

Road Dogg
a Memoir

June 13th, 2005

Monday 2:34pm

I look over at Her and smile, my tongue lolling out of my mouth. But with the car full of our friends, driving 80 miles per hour, laughing, She doesn't notice. No matter. Her joy is palpable and I can't help but bask in it. We've lived together under many conditions since She first adopted me two years ago, but *this* is when we're happiest.

On the road.

Although less like Kerouac and more like Steinbeck and Charley.

Some might say a traditional U.S. road trip is incomplete without a canine. We didn't know it at the time, but we would often replicate the first ever cross-country trip, which included two men and a dog.

On May 23rd, 1903, Bud would accompany his human companions from our very same San Francisco home. These three, despite the rough journey over underdeveloped roads, made it all the way to New York City, July 26th, 1903. Thankfully our '98 sedan (and I-80) was more reliable than their 1903 Winton touring car. But I digress (dogress?) Ha.

We traveled for weeks only stopping here and there. Rumors of places to stay. We were seamless. We protected each other. We were never alone.

December 18th, 2003

Thursday 10:23pm

Finally it was quiet. I only smelled Her in the room. I crawled out from under the shadows. I saw Her long hair hanging over Her face. She was sitting at the edge of the bed in some hotel in a place where almost zero scents were familiar. I walked over to Her and gently nosed my way through Her auburn curtain. I set my head in Her lap. I looked up through Her hair, into Her eyes. She started crying harder and got on the floor and wrapped Her arms around my neck, sobbing into my mane.

To this day I'm not sure what She was thanking me for, but I do know we are a pack forever. Her and me.

May 22nd, 2007

Tuesday 1:30pm

The pup didn't cry often, but when it did we all listened. We adored him.

I was laying there in a shaft of light streaming through the windows in front of Her many plants. I had my eyes closed listening to them whisper. Plants don't talk like humans or dogs do. It's more subtle. There are smells involved.

I was jolted out of my reverie by a waft of the new human being set down a few feet away from me. The lambskin I smelled first, a whoosh of musk and a lifetime lived outside. Then milk and lavender and His distinct smell.

He had come in the early evening weeks prior. She had been laboring for hours. Maybe days. I smelled Death everywhere. When She would howl, so would I.

I heard our friends tell of it later: Our pitch matched perfectly resulting in goosebumps and shivers.

I was the 7th being to meet Him but the first dog. He was minutes old when I first smelled Him. His scent an impossible mixture of new and ancient, of always and forever, of Her but also somehow more than Her. I tentatively licked His tiny face and even though I could smell Her exhaustion, She laughed. I wagged my tail at the sight of Her teeth, the sparkle in Her tired eyes.

So here He was now, set down near me on His lambskin pelt, arms and legs flailing like a beetle on its back. It roused me, plant-speak forgotten, and I went searching for my bone. With it firmly clenched between my teeth, I laid down next to Him, and started gnawing accordingly.

I sensed the tension before I smelled the fear. I continued on the bone, but I was aware of His wide baby blue eyes, neck craned to get a look at me. I realized the tension was coming from the adult humans in the room. I paused my chewing to assess the situation and it was that moment He reached His small chubby hand and gently removed the bone from between my canines. I looked up and smacked my lips together. He grasped the bone with both hands and put it in His own mouth to chew. I gazed at him, undisturbed. I smelled the onlookers sigh in relief. But not Her. She said “See? He’d never bite our baby! Not even a growl! Ha! I told you! I know my dog.”

I watched as She gently took the bone from the pup's mouth with an apology and gave Him something else to chew on. I happily took the bone back. We chewed together on the floor, that pink puppy and me.

September 6th, 2005

Tuesday 4:00pm - midnight

She got home from school today early. She immediately grabbed my leash. I danced in front of Her in excitement. I knew what this meant. It was music night! First we'd head to Alamo Square. There was an old blue Chow almost the same color as me that would hang out there every day. His human companion was an artist and was old enough to have been friends with Harvey Milk back in the 70s. At least that's what he claimed. We loved spending time at this twisty turny park. No leashes required.

When the sun began to go down we went to our favorite cafe. We had coffee and water, respectively. She snuck me a bite of lox from Her bagel sandwich. I've been to over 100 American cities and not one has been as friendly to dogs as San Francisco.

Tuesdays was Grateful Dead night at Nickie's. Our friend plus a cat lived across the street from the bar. It was the natural meeting place for most anyone from Hippie Hill planning on heading to Nickie's later.

The music would start at 8pm. She loved the Grateful Dead. There would be many mornings when I would lay on the couch watching Her dance around Her apartment getting ready for school, the music tinkling and resonating against the walls. Sometimes She would

leave it playing while She was gone. I would nap, dreaming about sunflowers, enchantment, summer and travel.

Nickie's was packed that night. The scent of terpenes and sweat overwhelming. She was dancing. Hard. I was weaving through bodies, smelling other dogs. I made friends with a blue-eyed merle from the midwest. Aren't we all from the midwest in SF? I got thirsty at one point and headed to the bar. I had my paws up on a stool, eyeing the bartender. A friendly patron lifted my back end and helped me sit on the stool. How kind! I happen to love beer but She only lets me have one on my birthday. The bartender poured me something brown and crisp. I drank it right out of the glass without spilling a drop. This is how She found me.

“Moon?! How did you get up here? How did you get a beer?! Anyone? ANYONE?”

But no one was talking. The friendly patron long gone. The bartender shook his head and smiled. She wanted to know how come Her dog gets a beer bought for him and not for Her. She laughs with the crowd. She pats my head and calls me “good buddy.” I make a licking gesture toward Her face. She tilts the glass to help me finish my beer. We really are so happy.

October 2nd, 2012

Tuesday 11:35am

It had been awhile since I had really seen Her smile. But for the last two days it seemed She could do nothing else. I sat at Her feet in the spacious passenger side of a giant van. There were four of us now. It was Fall and the leaves were vibrant compared to the starkness of the

desert from which we came. (It is a misconception that dogs cannot see color, by the way). Arizona is a bleak, unforgiving wasteland. Although I admit I enjoyed the sun bathing and the monsoons.

May, 2025

Present

We've become almost telepathic, Her and me. She looked into my eyes one day, and although I tried to look away, She saw it. We have been together for almost twenty years. I limp, despite my medication. When She looks at me She cries. I know She sees every year of me. We've traveled over 50,000 miles together. I'm in Her bed when a stranger comes in. Or maybe I've smelled her before. I'm not sure. I forget to bark. I never forget to bark. They are all there. Looking at me. I moan. They start weeping. She buries Her face in my mane, like She always has when things don't make sense and are terrifying and unforgivable. Despite everything I wag my tail for Her. For Them. The last thing I feel is the weight of many hands on my body and my pack saying "I love you, good buddy. I love you Moon Dogg Road Dogg."