



Finding the Open Road: Take a Roadtrip for Life

by Brian Clark

United States, but one thing remained constant: the road. “The open road is really a symbol for life. A big part of life is to go out there and explore all the different roads you can,” says

“What should I do with my life?”

That’s the question Mike Marriner, Brian McAllister and Nathan Gebhard asked themselves four years ago after graduating from college in Southern California. Three months and 17,000 miles later they found an answer and a mission by “road-tripping” in a shaky neon green RV to meet and interview the chairman of Starbucks, a lobsterman from Maine, the first female Supreme Court Justice, the director of Saturday Night Live, and over 75 other successful leaders and career professionals.

Hitting the Road

They booked the interviews with no connections. Rather, they used an old school tactic known as the “cold call” with the aid of 411 directory assistance. The three also filmed each interview on the trip—which they dubbed “Roadtrip Nation”—with one purpose in mind: “To collect their stories and learn how they got to where they are today,” says Mike Marriner. “The people we interviewed didn’t have it figured out in their early 20s, but we wanted to know how they made their decisions. What was their compass at critical points in their lives? How did they define their own roads in life?”

What the three learned changed their perspectives completely. “We were really impacted by Manny the lobsterman in

Maine and Howard Schultz, the founder of Starbucks,” says Marriner. “When you sit down and talk with these men, you learn that they each followed the same relative philosophy. For Manny, it was life on the sea. For Howard, it was coffee. But each knew what he liked and was passionate about it.”

Telling the Story

The fledgling filmmakers soon found an audience as the first Roadtrip Nation documentary aired on PBS affiliates across the country in 2003 and was later published as a best-selling book. This summer a 12-part PBS series will feature three other simultaneous roadtrips of college students as they traveled across the nation during the summer of 2004.

Life on the Road

So what do the founders of Roadtrip Nation think about asphalt pavements? “When you get that perfect, smooth beautiful road, the experience is unbelievable. And our mood in the vehicle is really affected by the quality of the trip,” says Marriner. “Asphalt definitely contributed to the overall experience and I think the road construction industry is doing important work.”

Through their camera lens, Roadtrip Nation documented a variety of people and places represented throughout the

Marriner. “By physically getting on the road, you gain a new understanding of life. And the road is a very valuable tool that most people don’t recognize. Believe me, a good road is the best, especially when you are in a shaky RV!”

Finding your own Road

Roadtrip Nation has released its third book, *Finding the Open Road: A Guide to Self-Construction Rather than Mass Production*, which shares the history of Roadtrip Nation and a how-to-roadtrip guide, in addition to more than fifty interviews from recent trips. “The book features a step-by-step plan for determining your own route, which is important because you should never stop exploring,” says Marriner. “Road trips are not just for college students. We know a policeman in New York who, every summer, plans a weeklong road trip for the entire family.

“Roadtripping helps keep you from focusing only on the day-to-day routine. The point is to keep widening the lens to explore and discover new things about life,” adds Marriner. “Get out of your comfort zone. Meet new people. Then define your own road and be passionate about it.” ▲



For more information, visit the Roadtrip Nation website at www.roadtripnation.com.