

Epilogue : Driving back - Sunday 30th August to Thursday 3rd September

I'll find my way home

*'You ask me, 'Where to begin?', Am I so lost in my sin
You ask me, 'Where did I fall?', I'll say I can't tell you when
But if my spirit is lost, How will I find what is near?
Don't question, I'm not alone, Somehow I'll find my way home'*

At the end of 73 days travelling at 18,000 miles on the clock there came just one small issue - driving back to Charleston.

Originally, my plan had been to get to California at the end of my trip in a rental car, or cheap car that I'd bought myself – sell it, and then carry on heading west, on a plane – via Hawaii and go home to England 'The Long Way Round'.

But then my circumstances in Charleston changed, and obviously Beverly had lent me her car, which meant that at the end of the trip – I had to drive it back to return it to her.

I spent six days resting up in Santa Monica with Tatiana, Paul was there for a few of them, and I decompressed a bit, slept a lot, but still felt slightly tense and I knew that I had to drive 2,000 miles back east again – on another (in effect) coast to coast road trip.

This would be a mammoth journey by anyone's account under normal circumstances except that to me it just felt like a few more annoying days tagged onto the end that I really didn't want to do. I'd spent ten weeks on the road already, and now I had to add on another to that.

Originally I'd planned to make a mini-road-trip of it altogether and visit more places on the way back. The Sedona National Park, the town of Roswell and its Alien museum and The Alamo were all potential places that I considered visiting on my route back, until I pumped in 'Los Angeles to Charleston' on Google Maps, and saw that the most direct and fastest route back was to re-trace my steps back east along stretches of I-40 and Route 66, but then keep heading due east all the way to Charleston ... and it really was going to take a whole week, seven days of driving every day by myself to get there.

And that's what happened. I drove, east. Every day for a week, slowly getting nearer and nearer to the point where I could *really* relax, and really get my lusted-after downtime, and put my feet up and look at a map of America on my wall and think 'Yup... done that..' which I was longing to do.

But a week's worth of travelling isn't without incident, and in that week three major things happened which are more than worthy of a mention, and so whilst technically aren't part of the trip, they sort of are –as they were part of the journey.

The Arizona State Trooper

Paul and I had been at the Hoover dam just a week and bit ago. Whilst holed up in Vegas for four days, we'd made a 'day trip' out of this to come and visit this feat of technical engineering. We'd driven out here from Vegas, parked up and explored it on foot and walked across it and over it.

From that visit I appreciate what a potential terrorist target it is considered – you can't view the Hoover Dam on Google Street view – the little yellow guy and his blue borders are conspicuous by their absence, as I suspect that the US Government has asked Google not to show it.

So there is security at you approach it from both sides. They just look at you, maybe have a poke around in the back of your car, and every third car or so, they order to pull over into a bay for a more thorough search. They're just security guards – not actual police, and I was more than happy to cooperate. Bizarrely, I think it was my *over*-willingness to be so cooperative that may have led to what happened as I drove across it on the way back east – out of Nevada and into Arizona.

When I got to the checkpoint on the Nevada side, I slowed down behind the line of cars and decided to be friendly and as helpful as possible. Did they want to search my car? Sure! No problem with that. I wound down my window, said 'Hello' to the guy and he just peered in through the back, murmured something to himself and then say 'Pull over that way!'. At least I thought that's what he said, but I wasn't sure if he was telling me to drive on, or pull in to be inspected ... so as I was just about to drive away, I stopped again and said 'Pardon? Go where?'. The guard looked at me a little confused, and said 'The left lane', and I looked and I still couldn't tell if the left lane was where cars pulled in to be searched, or was the road ahead.

'Am I being searched?' I asked, and at that point he gave me a look as if to say 'Why, is there a reason why we *should* be searching you?', which he dismissed, and just said 'Drive on! Left lane!', at which point I finally realised that he didn't want to search me and I could just drive on.

I drove on ... onto the dam, and noting that the speed limit was 15mph. This was easy to achieve for me, for the white sedan in front which looked like it contained half the population of Japan on the back seat were all gawking out the windows with their cameras and video cameras, and their driver and considerably slowed down to about 5mph, to let them get a steady shot & photo. Considerable for him, but not for me and the other cars behind me, now slightly angry that we were really being made to crawl across.

I got a bit annoyed, and sensed that I wanted to put my foot down and put some speed on as soon as possible ... but not until I'd finished crossing. To that end, I let some pedestrians cross over on a crossing in front of me that the white car had ignored, and slowed down to a complete stop – right at the end of the bridge. I did it to relieve my anger of crawling slowly behind the car – stopping to be nice to let some cross felt better than driving at 5 mph.

They finished walking over, and I accelerated quite quickly away, turning up the volume on my iPod as it did, and happily sung along to one of my favourite Hot Chip songs that was

playing. I was leaving Nevada – and entering Arizona, into another state east, and I felt happy. I was going home.

I know I'd got up to at least 15mph, and yeah ... maybe I was doing slightly more ... may 20mph at the absolute most when I saw the lights of the cop car flash behind me.

My initial reaction was to pull in and let him pass. Yes – *let him pass* – because there was no way that I had done anything wrong, and he must have therefore seen something wrong with the white car in front of me (too many tourists crammed into a back seat may be against the law in Arizona, perhaps?) and so I indicated, slowed, and pulled into, totally expecting him to drive right past me. That's how sure I was I was not in the wrong. Except maybe if accelerating away sharply and perhaps doing a couple of miles an hour over the limit is a problem. There's no way he's going to be pulling *me* over, right?

Wrong.

He's a State Trooper. And he's a *fucking arsehole*.

What, you think that's harsh? Wait 'til you read what happened, and what I'm going to call him at the end of it. Save your shocked reaction until then.

I can see he's a State Trooper from his hat, his boots, his swagger as he approaches the car and I watched him in the side mirror – oh and the fact that in reverse in the mirror I could see it saying 'Arizona State Police' all down the side.

So as he approaches, I know he's going to want to see my insurance details and license ... and it's at that point that I do something a bit sneaky. I get out my UK driving license.

Because I realise that it's not my car. I realise that when Paul showed his license to the cop in New Mexico it had confused him slightly. There was no way I was going to get a ticket for driving 3mph over the limit, and I was going home soon. If I showed him my South Carolina license, he might be an arse. If I showed him my UK license, it might just confuse him.

What it *did* do is probably make him nervous because he did the thing which made *me* nervous – he doesn't walk right up alongside the car. No ... he hangs back a bit and talks to me at an angle through the window of the car. I later figure out that it's because he thinks I might swing open the door on him hard to take him out. I also realise that he might have seen me fumbling for my license and figured I was fumbling for a gun. I look at *his* gun attached to his belt, hmmm.

I'm also freaked out because it's at this point I sense somebody on the passenger side of the car – it's his buddy, another cop who is standing a little back, *with his hand on his gun!* Watching me, ready to draw! What the fuck? Who do they think I am!?

We engage in a stilted conversation. Him asking me the standard questions – who I am I, where am I going, where have I come from, is this my car, etc... and the time he's eyeing me suspiciously.

What really gets me is that he doesn't tell me *why* he's pulled me over. No mention of an offence ... nothing, it just feels like he's giving me a hard time because he feels like it, and because – hey – he's a State Trooper, so he can.

The UK license thing is clearly confusing him – as is the fact that it's obviously not my car. I know that because I know that before they even approached the car they'd have run the license plate, found that the owner is a lady called Beverly – and I am clearly a male, and not a female.

'Is this your vehicle, sir?' he asks. Which is a trick question. He knows it's not my vehicle, I know it's not my vehicle, and I know that he knows it's not my vehicle – he just wants to see what I answer I give.

'No. It's my landlady's' – she's lent it to me for the summer, I've been on a cross country road trip with it, and am driving back to South Carolina'.

'Ok, wait there one moment please sir'

'I can call her if you like!' I say. *Still* trying to be helpful ... I meant it. If he thinks I've stolen the car, I'll just call Beverly on my phone and he can chat to her.

'That won't be necessary sir. Could you wind down the back windows please'

I wind down the back windows. The other cop to my right is still there, watching me in case in the process of pressing the window button I pull a gun out.

'What's all this equipment in the back of the car sir?'

'Like I said ... I've been on a road trip all summer. There's camping equipment, my clothes, and computer and video and photo equipment that I've been carrying around with me as well'

He looked at me, looked at the equipment, and then – still clutching my license in his hand walked back to his car. 'One moment please'. And I was sat there wondering still *why* they'd pulled me over. I didn't like to ask.

I looked around me and saw that I was in a lay-by area on the Arizona side of the dam. There were other cars parked here – people milling about, walking back to their cars from where they'd just been visiting, and now all staring at the guy – me – that had been pulled over by the cops. At least his buddy had now relaxed his posture and didn't have his hand on his gun anymore.

The first trooper came back to the car ... this time relaxed, he came right up on side, handed me my license back and gave me his lecture.

'Now I'm not going to give you a citation ...' – well that's nice of you, considering that you still haven't told me why you pulled me over or why you might be giving me a citation – '...an it would seem that Beverly is a very nice friend lending you her car for you to drive about in – hey Bev, see below – ' ... and I'm sure that they have music laws in England too ... ' – Ah, so *that's* what it was about ... playing Hot Chip too loud across the Hoover Dam is illegal ' ... as you were observed driving across making a lot of noise into Arizona'.

And that's what it was. Suddenly I realised what it was. It was a repeat of when J.J and I had entered Alabama all those weeks back. The State Troopers sit on the state line – the start of their jurisdiction, and just stop the cars that they don't like the look of coming into their state. There was I with SC plates, entering AZ, a lone guy in a big Jeep with darkened windows ... carrying God knows what in the back, and he just wanted to be nosey – very nosey. It also occurred to me at that point, that my nervousness with the initial security guy back on the Nevada side might have made them call ahead and say to check me out as I'd been *too* eager to have my car searched back there. And that was fine ... all fine ... really, I honestly mean it.

For at that moment, I wasn't angry towards the cop at all. He had a point ... the Hoover Dam IS a massive critical piece of infrastructure for the area. It provides a quarter of electricity for Nevada. – over 2 Gigawatts of electricity. And he was just doing his job ... he was protecting his borders, and I respected that ... and I felt ok, and relieved, and fine, and lovely, and I was *just about* to smile and say 'Oh, ok, sorry! Yes, well I'll be on my way then', when he said something that **REALLY PISSED ME OFF**.

'... so I'm going to let you off with just a warning. But I want you to know that I could have given you a citation that would have cost several hundred dollars, and I'm sure that a foreign exchange student such as yourselves doesn't have a lot of money and that wouldn't be good for you, do you understand?'

You *what*?

Oh you *cunt*.

Seriously. No apologies for the C word.

You might think that I've embellished this story, especially that last sentence that he said, but to this day I remember it as clear as anything that that's exactly what he said. I know this, because I replayed it over and over in my mind, for the next hour of driving, all the way down into Kingman, and right into the Starbucks where I stopped where the Barista had the unfortunate moment of asking me 'How my day had been', and I spat out and regurgitated the story above and then got out my laptop straight away and starting writing up there and then some of the words that you read right now.

But he deserves it. *Why*? I'll tell you why – for two reason.

One - his smug attitude of lauding it over me. He *could* give me a ticket and he *could* make me have to pay lots of money, but ... oh no ... he's so great and powerful that he's decided that I should be fucking grateful at the fact that he's decided to let me off, and that makes him all powerful and me just a cretin. This is wrong. If I have committed an offence, then pull me over for that, tell me what it is I've done wrong, give me a ticket, and send me on my way. No – instead, he just wanted to be nosey and give me a hard time, because I was playing my music loud and having a good time. Arsehole.

And two – because he made a massive assumption.

He called me a student – a foreign exchange student, and I know that at no point during our conversation did I say that I was a student ... so he just assumed that. And that's actually quite dreadful, because if you're a figure of power and authority – especially in one that gives you the write to issue tickets, arrest people and potentially shoot and kill them, then you should make sure that you get the facts at all times, and don't assume things. Hence the use of the C word. Still no apologies.

The Waffle House Server

I'm in Mississippi. It is 3 o'clock in the afternoon on a Sunday. It is day four of my long, boring six days drive home back east. It is hot, and I am thirsty and hungry – very hungry. So when giant 'WAFFLE HOUSE' sign, stuck 50 feet up in the end on its black rod and huge black-on-yellow letters stick out against the sky at me this makes me smile and I know I'm soon about to be not so hungry. I like Waffle House – it's only the first or second one I've seen since being back in South, and I always knew I was going to stop there.

I negotiate the exit off of the Interstate and follow the signs around, down, under the Interstate and back up on the other side, and ah – there it is! Just across the street from a Rite Aid too, which is handy as I need to go there afterwards too to pick up some stuff.

I pull up outside ... I think I may be the only customer, as there are no other cars in the lot. Hang on ... it's almost *too* quiet. It is open, isn't it ... isn't it? I squint from inside the car window into the sun-glow-darkened darkness of inside the Waffle House, and I'm pretty sure that I can see someone – a server, in there.

I remember that this is actually pretty standard procedure for a Waffle House – they are indeed open 24 hours a day, but they're busiest times are for breakfast, and for around 2am in the morning when people are on their way homes from a night out. When I'd stopped at one in Myrtle Beach two months ago it has been 3pm in the afternoon – and also empty – the exact reverse of what it would be twelve hours sooner or later. And it was a similar time here ... around three in the afternoon, and as I creaked the door open, I looked into the empty place and confirmed that I was indeed the only customer.

The young black girl and server behind the counter looked up and smiled at me. Well, I say *smiled* – it actually looked as if she was a bit miserable, but of course had been told to smile at and greet all the customers, 'Welcome to Waffle House', came out the mantra, and I said 'Hello' back, and gave the biggest smile I could in hope of encouraging a bigger one out of her, and propped myself up on one of the stools at the 'bar' that they all have.

Her name was *Jasmine*. I knew that, because that's what her name badge said pinned to the front of her WH uniform. She got me a water, and then started to take my order until she was interrupted by her manager. I assumed it must be her manager, because he was an older white guy – grumpy looking, hair grey, probably in his fifties, and he started barking something at her. She gave me an apologetic raised eyebrows, and moved away closer to him, hoping perhaps that he would talk to her at regular levels and not shout at her, as he continued to talk sternly too her.

I thought it was all a bit unnecessary. There were no other customers, the place was clean, and yet here he was giving her a hard time. Which explained why she looked miserable. I

started to feel sorry for her, and then I started to wonder if it was patronising of me to start feeling sorry for her, I got confused – and started staring hard at the plastic-wipe-clean menu in front of me that I had seen many other times in other Waffle Houses, but I needed something to pretend to be reading and it was the only thing I had.

She came back a moment later – spoken to – and solemnly took my order. I smiled again at her and tried to engage in conversation. I wanted her to know that just because one guy was giving her a hard time, I wasn't an arsey customer, it was nice to have her sole attention to serve me, and I wasn't about to give her a hard time about anything at all.

She started to cook my order when I realised that I did have something else I could read ... my iPhone. Well, any webpage on my iPhone and I got it out of my pocket and fired up and started some random web browsing. Her dick of a manager was to the side out the of the back somewhere talking loud me, at one point he stuck his head out further to issue some more instructions to Jasmine, and looked at me as if I was a bit of an inconvenience for being there. Well Sorry for being a customer to your establishment, mate.

I ate, I drank, I ate some more. Jasmine came and topped up my water, and I made completely pointless-idle conversation about which way it was that I wanted to head next, even though I knew which way I was going and where I wanted to head. I felt a little lame, like I was failing badly on the small talk conversation front, but at least I felt like I was trying.

There's only much small talk that you can make, and so I surfed the web on my phone, eating as I went and was done in about fifteen minutes. She wrote up my cheque but I nipped into the toilet first. 'Just goin' to the bathroom first!', I said to her, still smiling as I went, and detecting maybe the first hint of detection on her face that she was ok with me because I was pleasant and I haven't given her a hard time.

And it was whilst taking a pee, that I decided what I was going to do next on the way out. I even got out, and opened my wallet ready so that I didn't have to fumble at the till when paying.

I came out of the bathroom, scooped up the carbon-copy yellow and white piece of paper bill and looked at the amount ... \$9.62, and went ahead with my idea.

'Here' I said ... having over a ten dollar and a twenty dollar bill. 'Have thirty ... the rest is a tip!', and yet as I said it, I started to feel embarrassed that basically what I was doing was saying 'Here, I think you're having a shit day and I feel sorry for you – take twenty bucks'. But it *was* a tip – albeit a two-hundred per cent one, and so that made it ok. Right?

Of course, the saying goes that someone's jaw hits the floor – which is just a saying, but if here jawbone hadn't of been in place, then I think her chin would have hit the floor as her mouth gawped open. Then I started to feel *really* bad. Was giving her a \$20 tip amazingly patronising? Agh... you're thinking too much Geoff, get the hell out of there. I got the hell out of there.

She started to say 'Thank you', and stare at me with her eyes but I was already moving, towards the door, a 'No worries! Bye!' shouted back at her, and swung the door, out of the air conditioned space, into the sticky Mississippian sunshine.

I trot down the steps, towards the car, jangling the thirty-two cents change that I'm clutching in one hand, and the car keys in the other. I realise that she may be thinking 'Did he just give me a really big tip?' and be worried that I didn't mean to ... so as I walk through the parking lot to my car, I turn my head to the right to look through the outside window to see her and she makes eye contact, and mouths 'Thank you', and gives me a huge grin – a proper, happy, smiling grin, nothing like the forced ones that had come before.

And I just smile and nod a 'That's ok!', back, and – knowing me – probably a cheesy thumbs up too. And at that moment as I do, a strange emotional feeling stirs inside of me - from somewhere deep down inside my gut, - and with just ten paces to go to get to the car I know *exactly* what's going to happen when I get inside.

I get to the car, open it, sit inside and slam the door shut. I look up again and check that the server can't see me – she can't. And I start crying.

I cry like the little kid that's fallen off his bike for the first time. Like an angst-ridden pubescent teenager that's just been dumped by the first love of their lives. Or maybe just like the person who suddenly started to realise that he's had the best-fucking-time of his life driving round this fascinating country all summer, and who's emotions are all over the place now that it's coming to an end and knows that he's going home – proper home – and that for all of that, he is one hell of a lucky guy to have had such an experience, and is not working a seemingly miserable job in a Waffle House in the middle of Mississippi.

I turn the engine over and the radio comes on the car stereo. It's halfway through what has been an iPod favourite of mine these past few weeks, an anthemic tune of the summer, and I sob-laugh up at the serendipitous music Gods for making that moment happen, and it's set me off on a minor tearful journey again.

As I pull out of the parking lot – and in typical American style – cross 20 seconds over the street and into the parking lot on other side outside of the Rite Aid, and in that moment consider the whole weirdness of the situation. Why did it take an unhappy looking Waffle House server to provoke an emotional reaction from me? Was it wrong of me to be generous with the tip, and would a regular 20% have done? Because I knew I could afford it, should I have given her more, or would that have been uber-patronising? Should I run back in there and say 'Look, screw your nasty boss, you are a decent human being that doesn't deserve to be treated like shit, and better things are coming in your life, just go for it! Okay?' ... no ... no of course I shouldn't, that would be weird. And so I park up, dry the last droplet of moisture from my cheek and make a mental note to get some tissues too whilst in the pharmacy, just in case there are any more emotional moments on the rest of the drive home.

The Motel I didn't stay in

East is east, is ... east. Onwards, eastwards I plough in one direction going from coast to coast as fast as I can without falling asleep at the wheel. Staying in crappy cheap motels as I go, and eating bad road-side fast food.

I've been going like this for five night when as I plunder eastwards along the I-40, I find myself in Arkansas, and the City of Little Rock. My whole ethos had just been 'drive until I

get tired, eat something, and stay in a cheap motel', and so when I saw the lit up sign for the Super-9 motel just off the side of the highway, I pulled off and headed straight for it.

I manoeuvre through same vaguely dubious looking back roads to get there, but it's all familiar territory – Comfort Suite and Holiday Inn signs dominate lighting up the night sky, but I'm heading for the cheap & cheerful Super 8, because it's just forty dollars a night, and I am feeling cheap.

The reception is slightly odd when I get there – there's a tatty note on the glass sliding door saying 'Back in 10 minutes', and I look around for signs of life and see none, and am just considering driving somewhere else when a guy does appear and signals to let me in. The reception is looking a bit run down – even by cheap Motel 6 standards, but at this moment I don't really care. I just want somewhere to sleep for the night, and almost anywhere will do.

He gives me key and tells me that my room is 'around the back', and I drive round noting almost immediately there is a car with darkened windows parked there and a couple of people sitting on the bonnet, and another leaning against it having a conversation. They look at me a little as I get out, and carry two of my bags up to the room. The room is the plainest, cheapest things I have ever seen ... but it will do.

I head straight back out to the car, jump in and go off and get some bad fast food. Look I'm not even going to admit to where I want because it's that embarrassing (but is *wasn't* the golden arches, which I had given up back in Yellowstone/Montana and stuck faithfully to giving it up ever since), and drove back to the Motel. I bring in the rest of my stuff as I go, noting that I'm still being watched by the people just hanging out in the car park.

I go inside. Stick on the TV. 'Speed' with Keanu Reeves is showing, and I munch my Taco Bell along.

I get wondering about the people in the car park thought. I look around my room – yes I have brought all my stuff. PC, video camera, camera ... all the expensive stuff. But things like the tent and sleeping bag I have left in the car. They've watched me bring stuff in ... are they going to break into my car later to see what else is in their? My mind starts doing overtime and I wonder what to do. I peer out through the crack in the curtains down below and see that there is another car that has joined them. More people ... just ... hanging out. Drug deal? Who knows.

I decide to move the car. As briskly as I can, I run down without looking at them, jump in the car and drive ... round to the front of the motel. The front faces the road where there are more cars, it is better lit ... and there are less (i.e. none) mini-gangs of people hanging out. This time I grab a bag full of the camping gear to bring in with me as well. I walk back ... taking a slightly weird and more convoluted route through the concrete outdoor corridors and steps to get up to my level with the room without being seen by the people in the car park. As I do, I turn a corner and a white guy and black guy who were obviously doing 'something' stop – like they were naughty kids caught, and I just say 'Excuse me' and walk past ... around the corner, and to my room.

I shut the door, and now worry that they're going to break in the middle of the night, and steal my stuff anyway. I turn to snap the deadlock into place... the metal hook inside that stops the door being opened from the outside even if you have the key ... and it's only then

that I notice it's hanging down... broken... where somewhere has (recently?) forced the door. Shit.

Shit is *exactly* what I do next as I decide to use the toilet. As I do I send a twitter, and then call Katie to get her opinion. I explain everything that I've just written above.

'I think you should leave', she puts it simply. 'Me too'. 'And the trouble is, if you don't I won't be able to sleep through worrying whether you're ok or not, so I really think you should leave!'

So yes. She guilted me into it ... well ... I was probably going to leave anyway, but I just needed to hear someone else say it. And suddenly a great feeling of escaping the fear that was slowly enveloping over me, made me feel much better and energised and I started to enjoy the prospect of driving for a few more hours into the night.¹

I pick up ALL my stuff in one go – this is incredibly difficult to do, but I do now want to make multiple trips to the car again. Laden down with stuff, I waddle back down along the upper corridor, down some steps to the car, load up as fast as I can and then got the hell out of there.

As I pull away wondering where the hell I'm going to spend the night tonight, I drive 50 yards down the street and notice that there are two local cop cars in the motel that's adjacent to mine – the one I've just left. I figure, at the very least I want to let them know that something highly suspicious is going on ...

... 'Yes, we know sir ... we're investigating, right after we've cleared up our investigation here', was all I could get out of him.

I drove – stopping at the first gas station I could find to accelerate my departure – and if I needed any more convincing, then having to be served through a window in the gas station with bars AND a heavy translucent Plexiglas window, sealed the deal for me.

I put my iPod onto 'UberShuffle' mode. You'll probably find that your own generic-MP3 player hasn't got this particular function but mine has – it's willed on my the fact that you want to hear some upbeat, energetic, keep-you-going driving songs on a dark motorway at night, and that's exactly what I did. For the next two hours, the shuffle mode pumped out tune after tune, and I piled on the miles feeling like I was making more progress than ever – happier than ever, also spurred on by the thought that if I made good progress tonight, then it could mean that I could spend all day tomorrow driving and be back in Charleston by the end of Sunday.

So my last ever night's sleep on the road was in a 'Pilot' truck stop & service station somewhere near the Tennessee and Arkansas Stateline in West Memphis. At about 3am, I stopped driving and couldn't be arsed to move any of the equipment, I just dozed off sitting almost upright in the driver's seat, and got bad sleep for four hours. I dreamed of riots happening in Little Rock, which is not how I wanted to end it. My very last night of the trip ended with me feeling slightly scared, unhappy with the place I had been in and getting

¹ She has no idea I was sitting on the toilet when I had this conversation with her. I multitask well : phone in one hand, wiping with the other.

terrible sleep in my car. If you're from Little Rock and there are some lovely places to go there, then I am sorry – please get in touch and let me know.

And so at 7am, as the sun rose, and the slam of truck doors and shouting drivers woke me, a liberal sprinkling of gas station coffee injected into my gullet shortly after fired me up and put me on the road again, and through the rain and winding roads of the deep south, nine more hours of driving finally got me home.

Well you know, what had become my *American* home. Real home, England home, London home, was still there waiting for me.