

Part Two

More Travels with Fred, the World's Worst Tourist



Away Down South in Dixie with Fred & Rachel

Fred and Rachel were motoring through the American Deep South. The purpose of this road trip was three-fold: sightseeing, antiquing (for Rachel) and (for Fred) eating at every Hooters they could find.

They were driving in Rachel's parents' car, a late-model grey Nissan Murano. Her parents had migrated south to their Caribbean timeshare for the winter, so the SUV was just sitting idle in their Toronto garage until Fred "liberated" the keys. Fred had wanted to take Rachel's Smart Car, a proven gas miser, but since that trip to Philadelphia, she refused to ever let him slip behind the wheel of her car again.*

They were currently driving through some back roads in the state of Alabama, looking for an antique market that Rachel had read about.

The morning had not gone well. Thick fog blanketed everything, but, despite Rachel's haranguing, Fred refused to drive slower than the speed limit; a limit he thought was way too slow to begin with. They had no luck finding that antique market; signage was sparse and whatever signs that did exist had been obscured by fog. Fred was irritated at being lost (while refusing to stop and ask for directions), and Rachel was irritated at Fred being irritated.

They came around a tight corner and hit a cow.

The animal suddenly loomed out of the fog right in front of them. It never saw them coming either; its rear was to the oncoming car. Fred and Rachel both screamed like little girls as Fred swerved desperately to avoid the beast. He was not entirely successful. The right side of the car connected with the left side of the cow. With a bovine yowl of surprise, the animal went flying into a ditch.

Fred screeched to a stop.

"Ohmigod! You hit a *cow*, you idiot!" yelled Rachel. "You've killed the poor thing!"

"Killed it? Are you sure?" yelped Fred.

“Well, it’s not moving! The fog’s thick, but I see a big black lump in the ditch and it’s not moving!”

Fred cursed and said: “Well, it’s not *my* fault! What the hell was the stupid thing doing in the middle of the road anyway? Farmers are supposed to keep their stupid animals in a field! Dammit!” He started driving again.

“What are you *doing?*” Rachel demanded. “We have to stop and call the police. Someone owns that cow. We have to report this accident.”

“No way! They’ll see we’re Northerners, and either throw the book at us or nail us with a hefty bill for that cow, which of course will turn out to be a prize-winning pedigreed heifer or something. It’s best if we just keep going and pretend nothing happened.”

“Fred, didn’t you learn your lesson in Jamaica when you didn’t stop after splashing those hikers in our rented Jeep?* We *must* stop!”

“No. Way. We keep going,” proclaimed the World’s Worst Tourist. “Besides, no one saw anything in that fog, so don’t worry.”

She berated, begged and badgered him for another fifteen miles before finally giving up and lapsing into a moody silence.

By lunchtime, the sun had burned the fog away. The afternoon was bright and sunny. They had not stopped since hitting the cow; Fred wanted to get as far away from the accident site as possible before stopping for the Three Staples of Road Trips: gas, food, bathrooms.

Rachel was dozing in the passenger seat and Fred had relaxed somewhat, listening to his favourite rock tunes on his I-Pod hooked up to the car’s speakers. Abruptly, a wail sounded behind them. Startled, Fred looked in his rear-view mirror. He saw an Alabama State Police car come up behind him, all lights flashing.

He hurriedly pulled over. Rachel woke up as they stopped and Fred told her the good news.

“I don’t understand why he stopped us,” he whined. “I was doing the speed limit, I wasn’t weaving, we’re wearing seatbelts, and all my lights were working last time I checked!”

He looked at his wife and blanched. “You ... you don’t think it’s about that damn cow, do you? But how did they find out it was us?”

“It was *you*,” she corrected him. “You should have *listened* to me and stayed there and called it in!”

The state trooper exited his car and walked towards them. He was in full regalia: hat, gun, grim face, and the requisite opaque sunglasses.

“Oh God, oh God, oh God,” moaned Fred. “I don’t wanna go to a Southern jail. I know what goes on in there! I’ve seen it in movies!”

“I’ll visit you. Maybe. *Schmuck*.”

A sudden inspiration struck Fred. He fiddled with his I-Pod.

“Maybe this’ll help,” he muttered.

The cop reached them. Gulping nervously, Fred powered down the window as the opening chords of *Sweet Home Alabama* filled the car. Smiling like a kid caught with his dad’s *Playboys*, he greeted the trooper with the time-honoured line:

“What’s ... what’s the problem, officer?”

The impassive cop bent down and looked into the car, not saying a word. Fred saw his scared face reflected in those cold, menacing sunglasses. He made a tiny mewling sound deep in his throat and slunk lower in his seat. Rachel started wondering about the logistics of raising bail money, and how was she ever going to explain to her parents why their car had been impounded as evidence by the Alabama State Police when it was supposed to be snug in their garage.

“What’s ... what’s the problem, officer?” Fred repeated, voice squeaking.

The trooper suddenly broke into a wide smile.

“Why nothing, folks. Ah saw your Ontario plate an’ pulled you over ‘cause ah wanted to meet a Canadian. Ah never met one before!”

Fred and Rachel gaped at the cop, speechless.

“Aw, c’mon, folks: say something in Canadian! Say ‘about’ or ‘eh’ or some such!”

“Well, um, it’s nice to meet you, eh?” said Fred. “My wife and I are ... are just out and about looking at some antiques.”

The cop guffawed. “Priceless! Yep, y’all are Canucks all right! So polite, too! Look, can ah help y’all with any directions? Y’all are nowhere near the Interstate, y’know.”

“Why yes,” replied Rachel, their onboard navigator. “How can we get back onto the Interstate? We’re kinda lost.”

The trooper obligingly gave them directions, which Rachel asked him to repeat twice to ensure she understood them correctly. (The real reason was to prolong his being there, while her jerk of a husband slowly melted into a nervous puddle.)

“Well, thank you *so* much, officer,” said Rachel gaily when he was done. “We’ll just moo-ve along now, eh?”

They drove off with the cop waving them goodbye.

“Didja get that, hon? Moo-ve along?” she smirked.

“Shaddup.”

Sometime later, they pulled into the first Interstate rest stop they found, to access the Three Staples (all of which they desperately needed). It was only then that they discovered the damage to the right side of the SUV. The right front fender and passenger door were bent inwards. Bits of short dark hair were lodged in the crevices.

“Good luck claiming that on the insurance without an official police report,” said Rachel, whacking Fred on the shoulder.

At their motel room that evening, he slept on the couch.

Although the state trooper part of this moo-ving tale was based on a true event, your author assures readers that no cow was ever harmed. Not even ... grazed.

(*Editor’s Note: recounted in *Humour on Wry with Mayo, featuring Travels with Fred, the World’s Worst Tourist.*)

