

# AN ODE TO MOVEMENT

By Sylvia Karcz

*Stop waiting for the right time to do it. The right time is now.*



Sylvia with her vintage store on wheels.



One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was: the faster you accept that you're not always going to feel 100 percent ready to do something, the faster you'll get around to actually doing it. My friend was two glasses of wine in as she told me this, and I was slumped cross-legged on a couch petting our house cat, explaining a deep-rooted yearning that was at a boiling point: to quit my part-time, "just a paycheck" desk job, buy a box truck or retro trailer, and start selling vintage clothing in a more adventurous, all-consuming way—one that aligned with my passion for travel.

I'm pretty sure my friend rolled her eyes. This wasn't the first time she was hearing this ramble, and she seemed somewhat annoyed that I was still talking about this idea without making proper headway. I was a confident young woman, after all—one who had no

qualms about taking a spontaneous trip to Central America for a month by myself, or organizing a big charity art show even though I knew next to nothing about putting on charity events or art shows.

My friend leaned in close, pinning me with her blue eyes. "Stop overthinking things," she said forcefully, making the cat bolt. "Everything will be fine, and you have enough."

It felt like a roar.

Nearly a decade later, those words played on repeat in my mind as I prepared for my cross-country escapade. If I could have written the script to my dream road trip before it all started, the starring role would have been given to an earth-tone Sprinter van with a youthful engine and a set of those studded, off-road tires that give a hardened, I-can-tackle-anything air of confidence. What I had, though, was an aging Jeep Cherokee with a rust problem

Sure, it's not a typical trailer—but this is not a typical life.



A folding bed and a view. You don't need much else.

and a temperamental transmission, and my “mobile office”—a vintage clothing store housed in a 12-foot trailer. It was covered in polka dots, most people probably assumed it was originally used to transport horses, and it was far more suited to hold bins of fanciful 1970s dresses and distressed denim than to live out of.

I didn't have all the gadgets and gizmos that would make my road trip a cakewalk. I hadn't even fashioned a way to properly lock the trailer from the inside yet—my security system was just three heavy-duty bungee cords from the hardware store. I did, however, have a spacious walk-in closet on wheels and a car to tow it with, and at a fundamental level that was enough. Plus, I had the essentials. I had a cozy sleep space in the form of a cheap collapsible bed frame topped with a foldable mattress, which wedged perfectly in between two racks of clothing. I also had a kitchen: a Coleman two-burner stove purchased from a guy in New York City for \$20, and plastic storage crates filled with thrift-store cookware. Those were plopped on a wooden platform that I had built specifically for the back of my Jeep. The bathroom situation, more often than not, involved hovering over airtight plastic containers to pee or begging my bowels to hang tight while I found a public toilet—nothing I hadn't done before. It basically felt like camping—and I love camping!—and I reminded myself that I was building character by not having it be so... well, easy.

Road trips, after all, aren't meant to be perfect.

The original plan was a three- to four-month journey that would begin in my home state of New Jersey and end up on the shores of California. In reality, the adventure ended up taking nearly two years, introducing me to a handful of mechanics in various states, and getting me very well acquainted with urgent Airbnb rentals. In the course of that time, I zigzagged about 30,000 miles through two dozen states, collecting experiences like one might collect books, or seashells, or band shirts. And I did everything I could to spend and make my money wisely. That is to say, I did everything I could to not pay for accommodation.

I slept in chain-store parking lots, restaurant parking lots, and casino parking lots. My wheels found solace on public and private land, and in parks of every kind—from saguaro-dotted sanctuaries to dusty patches in the centers of southwestern ghost





towns. I pulled up in friends' driveways, in front of churches, under 200-year-old oak trees. There were lakefront spots, marina-front spots, spots on farms, and spots next to canals teeming with alligators. I scored free overnight parking in places with varying levels of comfort: one a block from a surfing beach in a high-end California neighborhood with public bathrooms (jackpot!); one a block from a methadone clinic in a small New England city (probably won't do that again). And sometimes, usually after one too many days of brushing my teeth in places I'd never thought I'd brush my teeth, I said, "Screw it," and treated myself to a cheap RV park stay or room rental for a few days. Because the truth is, even a short taste of stability can feel really damn comforting.

There is no prerequisite for getting out there on the open road, other than having the time and the sheer will to do it. Some people sell everything they have and start a van-life journey with a five-figure savings account at their disposal and no stopping point in sight. Others may just have a beat-up car and several hundred bucks to their name and, if they're fortunate, a month or two—hell, even a week or two—to explore the country, explore themselves, and explore the possibility of another lifestyle. On my travels, I slept near intrepid souls living their stories in every way imaginable: in the back of their Subarus, in converted buses with outdoor patios, in brand-new 30-foot campers, in vintage Land Cruisers with rooftop tents, and on bicycles with sleeping bags strapped to their saddlebags and a puppy in a backpack. Who knows

what they thought when my polka-dotted home-slash-business rolled up? Does it matter? Not to me, because that odd little trailer is home to me and my dreams, so it's perfect.

Imagine you and me sitting on a couch with a cat—or around a campfire, or at a café—and you're divulging an insatiable desire to drop everything and follow your internal GPS to some far-flung corner of the state or the country or the world. You'd better believe that I'll search deep in your eyes for that glimmer of hope and return the favor that my friend did for me, saying: "Dive the hell in, friend." Don't wait until you have that dream setup or for the right time. Adventure can be had in any form and for any amount of time, as long as you modify the mold to suit your own circumstances. But do embrace that seedling of an idea as quickly as you can.

Every road-trip incarnation is bound to be rife with its share of gifts, detours, mishaps, happenstances, and a-ha moments. Once you remove the vehicle, the budget, and the map, though, you're left with a pretty rudimentary concept that, in many ways, is the backbone of any journey: movement. It's movement that allows you to connect, without restraint, on a visceral level—with people, with places, with nature, and with that audacious part of yourself that knows that now is the best time there is. **R**

Sylvia Karcz is a freelance writer forever dreaming of the next adventure. She is an obstinate believer in the power of storytelling, and her heart is fullest when exploring connections in the outdoors.

Home, or vintage clothing store on wheels? Both.