

As The Asphalt Crumbles By Sue Ann Jaffarian

On December 31, 2018, I hit the road as a full-time RVer in my 2016 Winnebago Travato 59K named Novella. My heart was light. My hopes high. Excitement coursed through my body as if I'd been tasered. I woke up on the 31st with the beginning of a sty in my right eye. I hadn't had a sty since I don't know when. I took care of it with warm compresses and pushed on. I had a new life awaiting me. Looking back, I should have taken it as a warning.

My first destination was Anza-Borrego State Park where I would spend three nights decompressing from all the stress of the past several months as I readied for retirement, said goodbye to dear friends, and prepared my van for travel. From there I would go to Quartzsite to meet up with other Travato owners to attend the Women's Rubber Tramp Rendezvous.

I wasn't that far from Anza-Borrego when it started to rain. Then the rain turned to snow. Then the snow turned heavy. I hadn't driven in snow in decades. Then it got dark. With the steering wheel in a death grip, I followed the cars ahead of me, going slow, keeping my tires in their tracks as the snow continued to fall and accumulate. Here and there cars had gone off the road. Eventually, nerves shot, I got to my campground. The ranger told me it was a freak snow storm that took everyone by surprise.

Stye. Freak Snow Storm. On my first day.

Over the next week, I lost my propane when it failed to refill. Then the electrical system of the coach failed. I spent my first night in Quartzsite with no heat and it was 28 degrees – in my van! None of the RV repair places in Quartzsite would even look at it for at least a week. Fortunately, my friend who sold me the van suggested I return to Southern California where he would take a look at it, and I eagerly agreed. I was very sad to leave my new friends and change my original plans, but I couldn't go forward with the van having these issues.

The electrical problem was a very easy five minute fix. We tried to get the propane filled again, with no luck, and it was suggested I had a bad fill valve. While going over the van, my friend noticed that my front tires were balding on one side, signaling the van was out of alignment. I spent an entire Saturday trying to get new tires and an alignment with no luck. No one had the tires or equipment to do the alignment. I finally was able to get a Ram dealer to do it, but not until Monday. So I holed up in an RV park close to the dealership. I got the tires, but honestly, I was a bit depressed over the issues I'd been having. I even made a very sad but hopeful YouTube video about my situation the day before my electricity was fixed.

Stye. Snow. No Propane. No Electricity. Bald Tires. What was going on? I'd owned the van for ten months and never had issues like this before.

A few days later, still without any propane, and another failed attempt at getting some, I put on my big girl panties and hit the road. This time for Yuma, Arizona, where I would stay with friends

for a few days. Traveling full-time in this van had been my dream for nearly three years, and I would not be denied my dream. On the way to Yuma, I traveled the Great Overland Stage Route of 1849. A road actually built on the old stagecoach line. It was about 50 miles of road through some of the most beautiful and desolate desert I had ever seen. It was a reminder of one of the reasons I was doing this.

From Yuma, I made my way to Tucson, where I would be meeting long-time friends for brunch. Along the way, I stopped at the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum, just outside of Tucson. The museum and the Saguaro National Park were definitely highlights of my month. In Tucson, I boondocked at a Pilot Truck Stop. I still had no propane, but I had made a great purchase while in Yuma – a \$15.00 sleeping bag from Walmart. I slept snug as a bug using the sleeping bag as a quilt. In the morning, I showered at the truck stop and bought coffee. No problem! I could do this!

Let's backtrack a bit. Remember all that downsizing I did before I hit the road? Well, while I was in Yuma, my friend Linda, a professional closet organizer, and I went through Novella and organized and downsized even more, removing a huge trash bag full of clothing and other items I would not need on the road. Novella may not have had propane, but she was lean and mean now.

After Tucson, I headed to Tombstone, a place that was on my bucket list of places to see. Since I had no propane for heat, I took a site at an RV park right in town so I could have electrical hookups. The RV park was built on the site of the original Tombstone Wells Fargo office, and the ticket office is still there. I had a blast in Tombstone. I had done a lot of reading over the years about the west and had seen several movies about Wyatt Earp and the OK Corral. I know this is kind of nerdy, but I loved sitting on a bench imagining the Earps and Doc Holiday walking the dusty streets. The next morning on my way out of town, I visited Boot Hill, which I also found pretty cool.

Except for the propane issue, everything was running smoothly. I boondocked at a dairy outside of El Paso that was part of the Harvest Hosts program, and in front of the home of a lovely couple in Texas who also own a Travato and were members of the Travato Owners and Wannabees group on Facebook. Between the dairy and them, I met another Travato couple as I was checking into an RV park in Fort Stockton. And before Fort Stockton I met up with more Travato owners at a Pilot station. As long as it didn't get too cold, I was fine with no heat and my sleeping bag. And if it did get cold, I found an RV park. My spirits were lifted with every mile and with every person I met.

Several of my friends and members of my fan club are located in the north Austin area. So I headed to Georgetown, TX, and stayed in an RV park for several days while I visited them. There I experienced a really strong and cold wind for a couple of days and was thankful for the electrical hookup at the park. From there I headed to Livingston, TX, to the Escapees RV Park, where I would stay for a full week.

In Livingston, I registered Novella in Texas and got a Texas Driver's License for myself. Twenty-eight days into my journey, I became a Texan. I also received the new part for my propane valve. Oh, and along the way, I caught a bad head cold.

After leaving Livingston, I traveled to Tomball, Texas. Why? Because another group member highly recommended a RV repair company there. When I called, they said they could squeeze me in and recommended an RV park near them. It was just about an hour away from Livingston, so off I went. I stayed there two nights. When I left, my new propane valve was in place, new cab steps had been installed, and a few other minor annoyances had been repaired. Novella was whole again!

Every RV comes with issues, and every trip has its challenges. Every road has its speed bumps. I was surprised how many hit me at once, but that's how the asphalt crumbles. I had to take a step or two back and look at the bigger picture. I had to remember why I chose RV travel in the first place. I could choose to focus on the negative, or I could make new friends and see new things, and meet each challenge head on with determination.

I keep a daily online journal called The Novel RV Journal, which is raw material for a travel book. Going back over my entries makes me realize that the good far outweighs the inconveniences. I learned that I can adapt and improvise, and wield a screwdriver or hammer when necessary. That I am stronger than I expected. That I am ready to take on all the months to come.