehicle is greatly increased with all that weight of the trailer pushing you. And passing a slower vehicle will also require you to have enough distance to attain a speed for a smooth pass. Keep your eyes on the front wheels of the truck next to you when passing it. He may be drifting into your lane while eating, reading, talking, and yes even falling asleep. Signal early when you are going to pass or change lanes. Good communication is a polite notice that can be easily interpreted by all drivers. Some cars follow you so closely you won't even be able to see them in your mirrors. There are some video systems available for mounting a camera on the back of your trailer with a screen display in your truck for that very reason. I had one. It was adequate but not magic.

With my 6-speed auto transmission diesel truck I normally pulled the trailer in 5th gear. I could "feel" the trailer and the engine was pulling, no sway, no drift, no yaw. On a long flat road I might shift to 6th gear for better mileage. In town or busy highway traffic I often chose 4th gear so RPM's could better assist with prompt speed adjustments. Anticipate climbing the hill ahead and keep the engine at the best RPM to avoid carry your load, not dropping behind the power/torque curve. I could maintain about 62-65 MPH on the road using selective gear changes, a smooth even speed for the highways. Controlling the speed on a downhill grade is probably more important for safety than climbing a hill. Slow to 50-55 MPH, and choose a lower gear before cresting the hill.

My Dodge 3500 had great electronic brain to assist and maintain speeds in cruise control and would select a lower gear to avoid speeding up going down hills. Making sharp or sudden turns on a steep curving road isn't safe with that heavy trailer hooked up to your hips. Sudden stops or starts can cause a huge shift in the weight of your trailer load and that can create havoc in your home on wheels and is extra/unnecessary wear on your truck transmission, the pin box (trailer hitch on the bed of the truck) and your trailer chassis. Keep an eye on your engine temp and in a diesel your exhaust gas temp when in mountains. A long steep climb may mean it's more important to keep RPM's higher to cool the transmission. You may notice semi-trailers stopped on the mountain roads to cool their engines and tranny after a steep hill climb. Stay ahead of a possible heating situation to avoid problems. Stay off the brake pedal while driving. No 2 foot driving. A diesel truck and some modern cars interconnect the brake pedal and the accelerator which can mean a pause, or hiccup when you try to accelerate with that left foot still on the brake. When you are stopping with the trailer put a smooth steady pressure when coming to a full stop.

Just like other vehicles, RV/Trailers have load limits. Those are clearly marked on your coach or trailer. Distribute your load evenly in storage compartments and throughout the RV. DO NOT

EXCEED THE WEIGHT RESTRICTIONS. Your axles can be damaged or even fail even you overload your RV.

Those truck scales you see at truck stops are available for your use also. Don't guess about your weight. Weigh it. I'd be surprised if you aren't way over you estimate. Weigh each wheel/quarter of your load separately so you can determine if you evenly distributed your load. The results will save fuel, tires, increase comfort and ease your work of driving on the road.

Trailers wheels may have wheel bearings that need regular service. Usually about 5,000 miles. Service means removing them, and cleaning, adding grease, maybe replacing a race but always replacing the seals. The service should be done by a professional. Overloaded axles also can overheat your wheel bearings and they can fail. UGLY !!

BOOKS are heavy. You may have to learn that if you add new books, you need to trade in, give away, leave old books at lending libraries. E- readers are substitutes but personally I like the feel of books and use the exchange libraries at most RV parks and campgrounds.

Diesel versus gasoline. Most big Class A and 5th Wheels use diesel engines. Big power and torque to move the weight. Diesels have more rules. BIG RULE: Never run out of fuel with a diesel. You can't get a can of gas and start it. It will need to be towed in for a mechanic to resolve the issues of air in the rails and filters, etc. Just fill it up when it reaches 1/4 tank and never deviate from the BIG RULE. That means big delay and big money for your mistake. Diesel fuel may need additives by state/federal law. It reduces the dark smoke and also adds back some lubricants that are lost by reducing the sulphur content. Diesel fuel will freeze. Diesel engines have a little pre-heat device that helps it start on cold mornings. Wait for the icon before starting. In winter use winter grade diesel fuel. In some cases plug in your engine heater (if equipped) but I doubt you will be RV camping in below 32 F weather for any length of time.

AND anything else you would like to comment about.

As difficult as some difficulties were, and I didn't touch on all of them that occurred with the RV or the truck, we would do it all over again and treasure our travels and the freedom to we had to roam this great country. I hope that never changes due to travel restrictions on types of vehicles or limited access or accommodations for RVs. For now we will be traveling by car, train or commercial air and staying at hotels, VRBOs or similar. Many thanks to our fellow travelers along the way.

Larry J Statham
East High Class of 1960