

INTRODUCTION

Among the pleasures of my life is driving. Moving through the landscape thrills me. More than 300,000 miles of paved streets and highways crisscross Texas. They range from cross-country interstates to narrow farm-to-market roads. Some, like Route 66 and U.S. 80, are fractured remnants of an earlier time. Branching off from rural pavements, thousands of dusty, rocky private roads head into pinewoods or mesquite flats. Texas is a fine place to drive.

Except for Interstate 35, which the North American Trade Agreement has turned into a clog of trucks spewing diesel smoke and danger, even the superhighways are good routes to ride. Better, though, are the sparsely traveled farm-to-markets and the old highways that used to connect the little towns before the interstates bypassed them. On those roads, men wearing Western hats mosey slowly toward town or home in pickup trucks. They lift a finger or two in greeting to everyone they encounter. Sometimes, when they meet somebody they know, they stop in the road and visit. The road is part of the community. Time moves slowly here. No one is in a hurry.

The best roads are the dusty unpaved traces that leave so-called “civilization” entirely behind and disappear into nature and silence. To travel these, you must open a gate or cross a cattle guard into somebody’s private

domain, but the “No Trespassing” sign on the fence means what it says.

Driving the little roads beyond the fences is a privilege. The people at the end of them had better be your friends. Or you had better have asked permission to come. Else you might be told politely but firmly to leave.

A few stories in this book are about people in Dallas and Austin and other cities. But most are about people I met on road trips through the Texas that lies beyond the interstates. I met them in little towns and the rural countryside in every region, from the Panhandle to the Gulf, from the Piney Woods to the mountains in the West. The stories were published in The Dallas Morning News, which gave me permission to collect them here. I also have included a few personal ruminations. I think of this book as the story of my own life as I have roamed the land I love.

After many years moving across the land, I continue to marvel at the grace, the kindness, and the generosity I have found among the people of Texas, whatever their region, race, gender, or economic situation.

They are my people. I am grateful to them all.

Bryan Woolley

Dallas

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