

CARELESS OR CAREFREE

Jonathan Hong Phan



My Info!



Thank you to Jorge for an epic road trip along the West Coast
Thank you to Nina and Jodie for rereading and proofreading
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And finally, Thank YOU for reading!



My daily wake up call screams its melody at 7 a.m. I begrudgingly tried to wake up because I stayed up the night before packing for the road trip.

I snooze the alarm to cuddle my wife, Nina, some more. It's Wednesday, October 2, 2024. The sun beams into my right eye that it's almost time to go.

We said we'd leave at 8 a.m. so I was about to text Jorge I'm awake, but he texted me first saying he had other things to take care of so it'll be awhile. I continued to cuddle Nina until about 10 a.m. and got another message that it'll be another hour.

Bet.

I sat on the couch playing Magic The Gathering: Arena for about an hour and he FINALLY swings by around 12 p.m. We shared each other's location so I saw where he was. I don't typically give my friends shit, so I understood.

"Hey dude, sorry I got a lot going on and had some stuff to take care of."

"It's aight, you wanna talk about it?"

"Nah, let's start heading out. You wanna get coffee before we grab breakfast? I gotta grab some stuff from my house too."

"Yeah, that's fine. MoonGoat is just down the road, a little out of the way but not a big deal."

"Damn, alright."

Thinking we were about to get some MoonGoat, Jorge turned left instead of right. I said nothing.

Part way there, I finally spoke up.

"Oh.. well it's not like I'm never coming back to OC, but yeah too late. It's all good."

We ate at Country Family Cafe; an OG spot from our high school days and of course I could never not get my favorite. A country fried chicken steak with scrambled eggs and hash browns. That shit has got a tight grip on my taste buds.

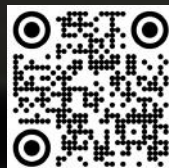
When we got to Jorge's place, his dog Luna greeted me with excessive barking and it never stopped until I was out the door. I've met this dog before but whatever, I chased her around. All bark, no bite.

His room was a mess.

"I still got some stuff to pack away so it'll be a bit. Just hang out at the car for now."

It was blazing hot outside.

Listen to the curated Spotify playlist -
It'll feel like you're in the car with us!



I looked in the trunk of his Veloster and god damn he definitely needed the help.

I helped Jorge reorganize his car. Just like him and his fuck it personality, shit was everywhere and space was nonexistent. After throwing out random junk, cramming shit in whatever crack I could find, there was this one fucking dragon statue.

Now, I had everything perfect to the line in squares. There was room to cram another two or three boxes. This shit was its own shape and no way I could cram it without breaking it realistically. He said leave it behind.

“God damn, I love you dude. Holy shit.”

After he found a million other things to pack into the car, we finally hit the road. At 2:30 p.m.

As we angrily swath through LA traffic, Jorge kept sighing deeply. My parents were pretty abusive so I'm too keenly aware to know he definitely had something on his mind.

I asked what's wrong.

He said he forgot to say goodbye to someone. Someone he deeply loves but he can't express it to me because of machismo culture. I told him he can do it over the phone.

But then I realized a phone call would be pathetic.

It was now or never.

As we approached DTLA, he quickly whipped back over to Whittier adding on another 2 hours. He stopped to buy flowers outside of her apartment, parked in her complex, and stepped out to see her while I sat in the car for about an hour without interrupting.

He felt much better giving a proper goodbye.

We finally hit the road for real this time. At 5:34 p.m. ETA was around midnight.

Fucking hell.

Along the way, I had extreme bouts of drowsiness. Jorge had me wake up at 7 in the morning only to start leaving at around 2:30 in the afternoon.

We put on a playlist we made with the bois until Jorge got sick of it and put on an audiobook. It was NOFX: *The Hepatitis Bathtub and Other Stories*.

The very first chapter was Mike's. It didn't hold anything back.

He was going into intricate detail of his sex life and the horrors of his childhood. It sounded fucking unreal. I thought it was some off-the-shelf dark fantasy book but in actuality, it's a fucking autobiography.



My eyebrows were scrunched, my attention was locked in. I wanted to hear more.

I felt inspired by their writing and narrating style. I might have overcompensated writing this trying to emulate the same feeling, but it's all in my head until the next person reviews this.

Maybe I'll try narrating myself.

The sunset was gorgeous while we sat in terrific LA traffic going past the Grapevine.

We zoomed and boomed until we hit Gorman to gas up, snack up, and eat up. Bought some sunflower seeds so our tongues could figure how the fuck to eat the actual seeds rather than suck on the shells. Starving for dinner — because we had hours to go — we ate at Jack in the box where Jorge found shit smeared all over the restroom stalls.

Falling asleep at the wheel and my ass barely knows how to drive stick, we stopped in Turlock rest area. Pondering on our decisions, we continued driving in pitch black to finally arrive in Elk Grove at 1:34 a.m.



The next day, we woke up around 8 a.m. questioning when our backs and asses will stop being sore.

Shit, showered, and ate our free continental breakfast.

Jorge being indecisive whether to shit now or later. I told him sooner the better because ain't nowhere else will have a clean restroom.

ETA for this leg was about 9 hours. Let's fucking go.

Stopping by the Sacramento Glantz branch, Jorge got to know his coworkers. In that moment, he totally forgot the plan to ship out his work shit so we can actually see out the back window.

He went straight to Dutch Bros for some coffee and we continued our pursuit to Portland.

Jorge spent the first 30 minutes fucking around with Google Assistant. He asked dumbass questions like "what's the meaning of the universe, tell me a funny joke but in Vietnamese (I have no clue what it said to be honest), and what sound does a dog make?"

Then another 30 minutes or maybe an hour, well it felt like an eternity to me, of him playing that stupid ass "Meow Meow" song cover of Billie Eilish "What Was I Made For?"

Amazingly there's a brain rot playlist on Spotify, but the only one that I can remember most, because it was so fucking hilarious, was the one about spreading booty cheeks and taking dicks, rubbing thighs. Yeah.

After destroying whatever energy we had left in our brains, we sat in the car silently for half of the trip. I'm pretty sure the audiobook was playing, but I can't really remember.

Looking straight out at the beautiful scenery NorCal has to offer — lucious green trees and bountiful farmland — living in California is truly a blessing that we never spoil ourselves with.

Jorge wanted to eat as much In-N-Out as he could. Our first stop was in Redding — A desolate town with stuff going on but not much to offer. It gave small town vibes in a corporate chain burger restaurant. I got my new favorite of an animal style cheeseburger and fries well done with a slice of cheese. Jorge got a double-double with the same fries.

After engorging the best California burgers, we resumed viewing the beautiful landscape.

Dunking and diving mountain roads, Mount Shasta was within our scopes. Without the snow caps though. As we hurriedly pulled into the shortest rest stop, we took a gander at the lowest water levels ever seen in the mountains. It must've been like at least 1000 feet of water missing from where it used to sit.

Then we hit a wall.

It was nothing but pure yellow, boring, dead fields. I figured that at one point of NorNorCal that there's literally nothing to look at and distract from the fact you're still in California.

After staring at nothing for the longest time, I asked Jorge if he's cool if we stop by the "Welcome to Oregon" sign.

"Let's do it."



"Okay, it'll come up in the next eight minutes."

It was actually eight seconds.

He immediately veered into the shoulder and at the same time a semi truck on the shoulder was pulling back onto the highway. We narrowly missed becoming the trailer's lunch.

With roadside garbage and piss bottles, the sign was on an awkward steep slope. Jorge was a bit wary, screaming at me for walking in a random direction if he wasn't sure if he could make it up the small, steep hill.

With a little more encouragement, we finally made it up to the sign.

We took our pictures, we took off again.

Spectacular views left and right but as a passenger, I'm limited to what's right of me.

Acres of farmland influxed with mountain ranges, I thought living in the Orange County bowl between the Los Angeles National Forest and Silverado Mountain was something.

We stopped at the Ashland Welcome Center. It was quiet; the freeway's presence subsided.

The sun starting its descent glazed the farmland right behind the rest stop. Cows meandered about while calves played a game of tag.

I was in awe.

I'm a fan of living in the city, but the canvas Oregon paints itself could change my mind.

We needed to gas up before finishing the last leg of the road to Portland.

We pulled up and were immediately ambushed by the Attendant. We forgot Oregon used to be a full service gas station but switched to either self or full. Poor guy had to give us a fat 5 minute spiel of what services and food to offer. At least he gave us helpful directions to get back on the 5.

There's not much to say honestly. Driving on the 5 in complete darkness, I fell asleep in between chapters of the NOFX audiobook.

About a few hours away from Portland, Nina gave us a call. She wanted to know how we're doing and whether we'll make it to the hotel before midnight.

Oh yeah, forgot to mention that nowhere on the website or the fine print that supposedly there wouldn't be anyone attending the valet or the front desk after midnight. Turns out, it wasn't true though.

Nina told us that she called the hotel ahead of time notifying them of our late arrival. We originally wanted to stop at the last In-N-Out in Salem but we changed our minds.

Our current ETA was 10:36 p.m.



I didn't realize I passed out and I woke up to Jorge asking,

"Hey, you see that mountain next to you?"

"What mountain?"

Then it struck me.

As the one lonely highway light illuminated the lightest shadow, I saw the huge fucking thing hiding in the dark. Holy crap were we really driving through a mountain pass in the middle of the night?

Bright white lights and skyscrapers greeted us as we cut through on the freeway.

We got off our exit and were overstimulated to our new environment. In the complete dark which totally helped.

Dazed and confused, Jorge almost drove onto the train tracks instead of the right-of-way. Pulled up to the valet, didn't excuse our mess, and checked in. He made mention that my wife called ahead though we came much earlier.

Originally, I wanted to check out this weird ass restaurant that was a punk venue serving vegan food. The menu looked really convincing, but we would have to walk at least 15 minutes at 11 p.m.

Starving and tired, Jorge opted not to walk so we ended up at Denny's conveniently right next door.

The first time I visited Portland it felt like straight up the video game, Grand Theft Auto. Everybody's a character but they won't bother you. Felt like real life NPCs.

It was honestly dystopic in there — there were gambling machines inside around the back and a random PA system to notify diners there's 24/7 CCTV monitoring "**to keep the general public safe.**" That's definitely some shit I wanna hear around midnight.

We happily munched our late night dinner and returned to our hotel.

As we were about to knock the fuck out, Jorge kept raving over the weighted faux fur blanket the hotel had on our beds. It was \$300 and I was skeptical why he liked it so much. I pulled it over me and was actually amazed how warm it was.

At one point in the night, Jorge jokingly suggested we just head to Seattle because it would take 2 hours rather than 4 hours.



Seattle wasn't too far, but we planned to explore Portland for at least a few hours.

It was raining pretty fucking hard. It felt extremely chaotic checking out.

I asked so many damn questions because the answers weren't easy to find. Thankfully they were accommodating.

They pulled up our car, we threw our stuff in, and began exploring with our hotel branded rental umbrellas that held a \$50 deposit.

The nearest train stop was around the corner from the hotel, but I walked us in a circle following Google Maps.

My shoes got soaked within the first two minutes.

I bought us one day passes and hopped on the train. I put my phone up against the window to film a time-lapse but of course, my dumb ass didn't hold onto it so it fell immediately after the first bump. Jorge sneered and told him to move so I could recover my phone before it got snatched.

Coffee was necessary; at first I planned to introduce Jorge to Stumptown Coffee.

Fuck that.

We went to an independent called Never Coffee. It was the best decision I made. We both got the Oregon because it sounded the most delicious as first-timers. We got it in their handcrafted mugs, but I forgot to ask for iced. It was hot. To my surprise, the temperature of my coffee was perfect. It was warm enough that it wouldn't go cold in the next few minutes if I were to take baby sips. I was able to enjoy it.

That first sip, the flavor was so overpowering I had to take baby sips. I didn't want it to end.

Jorge and I sat in the shop for at least 15 minutes until we had to say our final goodbye to this wonderful drink.

The rain stopped. We had our umbrellas for an hour and they became a nuisance.



Walking a few blocks we finally reached Powell's Bookstore. It's this giant bookstore with new and used covering an entire city block. I prefaced Jorge that it's kind of a giant maze but there's lots to look at. I know that he can get a bit overwhelmed and overstimulated, but I thought of it like exposure therapy since Seattle is so dense it's kind of unavoidable.

Walking left and right, back and forth, up and down we checked out the music section, film section, fiction and nonfiction, and the coolest section: the rare books.

We left happy with a few books in hand.

We looped our way back to Kinokuniya so I could try to find some Smiskis. They had a Gundam in the doorway that's as tall as me and really cool figures upstairs, but to no avail they were out of stock.

Feeling quite hungry and being in an area with Japanese eateries, we stopped in Tanaka before heading to Paxton Gate. I find myself choosing Japanese food often as a form of comfort food because I didn't want to find some other place to try. Plus their katsu sandwiches looked really fucking good (which they were).

Took a streetcar to Nob Hill but we hopped on the wrong one because I'm fucking dumb so we hopped off to walk to the right stop.

Jorge wanted to visit Paxton Gate to find something to decorate his new room.

Last time he was there, he bought me an acrylic spider. I fucking hate spiders. I will kill one on sight. According to Jorge's logic, since it's dead and in acrylic casing, it would be fine to give me one.

No. Absolutely not, dead or alive I don't want to see a goddamn spider.

It was my first time being in a taxidermy shop and you could practically buy almost any part of whatever animal they had on display. From an entire body, the head, in a jar, the eyes, or a random hyoid bone. Just because you can.



My stomach started feeling a bit funny.

If you don't know, my bowels run on a well oiled schedule between 7 to 8 a.m. Because we ate so much crap food, I needed a second shit. But I could wait though Jorge was debating on what he should be concerned about.

Me needing to take a shit or his spontaneity.

Jorge kept pacing back and forth. Quiet, mentally occupied it was hard to pry so he could just spit it out.

He asked if we could detour somewhere across the street. It was to a piercing shop. Is he gonna finally get that septum he always wanted?

We entered the store, spoke to the wonderful staff, but unfortunately the soonest appointment available was the next day. Jorge left disappointed and our day in Portland was running short. He ordered an Uber back to the hotel, returned our umbrellas, took a shit, and headed out.

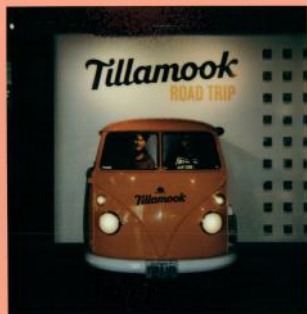
Before taking off, I asked Jorge if he could keep playing the NOFX: *The Hepatitis Bathtub and Other Stories* audiobook.

"Oh, you actually like it?"

"Yeah! At first, I was like what the fuck is going on, but then it really got me hooked and wanted to hear the rest of it."

Tillamook

ROAD TRIP



Our ETA was about 5 hours. Not good, but not terrible.

Jesus fucking christ is Oregon beautiful. Highways lined with trees made it feel like driving through a forest (though the entire state of Oregon outside of almost any major city is basically one giant forest).

An hour on the road, Jorge had the funny idea of going to Tillamook to visit the creamery. I asked if he was being for real. He gave a half shrug suggesting that we really do it. I looked up the route and it was only about an hour and we're on the road already.

I added the stop to his GPS and went our way.

The drive continued being amazing with tall pine trees and random shrouds of fog cut through the mountains. It really gave the stereotypical Pacific Northwest vibes.

We finally reached the Tillamook Creamery and Jorge already missed the turn into the parking lot. He ferociously twisted his Veloster into a U-turn. We had at least 11 minutes before they closed so we hit up the gift shop first.

Jorge and I were like kids in a candy store. Minus the part of actually grabbing everything but more of like the Ooo's and Ahh's of what we really want to buy.

They had your typical shirts and sweaters, themed stickers, pins, postcards, plushies, dog toys, almost anything you can imagine. There was the refrigerated section as well so you can eat their cheese and ice cream on the spot.

Definitely will have to come here another time to spend a good chunk of the day there. We checked out leaving with stickers, pins, and some cheese.

We got back to the car and opened up a smoked black pepper white cheese.

Oh my fucking god. The flavor was astounding. I'm upset that it doesn't exist in SoCal yet.

Next stop was Astoria to gas up before we hit the bridge to visit the "Welcome to Washington" sign. We peeled away from the Tillamook Creamery and we got blindsided.

The sunset was. So. Fucking. Beautiful.

Jorge and I looked at each other and agreed to pull over. NOW.



As soon as we stepped out of the car, we were greeted with what could be a photographer's wet dream.

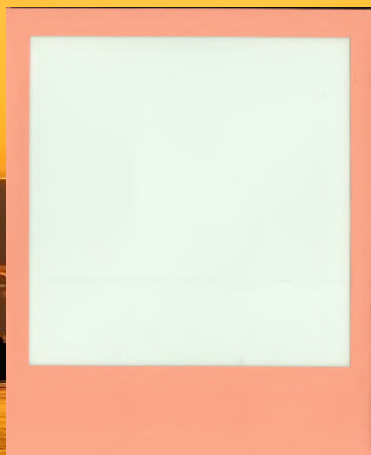
I screamed, "What the fuck do I take a picture of?!"

The shoreline along the highway, the mountains behind the shoreline, the mountains off in the distance, the big ass rock formation even further while the sun sets.

I wanted to fucking cry so bad because my eyes have never laid on something so beautiful (aside from my wife, I know she'll give me shit if I thought the Oregon coast was more beautiful than her).

Snapping a bajillion photos of everything within our sights, I noticed a restaurant among the blinding light.

We moved the car over discovering there was an actual parking lot we could be at. And what else did we discover? A trail along the jetty to get closer.



Behind the restaurant was an inlet in hella low tide. As we walked along the jetty, we saw the next town over. It felt surreal to see a coastal town in its most PNW stereotype.

The sky burned orange giving us its last 5 minutes to appreciate what the Oregon coast had to offer.

Trekking back to the car, I noticed a lot of brown lumps on the ground. I wondered to myself why the fuck would people let their dog shit all over the place. But looking a little closer, they were all the same shape and texture. Couldn't be dog shit.

"Oh yeah, those are slugs."

Slugs? SLUGS?!

They were huge if they looked like dog shit. Luckily I kept looking down to dodge them.

Passing through small coastal highway towns, later the speed limit opened up. We finally reached the 76 in Astoria to gas up.

We bought some snacks, a Twinkie, and a couple of Monster Coffees. I've never had a Twinkie or a Monster Coffee. Jorge was surprised and told me to buy it so I could see what eating a Twinkie was all about.

It was a delicious yellow sponge with white filling. I think that was enough Twinkies for me the rest of the year. I cracked open my Monster Coffee, took a sip, and realized how nasty it was. I got Vanilla and Jorge got Mocha. The Mocha tasted way better because the chocolatey profile helped hide the bad. Unlike the Vanilla.

The drive on the bridge in pitch black was scary as fuck because when you realise how high up you are from the water, you definitely don't want to fall off the bridge.

In pure darkness, one single light was up ahead. We pulled into the supposed stop to see the "Welcome to Washington Sign."

"Well Mr. Jon Phan, there's your fucking sign."

"Where? I don't see it?"

"It's that little sign right over there. If you get out, you can go look."

I left the car, looked around in the dark. The only lamp illuminates part of the lot. Confused, Jorge drove off.

Only a little bit.

He kept screaming it's right in front of my fucking eyes until his headlights illuminated the sign.

Fuck.

We drove a 4 hour detour to see this tiny highway sign.

I thought it would be as big as the "Welcome to Oregon" sign.

Climbing back into our pack rat car, he laughed his ass off.

Out of anger?

Confusion?

Irony?





Jorge wasn't mad, he reassured me that it would take a lot from me to make him mad. He thought it was so fucking hilarious after being so giddy in the Tillamook Creamery, enjoying a beautiful sunset to cap it off to one. Tiny. Highway sign.

Resuming the road to Seattle, it was pure fun and fear.

Dark as fuck, the only lights illuminating the road was ourselves and everyone else passing by. Hardly anyone was on the road. It was kind of creepy.

Wet, windy, and winding a billowing fog covered the hidden bogs that the moon could reveal.

Several hours later, we reached a rest stop before entering Seattle proper.

Driving in head first, blind, we came up on a fork but we couldn't tell which way was for us or truckers. Making a split decision, Jorge dove right. We saw tall stalls and long parking lines.

Whoops.

We drove into the trucker's lot, but it's 11 p.m. so Jorge said fuck it and drove around the lot, back towards the entrance, hoped no one was exiting and made a U-turn into the correct parking lot.

Stretching our legs, taking a piss, and eating our snacks in the freezing cold, we had about an hour to go.

We finally had our sights on Seattle.

The city is so spectacular at night. Quiet, towering buildings as we rush through the freeway.

Hungry, seeking dinner, we pulled up to Dick's Drive-In.

Apparently we rolled up to a car meet as well. It was whack. Shit music, weird people, we had to shove Dick's down our throat in case the police rolled up.

The burger was delicious, I wished I had ordered another, and the fries weren't too bad but a lot better than In-N-Out.

Don't kill me for that.

Small bulbs of light flicker through the downtown freeway. We took the expressway, the long way to our destination. We saw most of the east side of the freeway driving around the lake or whatever.

We were nearing the end of the NOFX audiobook. It was the part where Mike was describing the last few days with his mother and made a deal with her that he would be the one to euthanize her. Tired and quiet, we tuned in.

In a quiet, suburban neighborhood a lonely light above the garage greeted us. Jorge and I finally made it. When we stepped out of the car, we looked at each other and said "yeah let's unpack tomorrow morning"

Jorge's new roommate, Michael, was sleeping on the couch. He promptly woke up, surprisingly friendly at around 1 a.m. Showed us Jorge's room which was barebones with a dresser, a bed frame, and some shelves in the closet. At least he won't have to buy too much furniture, but the sliding door for his closet was off track.



After Michael showed us around, he gave Jorge his keys and went back to sleep.

I needed to use the bathroom.

If you don't know me, I judge a person's house by how clean their bathroom is. It's easy to clean around the house, but the bathroom tells you a whole lot.

I stepped in, looked around.

Yeah, I don't want to stay a night here.

I quickly took my piss and bounced. I head back to the couch I would be sleeping on and it was cold as fuck. I bundled up as much as I could with the itchy, scratchy blanket that smelled communal and tried my best to fall asleep whilst the streetlamp was in the corner of my eye and Jorge's snoring sounded like a beast in a dungeon.

I woke up probably around 7 a.m. No alarm was necessary because the sunlight shone right into my face. Jorge was still knocked out and I entertained my sleepless self by scrolling through TikTok.

I looked around the house and it looked alright. Just hella dog hair all over, dog food bowl knocked over, but no dog in sight or sound. I felt uncomfortable with the idea of staying here another night.

I started looking for hotels near the area so we could just meet up at the nearest train stop. My stomach growled. I was hungry, but also I needed to take a shit. I was willing to hold it for as long as I could, but I really had to go.

Jorge finally woke up from his deep slumber. When we both felt relatively awake, we made our way to Jorge's car to start the unloading process.

My stomach growled harder once again. I really had to take a shit.

While Jorge was figuring out how and where to start, I ran up the stairs and headed toward the restroom. I anxiously sat down in the cold, dirty bathroom.



Feeling pressure, I finally let myself go.

Instead of shit it was the biggest gurgling fart ringing inside the toilet bowl as if I had some Taco Bell the night before. It was so loud in this quiet ass house, I'm pretty sure I heard Jorge's roommate wake up to my gut blasting fart and started giggling.

I started giggling too.

With my unsuccessful shit, I got up, washed my hands, and went back outside. I told Jorge what happened and that I was gonna put the blame on him.

He snickered and said "Fuck You."

Michael also came out a bit later and helped us. Because there were two sets of stairs, we had to make a train getting the boxes from Jorge's car to his room.

"I'm gonna need a bed so hopefully we have time to go look for one."

I looked across the street at the high school. They had a bunch of yellow and green signs.

It read, "Mattress fundraiser from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m." It was 9:58 a.m.

I pointed that out to Jorge and today might be his lucky day. He looked at me with a big ass smile.



We successfully emptied the car and got everything into Jorge's room.

We walked over to the high school, and inquired for a mattress. They said Jorge could put in an order now and wait two to four weeks. Oof, he was looking for something today.

The ladies helping us said they might have something, but only so few on hand. Jorge was looking for a firm mattress and it was definitely out of stock. We thanked them for their help and left.

Starving and with plenty to do, we drove to get breakfast at this cool little drive through stand called Kelly Cannoli. We ordered some bagels and juice before heading to Target.

I had to confess to Jorge.

"Hey man, I hope you won't feel offended, but I took one look at the bathroom and... yeah I don't wanna stay another night here. I'm booking a hotel."

"Dude, why would I feel offended? Of course I would rather you be comfortable. Book that hotel... but can you make sure there's another bed for me?"

I scoffed, "You too?"

"Fuck yeah, it just needs some TLC, but I still wanna spend some time with you before you go."

I told him about my plan, but he suggested something downtown to save time from using the train to explore.

Neither of us have showered yet and I felt filthy. Jorge kept reminding me that I won't be seeing any of these people so who gives a fuck. But I couldn't wait to take a shit and shower at the hotel.

As we drove back to the house with our breakfast, Jorge and I resumed listening to the final parts of the book. It was a bit of a hard listen because Mike spared no detail and we were still waking up. Mike was retelling how watching his mother slowly die while still trying to fight to stay alive. He wrote a song about it. We sat in the car for a bit to let it sink in that we finally completed NOFX: *The Hepatitis Bathtub and Other Stories*. We resumed unpacking.

We made our first stop running errands at a Target nearby. Once we finally found parking in this circus of a structure, we finished our breakfast and started shopping for basic needs. He needed some pillows, comforters, a blanket, some other random shit. He was taking his time thinking about what to get next.

My phone rang that I was at fifteen percent battery life. Fuck. I forgot to charge my phone overnight and used it so much to brain rot in the morning. I told Jorge I'm gonna head to the electronic section to buy a portable charger. He was asked if I was for real and yeah I was because my phone was about to die but it wasn't much either. I picked out a small 5000 milliamp charger for \$30. It was missing the USB C cable but luckily I carried one with me.

We headed over to check out and I saw Jorge grab a water bottle so I did the same but in the case next to him. I noticed my bottle cap had some color to it but Jorge's didn't. I started reading the bottle and saw I grabbed strawberry blackberry flavored water.

Ugggggh.

I was so thirsty and sleepy I didn't look. I opened the bottle and took the first sip.

DISGUSTING.

It was the worst thing I've ever tasted. Jorge laughed his ass off and doubted how bad it could be. He took a sip, sat in silence, and agreed to throw the bottle out. I'm fucking parched.

We got back to his new house and unloaded our Target score. Jorge started to unpack and settle his room. I went into the living room to hang on the couch and Michael was watching Demon Slayer.

I never watched Demon Slayer nor had any urge to do so, but since it was on and I needed to continue charging my phone, I tuned in.

It was a pretty entertaining anime with an interesting art style. The story had a good amount of lore, but considering I jumped in the middle of Season 7, I definitely have a lot to catch up on.

I continued watching and borderline falling asleep while Jorge continued making his room and ended up showering.

Finally ready to go, I packed my things and brought them out to the car.

It was about 2:30 p.m. and we felt hungry for lunch. Jorge recommended Rainier BBQ Restaurant and thinking it was an American diner style BBQ it was actually a Vietnamese Restaurant.



Mount Rainier was within our view and ate half the sky. It was such a beautiful view, but the skies weren't clear enough.

Walking downstairs into the basement of the restaurant, it felt like back home. We looked around and found a table that's big enough for two. Perusing the menu, they had a pretty good amount of Viet dishes that made it pretty authentic.

We ordered some Cơm tấm, Bò Lúc Lắc, Fish Sauce Wings, and Fried Squid. It was good but not Little Saigon good, though I would definitely come back. Jorge pointed out that Anthony Bourdain visited Rainier BBQ and gave it praise. That's pretty cool.



Check-in to the hotel was at 4 p.m., but the day was still young.

Jorge felt that it was finally time to get that septum piercing. We made our way to the University District and zigzagged to find parking. I told him just pull into the lot and I'll pay for it.

Jesus fucking Christ was this lot crazy. Cramped, filled with trash and loiterers, I'm surprised people felt comfortable parking their cars.

Navigating ourselves through a sea of college students from UWash, we landed ourselves at Deep Roots. Jorge and I entered, made the appointment and had to wait about an hour.

We meandered to find something to do.

Got TP Tea boba that was around the corner and it was exceptionally better than the Irvine location.

We went across the street to look at this second hand CD, vinyl records, and movie store, but we couldn't bring our drinks in. We sat across the street from the store and took our time finishing our drinks.

A homeless lady approached us and I didn't hear her correctly and she felt comfortable approaching us.

She explained herself she was in the process of moving to a new place and wasn't really homeless, but from the looks of her crazy hair and foldable shopping cart that was a lie.

She was bumming for a cigarette and wasn't looking for money — her explanation of why we seemed approachable for a cigarette was that we looked like a bunch of smokers. While that was true between the ages of 17 to 27 (yep, we unfortunately smoked for that long but thankfully we quit), we told her we quit a long time ago. She raised her eyebrow in surprise and wished she could do the same.

She kept talking to us for a good five minutes and I really wanted her to fuck off, but she was going through it and just needed somebody to hear her out. Unfortunately she was sexually assaulted right down the street by some guy unprovoked the other night. It really does suck to be homeless and a woman because my wife works at a women's health outpatient clinic and has had a few patients like her.

All I could offer her was sympathy.

She said goodbye, we finished our drinks, and off we went to explore the record shop across the street.

Books, CDs, cassette tapes, and vinyls filled every possible nook and cranny. It was like walking into a time capsule because it featured every era. After browsing for a good half hour, we got kind of bored and walked back to the shop. We waited outside and I guess the ladies there noticed us waiting and it was finally time.



We stepped into the room, Jorge breathing deeply and sweating quite a bit (not sure from walking, being nervous, or both).

He laid down on the table and was ready.

The technician walked and talked him through the procedure. As she punctured his septum, Jorge groaned in pain and tried to calm his legs from shaking. Afterwards, they placed the piercing in and he was pretty much all done. He seemed a bit woozy from the pain, but was definitely a lot more awake than he was earlier.

Off we went after a successful septum piercing; it took Jorge some time to get used to.

We had one final stop before checking into the hotel.

We made our stop over at Uwajimaya because I love seeing all the different snacks they have, but mainly I wanted to see if Kinokuniya had any Smiski figures available. I was able to score a figure there.

We finally arrived in Downtown Seattle and checked in at the Motif.

When we entered the underground parking garage, there were a few spots near the elevators. There was this seemingly teeny-tiny spot that straight up had a pillar in the middle of it. Jorge thought it would be funny to try to park there, but I thought it was impossible based on the design.

He took that to heart as a challenge.

Motherfucker actually did it. I know the Veloster is a small car, but damn it fits in there like a glove.

He saw a car leave and moved to somewhere that's actually spacious.

Jorge later cut his forehead hitting the vents with a sign "CAUTION: LOW OVERHANG."

The hotel room was quite snazzy not gonna lie. The beds were big and comfy, the room had plenty of space, and the bathroom was spacious.

We chilled in our room for a bit and got ready to explore downtown. I helped Jorge load up his digital ORCA card and we walked to the nearest bus stop. It was already dark, forgetting that the sun sets a lot earlier now.



The streets are a lot more illuminated the last time I visited Seattle and I can see why.

One thing for sure though was it was cold and windy. Our first stop was the Olympic Sculpture Park. We took the express bus and walked for about 5 minutes.

I asked Jorge if I was walking a bit fast. It's nighttime so I would rather walk fast and not run into trouble.

He said fuck yeah I'm walking too damn fast.

We approached the straightaway to the park, but I forgot that it was downhill. Jorge gave a huff and took our time making our way down.

Little did I know or remember, the park actually had set hours. What the fuck. It was open from sun up to sun down and we couldn't go and explore the park so we took a stroll.

My bad, Jorge.

We continued walking on the outskirts of downtown, but we had to walk back uphill to get to the bus stop. Jorge didn't like hearing that but we didn't have much of a choice.

"Did you know, because of you, this is the most I've ever walked?"



Yeaaaaah, I kind of figured based on the amount of sweat coming down from your face.

He suggested riding a Lime scooter, but I didn't like the idea of how high the probability of falling off (remember this part) and that it was dark.

We continued walking.

Burning off enough calories, it was dinnertime.

When we got off our stop, we unfortunately had to walk. Down. Hill. My guy was working up a sweat but at least it was freezing cold.

Finally, we arrived at Von's 1000 Spirits. We waited about 10 minutes before we could get seated. That's when I had the great idea to journal, write, document, whatever about our road trip. NOFX's book really inspired me to be creative because it's not everyday you and your friends do a roadtrip.

At this point in time writing this on October 16, 2024, my brain is pretty fucking tired.

Jorge and I agreed to basically share all the food because it's a fucking lot. We both got beers, pork confit fries as our starters, tellicherry chicken and smoked gouda pasta and their craft bacon, Washington apple, and rogue blue pizza. Oh, and the best part is that everything is made with sourdough. Our favorite kind of bread.

Buzzed, full, and cold it was time to head back to the hotel. Jorge wanted to order an Uber, but I wanted to walk because it was just 5 minutes away and I wanted to walk off the food and beer.

I forgot once again that we had to walk uphill. The wind felt really good considering I'm allergic to alcohol so the beer made my body warm. Unfortunately for Jorge, he was freezing cold.

Guess beer does the opposite for him.

As we were at the straightaway, he started lighting matches. I looked over at him, "What in the fuck are you doing?!" I laughed.

"What? Your bitchass is all warm, but I'm really fucking freezing over here."

I pondered on the legality of lighting up some matches on the public street, but whatever we made it back.

Jorge immediately crashed onto his bed and the first thing I really been wanting to do all day was to take a fucking shower. God damn I felt dirty.

After washing off whatever stink I carried with me all day long, I found Jorge mumbling face down in his bed. I thought nothing of it, ignored him, and focused on numbering and labeling my Polaroids before I forgot what happened each day. I assumed he was asleep and looked for his phone to charge it for him.

For the next five minutes, I questioned if he was talking in his sleep. It was like a full on conversation and I almost wanted to mock him. I decided not to.

After tuning in a bit more, Jorge was actually on the fucking phone.

"You're gonna put that in your stupid fucking book, huh?"

"Well, yeah but I'm gonna omit your conversation and just literally write what we're saying."

"Okay."

Told you. I actually have forgotten what y'all talked about anyways.

We talked for a little bit, and Jorge knocked the fuck out immediately.

I stayed up a little until 1:30 a.m. I had a lot on my mind before finally falling asleep.

I woke up to complete darkness.

I scrolled on my phone for about 30 minutes before I decided to open up the curtains. It was so fucking bright outside.

Jorge finally woke up and felt bad waking up late, but I told him it seemed like he definitely needed the extra sleep.

We got ready for our final day and packed up before checking out of the room.

Stored our bags in the car and off we went to the Olympic Sculpture Park. But first, Anchorhead coffee.

The Motif was perfectly placed centrally to everything within walking distance so it was a nice walk to grab our coffee. I got my usual Honey Bunches of Cold Brew and Jorge tried the Pistachio Matcha. Unfortunately for him, the cold brew tastes way better than the matcha.

We hung outside for a bit as he was talking to Connie, another housemate, to update her about what he's up to.

Walking, bussing, and more walking Jorge and I made it back to the park. It was perfectly sunny, keeping just warm enough while the sea breeze blew by.

The fall foliage made the walkway a lot more magical. Brisk air, boats floating, planes flying, it was a good mix of nature and human life on the seaside.

We stopped at a walkway overlooking the street right under us. I stared out on the street while Jorge was focused on taking a picture of a Kei truck between the bars.

As he was reviewing his photos, I noticed a girl riding on a Lime scooter pretty fast on the sidewalk.

She made a late sharp right turn and WHACK. She flew face first into the light pole. I turned away real fast to quietly laugh at her demise.

Jorge looked up confused about what I was laughing about. I told him what I just saw and he peered over really quick to see if she was still there. She got up and looked around to see if anyone witnessed her fall. She promptly got up back on the Lime scooter and scooted away.

It literally felt like watching a cartoon in real life.

I saw a pathway down to the train tracks. I waited probably about 10 minutes for nothing. I heard a set of train horns, but the incoming train was freight so I deemed it unworthy for a picture.



Nice and quiet. We continued taking pictures. Then this dog sat down in front of us to stare out into the ocean. The owner laughed that the dog made its own decision to take a break right in front of us. It really wanted to appreciate the view just like we were.

Blindly following the paved road, we found this random dirt path that's off the main road. We followed it down and realized how much of the noise it blocked out. It was super cool to find a random nature path in a concrete park. Though as I continued forward it would lead us back onto the street. I told Jorge to trek back to continue the sculpture park.

We finally saw the last sculpture as we exited down the stairs from the park.

It was about lunch time and I was looking up directions on the fastest way to Beecher's at Pike Place. I joked about walking for 20 minutes. Jorge gave me the side eye.

I saw some Lime bikes and scooters gathered in one spot in front of us. I actually suggested using one of them this time around.

"You actually want to?!"

"It's our last day together, fuck it. Plus the sun is out so it's a little safer."

We got our phones out to open the Uber app, took a silly safety quiz, and activated our bikes.

Jorge got the clean bike but the basket had a hole in it. I rode the dirty bike, but the basket had no issues.

Riding the bike was definitely weird as the ride was rough, but it helped getting uphill with the electric assisted motor. As we made our way up on the first hill, Jorge's camera fell right out of the hole in his basket.

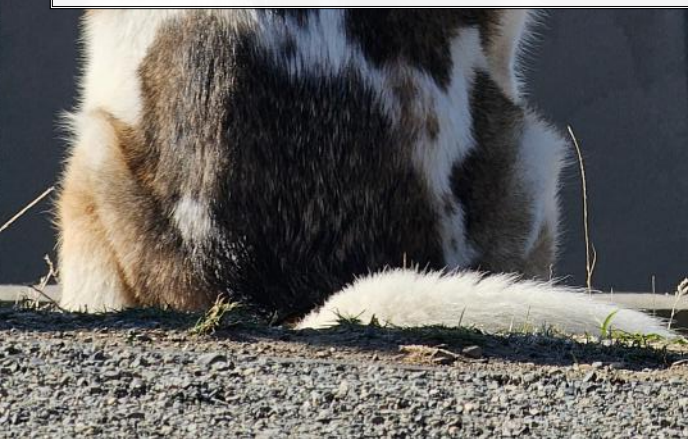
Stopping halfway uphill, we checked the camera and it thankfully only had a scratch on the filter. Jorge got extremely lucky. He placed his camera in my basket and we continued to Pike Place.

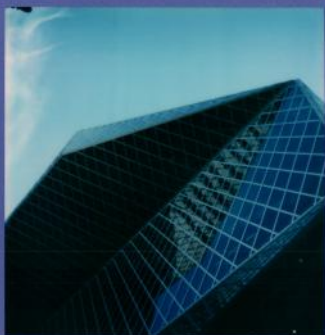
It was actually really fun even though knowing how easy it would be to fall and crack your skull. We spammed our bells almost every few seconds — to be extremely annoying, but also warning people of our presence.

We reached a roadway that goes downhill. I had a feeling we missed our turn. I abruptly stopped which made Jorge almost shit his pants because I gave no warning.

While pulling over and turning the bike around in the correct direction, this girl screamed at me for walking my bike on the sidewalk while riding her Lime scooter on said sidewalk.

I told her "Fuck you, I'm lost!"





Conquering up another hill, we finally made it to Pike Place. We parked our bikes off to the side like model citizens and walked the rest of the way. Of course the place was packed to the brim.

Quickly passing shoulder to shoulder, within our sights was Beecher's. The best damn place for mac n cheese and cheesy sandwiches. The line was thankfully not as long, but definitely got way longer after we placed our order.

We walked uphill to find a bench in the middle of the sidewalk and sat there to eat our sandwiches.

As we walked, we happened to be in between a few places we wanted to check out.

On the very first corner, we went into Robot vs Sloth. One of my favorite stores Nina and I found just from walking around Pike Place. They have cute stickers and pins featuring their Robot and Sloth but also other characters with plushies.

Jorge and I then ventured into this fancy, high end clothing store that had pretty much all the gear you need to survive the Pacific Northwest. Jorge forgot to pack a beanie of all things to combat the wind, but it was a bit out of his price range so we left to get some coffee again across the street.

It was nearing the late afternoon and one of our second to last stops was the Seattle Central Public Library.

It was ginormous in person. Standing under any of the corners you definitely feel small. Upon walking in, we took a restroom break and went up the escalator.

Greeted inside a cathedral-like structure, the lines draw the light in a unique way.

We walked the floor a bit and debated whether to go floor to floor using escalators to get to the top floor. Looking at the time, we decided to take the elevator.

Being at the very top in the designated viewing point was scary as fuck. It's such a huge drop down and looking up at the center tip you realize there's still so much ceiling.

Though being naturally tall, I ironically have a fear of heights. I peeked over and walked away. Jorge snickered, teasing me that "it wasn't that high up." He peered over and backed away immediately.

Yeah fucker, we were like ten-twelve stories up.

Jorge and I meandered the top floor a bit more before walking back to the hotel. We hopped into his car to head out to our final stop: The Museum of Flight.

As we proceeded to the hotel exit gate, we followed the directions we were told which was to hold our room key cards to the reader to raise the gate.

"It keeps giving me an error."

"That's weird, he said it would work until 4 p.m." It was 3:45 p.m.

After a few more tries, I turned forward and noticed the gate arm was missing. I pointed that out to Jorge, laughed, dropped the key cards into the deposit box and we exited the parking garage.

The drive was a bit of a blur. I think we were arguing about whether or not I was supposed to go to IKEA with Jorge, but he kept reaffirming that the point was to spend time doing fun stuff.

We finally arrived and man, it was so cool.

Saw a Blue Angels plane parked in the front and a giant passenger plane from Air Canada in the parking lot. Right along the parking lot was an actual airport, but there weren't any planes landing or taking off at the time.

Jorge and I entered the museum with glee and checked out all the cool planes and exhibits on the main terrace.

My favorite was seeing how the fuck they can cram an entire SR-71 Blackbird along with a bajillion other planes of all sizes. Obviously it's dwarfed in comparison.

They featured a Vietnam War section mentioning all the bombing runs the United States committed all over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Seeing how they just carelessly dropped bombs on top of innocent people still have repercussions to this day.

It was about 4:30 p.m. and as we were about to check out the rest of the museum, we decided to go into the gift shop before it closes.

Model airplanes of every airliner and every type of air force jet were on display; I had to choose carefully since I barely had enough room already. I walked out with an A-10 Warthog (Thanks Jorge).

We bum rushed to the Boeing plane park as we had about 30 minutes left until the rest of the place closed. Crossing the bridge, taking an elevator down, and finally going through three sets of doors we made it.



Although all of the walk-up exhibits were closed it was still a sight to see all of the planes parked under one hangar. Every size imaginable to ones you wouldn't have believed they were able to fit under.

It was practically closing time. We took one last piss and walked back to the parking lot. We divided up our shopping haul and I had to reorganize my bag to fit everything without getting TSA on my ass for its size.

One final car ride with my best friend. It was obviously to SeaTac where it's time to depart. We were both silent on the car ride there. Very much similar to my car ride to SFO with John when it was his time to drop me off.

We pulled up to the Alaska terminal (why yes I am an Alaska Airlines credit card holder) and awkwardly got out of the car. It was time to say goodbye. I could tell Jorge wanted to cry at that moment and so did I. Mirroring my goodbye with John.

I pulled out my Polaroid, with one shot left saved for a picture of us together. We hugged, posed for our photo, and hugged again saying our goodbyes. I could see his eyes starting to tear up uncontrollably and I looked away so I wouldn't cry either.

I breezed through most of the TSA line using the SEA Spot Saver, sponsored by SeaTac airport. I walked right up to the agent, handed my ID, and boarding pass and got right into security. Plenty of dirty looks, but that's the benefit of chronically being on my phone.

Hungry, I headed to Beecher's in the airport and ordered a mac n cheese. I happily read one of my newly acquired books written by Kurt Vonnegut, *Jail Bird*.

I returned to my gate and resumed reading.

An Asian kid came up to me, looking wary and uncomfortable weighing his head down. I peeked over and ignored him to continue reading my book. He slid his phone over to me with a page full of text.

Basically from what I skimmed, due to his poor planning traveling around the US, he needed some money to buy his ticket from wherever his next destination was to reach Dallas. He wasn't looking for cash and accepted digital payments.

Unfortunately with my wariness to help strangers financially, I declined to help. I kind of felt bad, but at the same time, the kid probably should have planned better than to be spontaneous and having to end up asking thousands of strangers for money to make it to his flight.

His head sank even lower.

I get it. Rejection after rejection it's going to happen, but poor planning is poor planning.

He exhaled loudly and went over to the person next to me to hesitate asking for money again.

That man gave him a lecture at first, also telling him that he's struggling a bit too, but will give him what he can afford to help the kid. Seemingly grateful, the kid left elsewhere and by then I stopped paying attention to resume my book.

I got on my flight, few hours later Nina picked me up, and I made it back home.

I sent Jorge a text:

Sunday, Oct 6 • 10:36 PM

Just landed! I'll miss ya :(

Love you bro

To this day his bitchass has yet to reply lmao.

