

# We Will Elevate (Part Two)

by Landon Beadle

The first 300 miles were nothing. We travelled up the familiar path of I-90 through La Crosse and into Minnesota, at speeds that we would later equate with the *tortoise* side of life. Still, it went quickly. We cut through Minnesota and South Dakota, staying the night in Rapid City. We saw Mount Rushmore the following morning, and wandered the streets of Deadwood.

Deadwood had a few good sources for historical record. Their tourist center had a few exhibits to walk through, recounting the history of the town as the last lawless city in America and of the fire that tore through the town in the late 19th century, almost obliterating it from the map. Across the street was the Adams' museum--three floors of collected clothing, weapons, letters and print. They had poker chips and whiskey bottles, building remnants and newspaper clippings. They also had an extensive collection of books on the town and key figures, most of which were light and carried a \$30+ price tag.

Once we had made our way into Wyoming it was a long, slow drive on I-90. Kathy insisted of driving the bulk of the day, ending my shift after a mere 40 minutes. I was allowed to drive while they picked up fast food through a McDonalds drive-thru (Kathy's choice, although she immediately told us that we couldn't push our 'McDonalds preference' on her very often) with a line that took 20 minutes to wade through, only to find that they were out of fish--the only option for me to eat. Kathy showed absolutely no sympathy for this, and when I waited for a gas exit that also had a Subway she seemed a little put-off.

We had to drive a mile off the interstate to get to the main drag. They only sold their subs in 6-inches, but still baked them in 12-inch loaves. Their signage indicated that they had several selections of 'pop' to choose from, and the pajama-clad couple in front of me asked for '*mato's*' as a vegetable. One of the cats--Missy--escaped during this stop, but was quickly recaptured. Later in the

---

Available online at [«http://fictionaut.com/stories/landon-beadle/we-will-elevate-part-two»](http://fictionaut.com/stories/landon-beadle/we-will-elevate-part-two)

Copyright © 2010 Landon Beadle. All rights reserved.

day Kathy brought up this stop as an unexpected hold-up that online map sites can't account for, grumbling something about a fifteen-minute delay. I bit my tongue and neglected to mention that it took less time than her food stop.

By this point I was having misgivings about the trip. Kathy was getting on my nerves, my sub had been terrible, and I was sick of constantly looking over my shoulder because I didn't trust that with the next un-blinkered lane change we wouldn't simply collide with a caravan, spilling onto the highway a combination of our blood and that of a loving, daytripping family of four. Kathy had spent the 40 minutes of my driving session in the backseat with an atlas, griping out loud about how much time had been wasted and how far it was going to be to Yellowstone and how we would never make any of our loosely-held goals.

She took over driving and within about 25 minutes had been pulled over.

This was in a small town just south of Montana. We had passed several signs for over two hundred miles declaring that Hwy 16 was the best way to take into Yellowstone. Each sign proclaimed it as the *safest* as well as the *easiest* and (to really sell it home) the *quickest*. But, as usual, Kathy's way is better. So we skipped it. And kept driving. A couple hours later Kathy would remark "I think it must have been that Hwy we kept seeing signs on that I came in on last year. Whoops!"

Awesome.

So, Kathy gets pulled over for speeding. 41 in a 25, or 47 in a 30. Something like that. The trooper greets her with a pretty aggressive "What's your hurry, M'aam?" which Kathy mocks for several moments. She acts much more politely when he returns to the car, but her excuse for speeding that she gives him was--in all seriousness--"I must have been paying more attention to my cat." Now, I've never been pulled over for speeding, so I might not be the best source on what is or what isn't an acceptable excuse. "My wife is in labor," is probably a good excuse. "I was paying too much attention to my cat to properly watch the road"? Not so much.

So, we hit the road again and come to the Little Big Horns. Basically--we drove up a mountain. I wish I could draw this out to encompass 50-60 pages, so I could thoroughly relate the adrenaline that was pumping through my system as we mounted this hill, but I don't think I could manage it. The truck in front of us had a dog in the back cab, one who was free to run and jump up and down and look at things. One misstep, one tumble and this dog would've been gone. I was glad the truck was in front of us, because it limited Kathy on her speed. Uphill drift racing might be awesome, but I really never wanted to be a passenger.

We convinced Kathy to stop at a lookout point about 9,000 feet in the air and it was unreal. It was like gazing down on the landscape from a plane. We resumed the uphill battle, and after awhile the ground leveled out a bit. We did pass one nasty car wreck, with what looked like a truck and a motorcycle that both went off-road and into heavy brush to avoid a collision. No bodies, but the truck was smashed up and personal belongings were scattered everywhere. A woman with one-arm was guiding traffic with an ill-humored smirk on her face.

The return trip down was just as bad, but--finally--we leveled out and drove next to a remarkable stream tucked away in the valley of the mountains. After an hour or so of level driving, we made Kody, founded by Buffalo Bill Kody. No Motel 6's in Kody, but we found a very nice motel with a decent bathroom and comfortable beds, and we made camp for the night. We ate at a family restaurant on the outskirts of town and--again--I had the choice of salad or pasta. I pasta'd up again and drank a Colorado Micro-brew.

We talked about writing and dialects. Kathy founded a very successful Institute for Speech Pathology, and she was talking about different vernaculars and areas of inflection you'll come upon as you travel. She lived in Hawaii for several years and was telling us how she could blend in as a native. Honestly, what I took from it is that locals in Hawaii come across as idiots--sounding eerily like the "I tell you every t'ing" character on Mad TV.

For writing, I brought up groups like McSweeney's and said that I'm a big fan of British authors like Douglas Adams and Nick Hornby, and that I'd like to capture that form of dry humor to an extent, but that it's difficult because I'm not British. Kathy seemed to take endless amusement at this, laughed at me and said "Of course you couldn't write like that, you're American." I'm fairly certain she completely missed the point that I was talking about a form of dry, ironic humor found much more prevalently in the UK than you see in America. I wasn't to any degree suggesting that I wished I could write from a British point of view. On moments like these Kathy displays an overwhelming naiveté and closed-mindedness.

\* \* \*

The next day we passed through Yellowstone. I always pictured this as a flat, forested area. I was completely blind before this trip to the immense variation in landscape you pass through in this corner of Wyoming. We're talking hills, mountains, hot springs, geysers, lakes... It was incredible. It's another visual thing that's difficult to describe, but we came within feet of Moose and Buffalo. The Buffalo group together in herds and are massive, intimidating creatures. You get the impression in their presence that--if desired--they could easily orchestrate a plan to stop you atop a hillside, then ram your car over the edge.

Passing from Yellowstone we hit Idaho, and I took over driving again. I drove the next four hours straight, taking us down through Idaho Falls and into Utah, to the outskirts of Salt Lake City. Along the way we listened to *Belle & Sebastian's* 'Dear Catastrophe Waitress' and *Rilo Kiley*. We stopped at an A&W just outside of Idaho Falls for lunch and caffeination.

The skies threatened to rain on us once we began to enter Utah, but the rain was elusive and always appeared just around the next bend. We hit some construction on I-25, detouring us off the highway just once, but then it was back to full speed. Utah drivers seem to move faster than Idaho drivers, and at one point I merged in

front of a van who despite needing fifteen to twenty seconds to even catch up to our car felt the need to honk, gesticulate, swerve around, flip us off again and fly ahead.

"That guy didn't like you...he flipped you off!" said Dad.

"Twice!" says I.

We stopped at a rest stop to switch drivers just outside of Salt Lake. The mountains were still clearly visible to the East, and the Salt Lake was starting to crop up to the West. There were also these massive, steep hills. I felt the strongest urge to tackle them, to surmount them as soon as possible. My Dad mentioned that they were precisely the type of hills my Mom would love to march up every day if she could. It seems to be a dormant, conquering urge that is in my blood, to soak up as much of the exploration as possible. I fought it back and climbed into the passenger seat.

Our new goal was to make it as far into Nevada as possible. The stretch across the Salt Flats is 100 miles, so by leaving SLC we were committing to at least that. I knew we couldn't make Reno, but secretly I was just hoping we didn't get stuck in Winnemucca, a town whose claim to fame is the great annual 'Runnamucca'. As we left SLC we stopped at a gas station to refuel and Kathy took over as driver.

The gas station we stopped at was actually across the street from a gas station we had stopped at heading in the opposite direction three years earlier. Kathy had left her window open and I had frantically turned the keys and hit the 'Window Up' button in a desperate attempt to stop the Cat--Max--who was greedily eyeing up the gateway to freedom. The window started its automatic rise, and Max still made a leap for it, getting his head through before it closed on his neck. I hit the "Window Down" button in a panic, and he fell back into the car shaking. He spent the next few days of the trip quiet and huddled into a ball in the back, and I was seriously concerned that long-term damage had been done. Of course, the story mutated within hours of the event from 'Kathy left the window open' to 'Landon almost killed the cat due to gross negligence'.

That was the same trip no one was supposed to find out that Kathy had lost her purse and credit cards.

Kathy was now in the Driver's Seat, so I took my usual place in the back, submitting wholly to the credo of 'What you can't see can't hurt you.' We had enjoyed quite the show of lightning from a distance for the past hour and a half, and as we hit the Salt Flats the storm seemed to circle us. The wind picked up. So did the rain.

This would be the storm in which an eccentric millionaire aviator went missing, invading the news for the rest of our trip. The storm was thrashing against our vehicle so intensely that it seemed determined to flip us off the road. On the Salt Flats there are no buildings to take shelter in or behind, no landmarks to slow down the current of air. The wind was ripping salt from the ground and railing it into the car, and I couldn't dream of what we would do if a tornado struck.

We passed a woman pulled off to the side of the road in a convertible, desperately trying to get the top of her car up. We passed two motorcycles on the side of the road, the motorists looking at a complete loss as to what to do now. A few minutes later, the convertible-bound woman passed us, having abandoned the idea of a top-up car and just trying to outrun the storm.

After about thirty minutes of this the storm started to lessen, and as we reached the safety of the hills running between Utah and Nevada the winds receded. They peaked every now and again as we wound our way through Nevada on I-80, but never with quite the same intensity as we had experienced on the Flats. Eventually we came within reach of Elko and called ahead to secure a Motel-6.

Elko was where I would feel the most homesick. We went to the Red Lion Resort & Casino for dinner, after rejecting a buffet-like diner in a smaller Casino further in town. The Red Lion was still buffet like, and my Dad actually opted for that. I ordered a Tuna Melt and Kathy ordered a Steak. The Tuna Melt was just as greasy and cheap as I had expected--I was fine with it. The buffet options were limited and the one thing my Dad really wanted was in short

supply. The Steak was poor. This was all expected as far as I was concerned, but Dad and Kathy's moods seems sullied a bit.

After we ate, we gambled. I popped \$5 into a Video Poker machine and lost it within about four minutes. I walked over to the Poker Room and talked to the guy running it. They had a \$40 minimum and they were playing \$5/\$10 No Limit. With my cap of around \$40 that meant I had about two hands maximum to play, so I excused myself and walked back over by my Dad. We both tried two more Video Poker machines and both lost \$5 right away. Kathy came over and popped \$10 into one of the adjoining machines, doubled her money and walked away. What an asshole.

Eventually I ended up at the bar. I sat down and put \$10 into a Nickel-Slot Poker Machine they had right there. At this point I more or less just wanted a free drink. The bartender obliged, and gave me a Sierra Nevada on the house, saying "The *first one* is free."

I actually didn't do too bad, at first. I doubled my cash up to \$20 and my Dad came over. He paid for a Corona and started playing the Poker machine next to me. I chided him that my drink had been free, and my \$20 started to drop back to \$10. I was about to hit \$10 and call it a day, but the bartender pulled up another Sierra Nevada and said it was also free, because I was playing max bet. My Dad pointed at the beer and at me in exasperation, and I was amused. I did end up losing everything, and after popping in a \$5 and playing it up to \$10 I cut my losses. I think I walked away \$15 lighter in the end.

I checked my phone when I got back to the motel room and Kate had called. Something bad had happened with her family and she wanted to talk to me. This was our third night gone. Kate and I had just moved into an apartment together, and we had just had our one-year anniversary. I had left her alone one day into our new place, one day after our anniversary and the apartment didn't even give her the necessary phone reception to call someone.

I called a few times until it started ringing and she picked up. I did my best to reassure her from 1500 miles away, talked to her for an hour and wished I could be there with her. I tried to talk to my

Dad for few moments, but he was half-asleep and I just sat and watched a Bob Saget stand-up special on HBO, feeling helpless. I text messaged some words of encouragement to Kate, hoped it helped and went to sleep.

\* \* \*

The last day (of driving)! We reach Palo Alto today! Hooray!

There is a cat in the parking lot at the Motel 6. It's wandering around and it has an ID tag on its collar. Kathy has run to the office to check and see if they know who checked in with a cat. They don't. She goes around door to door and after a couple of tries she finds a tired looking woman who looks at the cat and nods. The woman shrugs and takes the cat.

I am very tired. My Dad signals that he is going to stop in the office and get some coffee. Kathy tells him no, and like a child denied a snack he puts his head down in resignation and climbs into the car.

"Are you serious?" I say.

"I don't want to make waves."

We actually drive over to the office to drop off our keys and update them on the status of the cat. After some goading on my part, Dad hops out and runs to refill coffee. This is a moot but financially sound choice, as our next stop is across the street at a Starbucks. I grab a copy of a Texas Hold 'em magazine and order a Large Mocha with no Whip Cream. I actually work next door to a Starbucks, so this is a drink I am used to ordering.

"Venti no-whip Mocha," I say.

"Okay," say they.

The day is fairly uneventful. We drive over hills of dark red and brush, passing small communities that bear many signs of "WARNING! PRISON AREA! HITCHHIKING IS PROHIBITED!" and we talk about what it would be like to share such a small area with convicts. We stop in Winnemucca for breakfast and it is good. I get Orange Juice, Toast and Pancakes. It is a feast.



Reno is the scariest event of the morning. Kathy almost turns down a one-way street and almost flies through a few red lights. Once we get back on the highway it's smooth sailing all the way to a small town near Lake Tahoe. There, we stop at a Dairy Queen to use the bathroom and stock on caffeine. I take over driving and wind down the 6% grade to ocean-level. I'm glad that I am driving.

Around Sacramento Kathy insists on driving again. We hit heavy traffic and she does not pay close attention, accelerating towards lines of stopped cars and cutting people off to merge into the carpool lane. She talks about an accident she had when she slammed into a stopped car in the fast lane, and she talks about it as if it was that person's fault that traffic was halted. She drives with a sense of looking about seven feet in front of the car, and several times I yell for her to "Stop!"

We come in over the Bay Bridge on I-80, getting onto the 101. I would enjoy it if Kathy weren't already doing so. Instead, I decide one of us should probably watch the road and I make this my role. Several times I have to shout that there is a car in the lane she's merging into, and several times I have to point out that traffic is bottlenecking in front of us. A point comes where she has to merge several lanes and I am terrified.

Eventually, traffic begins to clear and we make it to Palo Alto. I still don't feel that I can untense. Even after we reach her house and are unloading the car, my heart is racing. At one point my Dad and I are alone in Kathy's kitchen.

"We made it," he says, breathing a sigh of relief. "We actually made it."

\* \* \*

Palo Alto is a very strange place. Actually, Silicon Valley is a very strange place. The Valley seems to extend from Palo Alto and San Jose all the way up to Washington, and they have Silicon Valley 'local' magazines that focus on cities hours away from you. There are places where you can indoor sky-dive against a massive air

current, and a lot of their school systems look like military housing. Kathy explains that Palo Alto didn't have much of a need for schools until the tech age began. That was when young people came into money and could afford to settle down and buy a house in the area, start a family. They uprooted most of the retirees and culture seeped in.

Palo Alto is still in the process of upgrading itself.

The first night there we drink whatever we can find. Gin and Seltzer Water, Gin and Orange Soda--largely, Gin.

The first day there we relax. Kathy and my Dad go to a few stores to stock up on food, soda and alcohol. I request Orange Juice. I sleep in until 10 and then I get up and walk a mile or so down to a local Cofee Shop, *Peet's*. It's in a strip mall that promises a liquor store and video shop, but I can find neither. There's a market there and I'm tempted to buy bread and such, but I hold off in hopes that I'll find beer first. Not for the morning, but for later. I will want a beer.

The Mocha is foamy, a thick lather that settles into a liquid. This is apparently more normal than not for the coffee out West. I mean, there are several places in Milwaukee that do it this way, but this... this is not the Starbucks way.

While walking back to Kathy's I keep an awkward pacing behind a small, older asian woman. The pace that I want to walk is just ever so *slightly* faster than the pace she wants to maintain. I eventually catch up to within a few feet and she notices. I can tell that she is increasingly aware of me, and as I get closer and closer she finally just stops and turns to a house. Out of my peripheral vision I notice her glaring at me as I keep walking and turn at the next block.

Awkward.

We swim in Kathy's lagoon-like pool and I try to sit on the bottom. I can't quite make it, and I can only hold my breath for 10 or 15 seconds before resurfacing for air. We invent a game called "Bash Ball" with two paddles and a floatable ball. The game is that you bat it back and forth, working cooperatively, but as soon as the ball is

dropped blame is assigned. Whoever is blameless earns a point, and the first to 14 wins. I make it a point to return volley's to my Dad's left side, as he is right-handed. He works more towards letting me get over-zealous and return too hard, sending the ball flying out of the pool and netting him a point.

Kathy judges and she doesn't keep track of score very well. She nets both of us points that should have scored otherwise, often being fickle between what is out of reach and what is lack of effort. Either way, she is the judge and we bow to her whim. The worst offense one can commit is to argue against her.

The same day we drove through Palo Alto. Kathy took us to the other side of the El Grande Real, where the more expensive homes are. Kathy's would go for around \$1.5M, these were more in the ball park of \$6M. We drive down through the business district and then through the college district. We drive around Stanford's campus and Kathy gives us a guided tour of what has changed over the years, what has grown... Apparently Stanford does not have Sororities, and I think that it would be awfully disappointing to get into Stanford and be denied a full College experience, for those who feel belonging to a Greek Establishment is part of College. Stanford is the size of a small town, swallowed by Palo Alto. It's a beautiful campus and I am jealous of the people who can go there.

We stop downtown at Kathy's former workplace, a Speech Pathology Center where she is still an Honorary Executive. We walk down a small shopping strip to a book store called "Know Knew Books". They are remodeling and clearing out old inventory, and I walk out several books heavier. One of their employees is making a show of citing off lengthy passages from memory from a wide volume of random books. It is impressive.

Later that night we drink Moose Drool beer, and watch an on-demand movie called 'Ready to Wear'. It's an Altman film from the 90's and none of us have seen it. The plot is hard to follow and Dad and I are in good spirits, talking about the movie and poking fun at it. Kathy has her fill of it and goes to bed, Dad starts to download Big Brother 8 episodes and I go outside to talk to Kate.

I lie on a wooden bench and gaze up at the stars. There's really not much going on there, being embedded amongst a hundred miles of city and light, air and noise pollution both. *Rilo Kiley* is playing a show some 50-miles away, and I wish I was there. I run over the trip thus far with Kate, sharing Kathy-isms and promising that in a day and half's time I will be home.

\* \* \*

The next day is San Francisco. We meet up with my Cousin, David. We go to Japantown. We stop at Ghiardelli Square. We drive down Crooken Road and my dad balks at the steep inclines San Francisco loves so much. San Francisco is easily one of the most beautiful cities I've ever been to. This is my fourth time there, technically, but really the third in which I got to explore. I felt more at home when I visited the Metropolis of New York City, but that's a comparison of a *well-oiled machine* to art.

Later that night I present Kathy with three previously written checks to repay a debt. When I go into the guest room to begin to pack I find a card resting on top of a nice, black leather satchel. The card says that it was great spending this time with me but my penchant for carrying my life in plastic bags has to go. Quirks aside, I love Kathy--she's great. She's just a really, really scary driver.

The flight home in the morning is fairly uneventful. Kathy makes a few almost-swipes on the highway and looks as if she's going to fall asleep. We hug goodbye at the drop-off point and I knock on wood that she's makes it back okay. She had previously admitted that she's a much more distracted driver when others are in the car, and the fact that she gets around unscathed as she does seems to back that statement.

For the first time, I make it through the security checkpoint without any issue. The queue to our flight is packed. I drop a few bucks on an awful machine-made cup of coffee and wait fifteen minutes in line to use the one unisex restroom they offer. We sit next to an older arab couple, and I am ashamed that I size up the man as

he shoots me an irritated look that seems to say he's sick of being profiled.

On the flight I read about 200 pages of *Silent Bob Speaks*, a collection of blogs and articles by Kevin Smith. I listen to my new 2GB MP3 Player that I picked up at the same Fry's Electronics that Douglas Coupland touts in *Microserfs* (which, strangely enough, I picked up a few miles away in Palo Alto) for \$25. At our stopover in Minneapolis I buy a Mocha and a terrible all-grain hemp bagel, and also a *Spin* magazine for the flight. I had an urge to pick up a Men's magazine--like *Maxim* or *Stuff*--but I didn't really care to read about Lindsey Lohan or cars, so I stick with the indie rock magazine. There's a good article on the new *Rilo Kiley* album that explains very well the politics behind why they made such a bad, bad CD. My dad tries to jump in on conversation with a couple of jock-types sitting in front of us, but they seem to shrug him off.

In Madison we walk past a tremendous update to an airport terminal I haven't seen in three years. They have a *Great Dane* pub now. We are tempted to stop. Instead, excited to be back, we exit through security and I bypass the escalator for the stairs, very much wanting to see my girlfriend and the rest of my family. Couples reunite and old friends greet each other with an awkward embrace.

There is no one for us.

We go to the luggage check and spot one of our two items straight off. I see the other one about to disappear into a black curtain, and I run over and grab it at the last second. Still, no one is here for us. We exchange a disappointed look and walk outside. Our plane had arrived fifteen minutes late, but we hope someone might be waiting by the curb.

We glance around. Madison is familiar. It's good to be back.

It's quiet. We sit on the bench, alone, and we wait.

\* \* \*

