

Taking tiny roads to travel big nation

Hinsdalean publisher, wife, head to New York as series on other Hinsdales resumes

By Jim Slonoff

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A police car with lights flashing and sirens blaring blocks our path. Several more careen in from various directions, bringing all traffic to a halt.

We were still in our first hour of what should have been a 12-hour drive from our Hinsdale to Hinsdale, N.Y., traveling on America's tiny roads.

My wife, Ilene, and I set out June 11, expecting to turn what would have been an eight-hour trip on the interstate into a 12-hour journey on those tiny roads. Instead, we clocked in at 17 hours.

As part of The Hinsdalean's 10th anniversary, Ken Knutson, Pam Lannom and I agreed to visit all the Hinsdales in the United States. Last year Ken, who thought up the plan, traveled to Hinsdale, N.H., and Hinsdale, Mass. I returned from Hinsdale, N.Y., June 17 and Pam leaves for Hinsdale, Mont., Friday.

To set the right tone for our adventure, we decided four rules would govern our travels. Rule 1: No chain gas stations. Rule 2: No chain hotels. Rule 3 No chain restaurants. Rule 4: No interstates.

Rule 1 went out the window within the first few hours, with Rule 2 following about 11 hours later.

I guess Rule 1 was just plain stupid. How was I supposed to know there is no such thing as an independent gas station? I suppose the first clue should have been there isn't one around here. Whatever.

In the spirit of Rule 4, we also decided to avoid Google maps. So, in preparation for the trip, I ordered a map from Amazon.com. I would rely on Rand McNally to plot our path.

In poring over the map, it seemed Route 30 — the historic Lincoln Highway — would be a great way to cut across Indiana and Ohio and then take smaller roads through Pennsylvania into New York.

The route also took us past our first "significant" landmark — a Fuller's Car Wash in Mokena.

After that, the rest of the trip through Illinois was mostly uneventful — well, except for that police incident.

Fortunately the drive across Indiana is relatively short. The scenery leaves a little to be



Taking tiny roads during our trip to Hinsdale, N.Y. gave us a view of America unseen from interstates. From the "Friendliest City" in America in Delphos, Ohio, to a World War II museum in Elred, Penn., to the Allegheny National Forest, we barely had a chance to make it to our destination. (Jim Slonoff photos)

desired. OK a lot.

Coming through Merrillville, we stumbled on the Albanese Candy Factory, which was boasting free tours — nothing about free candy though. Hmmm.

And the candy factory "tour" was just as I'd expect out of Indiana. You walked up a ramp, peered into a window and saw — absolutely nothing. Unless you were looking for stainless steel machines. Next window. More machines. Next window, well you get it. This was no episode of Food Network's "Unwrapped."

We also discovered that Indiana is home to the "Orthopaedic Capital of the World." Yep, right there in Warsaw.

As the afternoon began to wane and our stomachs began to grumble (despite our supply of pita chips, grapes, pineapple and tea), we decided the time was right to test Rule 3. The next town we encountered, Winona Lake, was a beautiful community. Unfortunately we could not locate a single place to eat.

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This is the first in a four-part series on our visit to Hinsdale, N.Y.

Crossing into Ohio, it looked like we were about to enter a science fiction movie. Windmills went on for miles and miles. I'm not a fan of this new look along our highways, but I guess the idea of alternative energy is good one. I just wish they could have figured out a way to disguise them. Paint them blue?

We spotted the town of Delphos, Ohio, and decided to investigate. The first thing that caught my eye was its claim to fame: "America's Friendliest City". We found a perfect restaurant that met Rule 3 criteria and boasted a great name, "Jim's". It was closed.

Not wanting to miss out on a Facebook moment, Ilene took a picture of me by the sign and posted it. Much to our surprise, Hinsdale's Carissa Kapcar

Please turn to Page 34

From the driver's seat

After my wife, Ilene, and I spent 35 hours on some of America's tiny roads, I offer the following observations and opinions.

- If we had a dollar for every Dollar General store we saw, we'd have enough money that we'd never need to shop in one.
- What happens when you put a brand new metal roof on a dilapidated house? The house looks like a dilapidated house with a brand new metal roof.
- If President Trump wants to "Make America great again" he needs to send five-gallon buckets of paint to rural America.
- Every ice cream stand we saw — and we saw quite a few — had people waiting in line.
- Why did the deer cross the road in Ohio? Ohio is a very bad state for deer — having seen dozens that didn't make it across.
- Judging by the flags I saw at cemeteries, there seems to be a higher percentage of service men and women who come from small towns.
- Our unscientific sampling shows the Methodist Church is the most popular.
- Farmers, who work harder than all of us, seem to spend an inordinate amount of time mowing their lawns.
- We came across several turn-abouts in New York and Pennsylvania. Unfortunately there are not as many drivers skilled enough to master them.
- People have too much stuff. Every town had a storage shed business — some had more than one. Americans need to stop buying things they don't have room for. See item 1.
- Small town residents seem to be more patriotic. Homes and villages were flying the flag everywhere on our journey. Many towns have monuments and statutes dedicated to the men and women who have lost their lives serving our country. The lists on these memorials contain far too many names — many more than would seem possible based on the size of the communities.
- Never ask for directions from a house that is flying a Confederate flag.
- It seemed like there were more dentists than Dollar Generals and storage businesses. So the good news is while we have too much stuff, we have good teeth.
- Logging trucks in the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania barrel down the road just as fast as logging trucks in the Redwood forests of California. There is nothing more unsettling than when you see them racing toward you, tearing down a winding road and fearing at any moment you are about to be hit by a tittering truck filled with timber. Makes you wish you stopped at that Dollar General store.
- Country music is somehow better when you are driving down a country road.
- You can't help but smile when you see an Amish man, with long beard, bib overalls and straw hat riding a brand new recumbent bicycle along the highway. — by Jim Slonoff

Taking tiny roads to travel to Hinsdale, N. Y.

Continued from Page 5

responded.

"That's my husband's hometown, so these Kapcar Hinsdaleans travel there every Thanksgiving and Christmas," she posted.

Small world, right? Do you think the Kapcars in Delphos refer to themselves as Delphoseans?

Resigned to rely on our ample supply of road treats, we headed back to the highway. I had planned our first night at a motel outside of Alliance — one of those motor courts from days gone by. You park your car outside the room and have a lawn chair right by the door. What more could a traveler ask for? And a review I read said, "We are truck drivers and in need of a nice shower and some quiet time. We had a very comfortable and relaxing time." Perfect, right?

So ... we get closer to Alliance and dusk is setting in ... and that is where I have an epic fail in ... map reading. One more block and I would have found the route to the motel. We pressed onward. After a quick check of the map, we set off for Canfield.

Finally we see civilization — or at least a number of restaurants and hotels lighting up the sky. We spotted a beautiful hotel, not a chain, called the The Inn at Ironwood, with lots of empty parking spaces. We thought we'd found a winner, until we saw the small type under the sign: "Assisted Living Center."

That was it — Rule 2 was out and Hampton Inn was in. Seeing only chain restaurants nearby we opted for an elegant meal of microwave Healthy Choice Four-Cheese Ravioli & Chicken Marinara and Three-Cheese Tortellini.

We were up early and hit the road after free breakfast at the hotel. Since it was free that means we did not violate Rule 3. (Hey, I wrote the rules.)

The landscape across Ohio continued to improve as we drove further east and was absolutely beautiful by the time we hit Pennsylvania. Wildflowers were in full bloom along the roads and hills were beginning to dot the horizon.

The roads were smaller now, and the farther east

we traveled, the deeper the towns' roots into the past. So much of that past has been preserved. At some point we were following Washington's Trail in 1753. I'm not sure where he was going, but he must have had a good map.

On day two our map and time management improved. We found a wonderful town in Pennsylvania — Emlenton — where we had our official first meal on the road at Chico's Cafe and Bake Shoppe. Rule 3 — mission accomplished!

By the time we hit the Allegheny Forest, we forgot all about Indiana. The hills were covered with trees, rivers ran strong and clear and flowers lined the highways. Puffy white clouds overhead created a picture-perfect canvas.

We pulled in to Olean, New York, that afternoon to find our motel, complete with a chair outside the door and parking by the room. When we arrived it, we realized it was miles from town. Another guest sitting outside, shirt off, gut exposed and a cigarette in hand, made our choice of lodging even less appealing. Rule 2 was out forever.

For our trip home we followed a tip by the editor of The Olean Times and traveled along the Grand Army of the Republic Highway, otherwise known as Route 6. It was even better than the way out. More scenery, more small towns, just a great way to travel and really see America. Never broke Rule 3 and rocked Rule 4.

Oh and those police cars? It seems the Lincoln-Way East softball team, the Griffins, was a runner up in the IHSA playoffs and were having a parade. Runner up? Parade? With a lot of police. A lot.

Bigger question: What is a Griffin anyway?

In the next three issues I will share several stories about the people I met in Hinsdale, N.Y. And while these new "Hinsdaleans" you will read about live in an area that may appear different than our Hinsdale, I think you'll see we are more alike than not. The love these folks have for their community is as deep as the love we have for ours.



We traveled the Grand Army of the Republic Highway, also known as Route 6, back to Hinsdale. Nappanee, Ind., located in Elkhart County, is currently exhibiting some of the 57 sculptures by Seward Johnson. We're confident the one titled "Waiting" has to be his best. The sculptures are on display in five other towns in the county as well. I guess it was a great day to be a Griffin, even though they delayed our trip with their motorcade of Jeeps and police vehicles. (Jim Slonoff photos)

