

Annie, 11
Flagstaff, AZ
~1st place winner~

“The Road to a Blue Sky”

I re-read the directions to Blue Sky Horse Ranch. According to the directions, we took the road south of Winter Park. We had been driving for twenty minutes when I saw the road ahead of me in ripped up chunks.

“We thought you knew Daddy, didn’t you see the sign back there?” piped up one of my kids.

“Wait, you knew about this?? Urrrgh!!” I growled.

I closed my mouth in tight-lipped silence. Taking a deep breath, I backtracked until I saw the detour. When we made it through, our car was filthy and low on gas. It sputtered out near a station. We all got out and pushed. We bought gas and went on our way.

As we drove along looking for the exit mentioned in the directions, we barely saw the side-road and I turned just in time.

Upon consulting the directions, we began scouring the left side of the road for an old oak tree. We skidded to a halt as the front bumper came within inches of crashing into the oak stretched across the road.

We noted the “bear crossing” sign that the directions had indicated. We felt like we were finally on the right track.

Suddenly, my daughter began yelling, “Look Dad, that’s the teddy bear that was on the sign! Can I touch it? Pleeeeease??”

I looked where she was pointing and we all jumped as the grizzly came lumbering toward us. Most of us in the car were frozen with terror, except for my daughter, who was ranting about getting that teddy bear. She even had a name for it: Princess Rainbow Sweet Strawberry Candy, as far as I can recall its first name. But we needn't have feared the bear, he marked us as his territory and plodded away.

Ahead, we could see the sign for the ranch. We followed the final direction and a feeling of peace washed over me. We made it within a quarter of a mile to the ranch, when, to top it all off, our tire popped! I sucked in a deep breath and tried to keep from exploding. Fortunately, we had the spare and we were able to continue after twenty minutes.

The ranch was a dream come true for my daughters, but was it worth it? I dread the ride back.

Amelia, 10
Chetwynd, BC
~2nd place winner~

“The Hasty Hunter”

David handed me a map to get to his secret hunting location.

“I already have a stand put up for you,” he said.

“Thanks,” I said as I began to look at the map.

Step 1: Drive 50 miles down highway 66.

Step 2: Turn off road into ditch when you see “Drive Safely” sign

Step 3: Follow trail with blue ribbons

Step 4: Stop at tree with ribbons around it

Step 5: Climb 20 feet up tree to tree stand

The next day, I was all over the house grabbing my hunting gear. My wife yelled after me, “Slow down! The elk aren’t going anywhere and you’re bound to forget something.”

“Don’t worry, Dear, I have everything,” I replied as I slammed the door on the car. A mile and a half later on highway 66, I ran out of gas. I called the tow truck and he towed me to the gas station. By the time I was on the road again it was 8 a.m. *Still a little time to get into the stand*, I thought. I turned off at the “Drive Safely” sign and hopped out of the car.

I hurriedly started hiking, but in my rush, I missed the first bright blue ribbon and I had to backtrack. Eventually, I got on the trail. Then, I saw my stand 20 feet up a tree, so I started climbing. I got to the top and sat down.

I slid a magazine into the gun and started aiming on a magnificent 8X7 bull elk. I squeezed the trigger... *click*. “What?” I almost shouted! I yanked the magazine back out of the gun. It was empty. I had forgotten all my bullets at home!

Toby, 13

Brazeria, TX

~3rd place winner~

“Who Needs Detours”

As I walked out the front door of my house ready to go to Stop There’s a Game Here store to get a remote adapter for my game system, I thought about how much I hate detours. I left with my G.P.S. in hand with the route I would take mapped out. I first came to an oil plant, but the road was blocked by a pile of dirt. So, I drove over it as fast as I could go, instead of driving around. I flew over an oil truck as it exploded sending me forward. Next, I drove to the bridge that crosses a muddy river; finding that it had collapsed, and not wanting to travel to the next bridge several miles away, I swam to the other side. Now on foot I walked along the road when it came to a split, one sign read Lake Hacky Sack half a mile which led through a forest. The other read Lake Hacky Sack one mile

and in the distance I saw a big hill. I took the forest path my G.P.S. had already routed, but it led me straight into a beehive. I ran away but got caught by the angry bees. One hour later, I was in the Lake Hacky Sack Hospital. When I received the bill my jaw dropped; the bill was one hundred thousand dollars! I paid the doctor and left the hospital headed straight for the Stop There's a Game Here store. Suddenly, a flash flood of people surrounded me. I was lost in the crowd when everyone suddenly ran scared. From my position I didn't know what had scared every one until I reached the store. I looked up to the sky to find an asteroid falling straight for the store. I watched in horror as my favorite store was pulverized. I sadly trudged home knowing I could have taken several detours to avoid disaster, and I would be driving home with a new adapter. It was then that I realized detours aren't so bad after all.

Whitney, 14
Norman, OK
~Finalist~

Hello Everyone! Thank you for choosing Intergalactic Space Tours Inc.! This tour we are going to Saturn Sandwiches, a restaurant created by Saturn colonists! Now, to start off, can you please sign these.... No, of course I will not be leading you into dangerous areas! I am a tour guide for a reason.... Alright then! With those waivers out of the way, we can begin! Everyone have enough supplies to last the journey? Good! Please fasten yourself to a seat, wall-bed, or other resting equipment, and off we go!

Oh, look at that, we are experiencing turbulence, but no matter, we will just continue to- oh. That's bad. Hold on a minute, I have to check this out. Hmm.... Well, OK then. We just got knocked off course. Nothing hit us, of course, but the atmosphere has slightly pushed us off our direct course. However, there is a detour, so don't worry!

And here is the red planet. A beauty isn't it? The surface is very harsh, however the surface colony has built very hospitable bases, and we will soon be able to re-colonize it to ease the earths ever-growing population. Oh my, we seemed to have gone too far. There is a pulsar star, and it is blocking my vision. Of course, that would not be a problem, if I were not the pilot. However, I am and I cannot see, so we are blind. No matter. We will keep going until I can see again, then we will continue on our course.

If you look out the windows, you will see the asteroid belt in it's full glory. I may have to exercise evasive maneuvers in case an asteroid gets in our way, but... oh, never mind, hold on everyone!
...Whew, that was close. But sadly, backwards thrust threw us off again, because I hit the reverse code in instead of the manual control one, but we are back on course again.

Saturn is almost among us! Right now, we are Passing By Jupiter, and my, look at it! The Red Spot is as strong as it was 3000 years ago. But did you know that this ship, yes, this very ship your traveling on, can pass through it? Yes, right through the core! Hmm, how bout this! Press the appropriate button on your touchpad to vote for the detour! That's 36/50 people! OK then, here we go!

Well, with that slight detour we have finally made it to Saturn! Look at it's rings! See that large rock there? That's the Saturn colony! Let's see... a few minor doges, then... here we are! After 5 days of travel, we have made it! Everyone ready to taste gourmet Saturn-food? Let's go! Well, after spending 10 days in travel, we are back on earth! Thank you for choosing Intergalactic Space Tours Inc.! We hope to see you again!

Trinity,12
St. Peters, MO
~Finalist~

My name is Isabelle B. Joyfull and I am a Travel Detective Writer, meaning of course that I travel to alien or monster sightings and either expose the person faking it (which happens more often than not), or I discern it would take someone with more time and resources to figure out the particular case I'm working on and write about it for the magazine I work for, *True Evidence is Stranger than Fiction*. When I saw your magazine's article concerning the Monster of Mid Rivers Mall Drive, I came right over. Since your directions start at the St. Charles Police Department (that's the least subtle hint I've ever heard anyone drop), I drove over there first thing, got a permit to legally investigate and started the 9-10 minute drive to the mall. That's when everything went wrong.

I drove southeast for .2 miles on Zumbahl Road toward Greystone, like your instructions stated, but was unable to make the U-turn over by Ridgecrest Baptist church due to construction and had to take a detour down Friedens Road and merge onto 1-70 heading in the wrong direction.

I was able to turn around but the detour had delayed me by 10 minutes. I was soon back on track and got within 2 feet of the exit for Mid Rivers Mall Drive when I heard a very familiar noise. (When you've had to drive where I've had to drive, you will soon know that sound inside and out.) I had blown a tire. Or I was being shot at, but I was betting on the tire.

I quickly pulled over and got out of my car to change the tire. Unfortunately, even the most prepared person in the world will forget things, like replacing the spare tire after the incident with the terrible spiky sow of Santa Cecilia Acatitlan (lo-o-ong story). It took me 5 minutes to flag someone down so that I could borrow their phone, since I'm not in the habit of taking it with me everywhere I go, because most areas I travel to don't have cell service and nobody ever calls me anyway.

After calling a tow truck, it took them one hour to get here and 30 minutes to change the tire. I was annoyed by all the delays, but not discouraged. Stuff happens to everyone, right?

Then, I got stuck in traffic for half an hour. I should have known better than to try to investigate a mall during the Christmas season. I could ***see* *the* *mall***! It was one of the most trying cases I had worked on, and I hadn't even started yet.

Finally, two hours and twenty-five minutes after I started, I pulled into the parking lot... and spent another thirty minutes searching for a parking space. (I only managed to get a spot because I cut off an elderly lady.) And after all that the "monster" turned out to be some teenage girl trying to get revenge because one of the store clerks at Vici's Intrigue had fired her. My conclusion to this tale of woe? Always replace broken equipment and NEVER investigate a mall on Black Friday.

(P.S. Why did you not start your directions at the St. *Peters* Police Department which I can see from the mall's parking lot?)

Anna,12 Beaverton, Oregon

"Basketball Bridge"

First, to get to Basketball Bridge, you will need to say that you are a believer. Once you say that, you are ready to begin your journey. The first place I went to was Mt. Foosball near Florida. Although it's a bit hard to climb, the view is amazing! Next, you will need to cross the Bowling Summit. You may hear weird noises but do not worry, it's just the wind. Then you will need to drive through the Woods of Swimming, which might be difficult with all the dogs paddling. You'll probably get worn out, so you'll need to stop at McDonald's (which by the way is built for champions). I would recommend the three cheeses burger. Now you will need to jump over the Hockey Puddle. You may think, "What? It's just a puddle!" but no, in fact, bring rain boots, because you will get soaked. Once you have dried off in the sunlight, you might just want to stop and say "hi" to O'Neil in his closet. And finally you will have arrived at Basketball Bridge, which is known for its basketball stars.

Melissa Orland, CA

"A Bit Unprepared"

We were finally on our way to colonial Williamsburg for what Mom calls 'Educational Interactment'. She means instead of reading a book, we have to get in the car, drive ten hours with all five of us, me in the middle, and interact with people wearing old clothes and talking in old English. We got in the car, and I was squeezed between Mark and Amy, with Jana and Mom in front. We turned right on Philmore Street and passed the gas station.

"Mom, aren't we gonna get gas? There's less than a quarter gallon." I asked, concerned enough for having to travel in this dinkey car, but I especially wasn't looking forward to running out of gas!

"I think I know how to drive! Besides, there's more than that!" Mom never gets gas when we need it, which always results in a break down.

"Mom, MOM! MOM! MOM! Oh, MOM!" Mom slammed on the break. Us girls gasped.

"What the heck is the matter?" Mom yelled at the only boy in the car. "I'm hungry." Jana rolled her eyes, and I glared at Mark. "Well, since we stopped anyways, we can get the snack bag out. You did get it, didn't you Melody?"

"Ummm... was I supposed to?" I asked my heart dropping to my stomach. I really was hungry, too.

"I told you to get it!"

"Yeah, but then Jana said she'd tell Amy to get it!"

Jana chipped in "Oh, no you don't, don't blame this on me! I was talking about Mark's toothbrush!"

Mom sat back in her seat. "I can't believe you kids! We've only gone twelve miles, and we're late. We definitely can't turn around."

"Can't we buy some snacks now?" Amy piped up.

"No, or else we won't have money for anything in Williamsburg! It's only a ten hour trip. You'll survive." That was her final word on the subject.

I sighed and settled back in the chair. I fell asleep.

Forty minutes later, we merged onto the highway. I woke and could see the landmark 'French Fry World' on our right. I picked up my game boy and rolled down the window. My elbow was resting on the car door, where the window was hiding. We took an abrupt turn to the left to avoid a swerving car ahead. Out flew my game!

"Mom, can you turn around? I dropped my game!"

"It's probably already crushed, and since we're not stopping for snacks, we're not stopping for anything."

We turned right to the exit that's by the Gorilla Cafe, one of the ugliest cafes ever, I think they're still stuck in the 'nineties. After trying to turn on the car TV, and finding that none of the controls were working, we attempted to listen to some music. But the thing that holds the CD was jammed! Jana handed me her Ipod so I wouldn't die of boredom. She had her phone, Mark had a LeapFrog explorer. Amy watched my screen.

After a while, I looked up from the game I was playing to see us turn left on Billsway St. Then Amy threw up into a plastic bag. Gross! I don't know how she did, because we had barely eaten anything that day.

“Mommy, I need to go to the bathroom.” We had just turned onto the interstate. We were entering the middle of nowhere.

“I’m sorry, Mark you’ll have to walk out there. There’s not gonna be any restroom anytime soon.” Mom sent Mark off and after a moment she called Mark’s name several times. She sent me and Jana off towards the area he’d walked to. We separated after not being able to find him.

Finally I saw him, asleep. It was the only time he was ever anglic. The only problem was, holding on to the little six-year olds hand, was a monkey. I stood there, my jaw hanging open.

I yanked Mark away and ran like a maniac, dragging him along, towards the car. “Mom, Mom, oh my gosh-” Now me and Mark were both talking at the same time. Soon, Mom got the whole story. Jana was back now, and we had to restart the story. Finally we got back on the highway. It split, and we turned left. We heard on the local radio about an escaped monkey. Mark and I stared at each other in disbelief.

Finally we got to a town where we used the restroom and got a quick lunch. We traveled on and passed through a small quaint town. The car stopped, and Mom pulled over.

“We’re out of gas! I can’t believe this!”

“Is there even a gas station around here?” Jana asked.

“There has to be!” Mom exclaimed. “Girls, go separate ways, look for a gas station and bring back a can.”

Jana and I gave each other an exasperated look. I walked down the street. Not only was a gas station nowhere to be seen, but I couldn’t find anyone to ask, either! I saw Jana down the road, that’s how small the town was. I walked up. “What are you staring at?” She was looking intently at a statue of a man.

“He won’t talk to me!”

“Umm, you okay? Statues don’t *normally* talk, but that’s just what I’ve noticed.” I smirked, wondering what she was talking about. The statue extended his arm towards me, and I screamed. “See, it’s a living statue. It’s a real person who gets paid to stand here, shake hands, wave, etc.”

“What’s the point?” Then turning to him, “Excuse me, I was wondering if you could direct us to the nearest gas station.” The man stared straight ahead. I poked him, but he didn’t budge. I shoved him and he fell over. He stayed frozen on the ground. “Whoops...”

Jana rolled her eyes and walked down the road. I followed. We finally saw a little woman, who pointed towards a gas station.

Once we got back to the car, we told our family our experience, except the part about shoving the statue over.

Finally we turned right onto a boring stretch of interstate, and we all fell asleep. Well, not Mom, but us kids.

A couple hours later, we got to our destination! Colonial Williamsburg! We were too tired to do anything that day, so we headed towards the hotel. Except, we couldn’t find it. Jana and I stopped a woman in a simple dress, but very old-fashioned. “Can you tell us where the hotel is?”

“Oh, I wasn’t aware there was a hotel in town. You see, I don’t know much about this town, as I live out in the country.”

We asked many more people, as there was not problem in finding people, it was communicating with them that was the trouble.

I looked at Jana. “This is a little too familiar.”

Well, our little adventure wasn’t exactly fun, but we learned that we should be a bit more prepared. Such as, bring maps! Fill up on gas *before* it’s necessary. Figure out where things are before you look for them! And most of all, don’t ever ask a living statue to help you. Plus, make sure you don’t just pack your luggage, but actually put it in the car!

Shelby,14

Nixa, MO

“Disasters On Wheels”

I glanced at the directions to "Heavenly Horse Prairie" I tore out of the magazine, "Ultimate Horses". I flipped on my blinker, turned left onto Patriot's Drive, and smashed the brakes abruptly. A dead cow was blocking my way! I grabbed a rope from the back seat, hurriedly tied its back legs, and lugged it into the ditch. I didn't get too far when a police officer came behind and proceeded to pull me over. The officer informed me that reading while driving was illegal. With ticket in hand, I continued my travels but didn't get very far when I came upon an unstable windmill swaying back and forth. The legs of the windmill snapped and down it came, crashing across the roadway. "Really?" I said out loud. I carefully worked to pick up the broken pieces of wood and metal parts, throwing them off the road. At this point, my blood pressure was on the rise. I traveled a few more miles, coming around a bend in the road and slammed on the brakes! Sheep! In the middle of the road! "Why not?" The barbed wire fence was broken and unsecured. I honked my horn and attempted to proceed very slowly. Once I cleared the herd, I stepped on the gas! An orange gate was referenced in the article. I pulled over to inquire about the fence and was informed the gate had been painted. "Of course. Why not?" I reached my destination, paid my entry fee, and waited for my change. The attendant replied, "You can't read?" He pointed to the sign below the window: HAVE NO CHANGE. WE ACCEPT KITTENS. I couldn't help it, "Kittens?! Why in the world would I casually carry kittens like cash on my person?!" I took a deep breath and as I slowly continued through the entrance, I calmly replied back, "Keep the change."

Anna,11

Canistota, SD

“My Adventure to Camp Judson”

Today I am going to show you how to get to Camp Judson, my favorite place to go in the summer. This was my experience from last year. Hopefully yours is better than mine.

First take I-90 to N Elk Vale Rd. The good news is we only stopped at every other town instead of every one! I have four brothers so not stopping everywhere is surprising. Continue until you reach highway 16. One sign says, “Watch out for escaped bears!” Bear country seemed to have a fence problem, but they only lost about half of the bears.

Continue on past Reptile Gardens and Bear Country. We stopped at Reptile Gardens. Bad mistake, today the man in charge of the alligators was sick, and they don’t listen to anyone else but him.

Now continue on highway 16 and head into Keystone. Do not stop at the taffy store if they had a heat wave. The floor might be kind of sticky! We had to stop and wash our shoes.

Turn onto Old Hill City Rd. Old is right! It is a Mudslide. We almost had to go back to Rapid for repairs.

Continue on for three miles, and try not to end up in the ditch like we did! We almost went swimming.

Now you are there and all you have to do now is stay a week without getting eaten by a mountain lion. You also have to survive the ride back home! Maybe next time I will take a plane!

Samuel,13 Indonesia

“The Worst Bathroom In the World”

A couple of weeks ago, I was at a Taekwondo tournament in Indonesia. I was excited! I was ready to go! I was drinking a lot of water, a lot of water. I realized this too late after I had downed two liters of water. Oh, no! So naturally I had to go to the bathroom. Really bad. Extremely bad. But luckily I saw a bathroom. I was so relieved, I almost wet my pants. I rushed over to the bathroom only to find that it was closed! AAAAAHHHHHHHHHG! I saw another bathroom, but it was closed too. Not again! By this time I did not know where another bathroom was, so I asked someone. They pointed down a dark hallway. I briefly thanked them as I raised away. Breathlessly I arrived only to find the bathroom door was hanging off its hinges. So NO way was I going in there! By this time my bladder was the size of a beach ball. Bending over, I hobbled out to find, mercifully, a sign that said, "Bathroom". I rushed over, pushing people off the edge of the railing in my haste. Then I was there! When I entered I almost passed out from

the smell, but that was not the worst part. The floor was covered in water and the walls with mold. I do not think it had ever been cleaned. The toilet was a hole in the ground. But I had to use it because there was no other bathrooms. I still have nightmares about using the worst bathroom in the world.

Samantha, 11
Clifton, VA

“The Great Disaster Journey”

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

[Well of course! Who wants a totally crazy trip that's potentially life threati-]

Didn't we agree that I could tell the story? You're giving away too much!

As I was saying, I didn't expect our little adventure to take such an unexpected turn. But enough about how *disastrous* it was. Time to get to the actual story. So, we-

[WAIT!!! You're forgetting to introduce us!]

For once in my life my sister is right. Go figure. I'm Witter.

[Get a load of this: His name means 'wise warrior'! He's anything but!]

Shut up, Farah.

[Oooh, guess what Farah means! It means *beautiful and pleasant!*]

And now it's my turn to say, 'you're anything but'! Anyway, we were trying to go to the village to find our father, he apparently left long ago. Mother had to care for us by herself, but enough of that backstory stuff. We went to the forest-

[Call it *The Dark Forest!* It's more fitting, and makes the story sound interesting.]

We went to The *Dark Forest* (Happy now, Farah?) because that was the only way to get to the village from where we came from. We heard tales about poor souls wandering into this forest, but we never thought that they could reality. We went to the forest unknowing that we could be in grave danger. The first thing that hit me was the smell. It was like skunks had been living there. As we wandered farther still, I couldn't help but notice that there were many pairs of eyes staring at me through the darkness. I was starting to wonder if it was safe to be here...

[Then we got ambushed by elves, but eventually went home with them. That was like, the shortest journey ever.]

Hey!

The End

Is just the beginning...

Mira,13
Mount Pleasant, PA

“Journey to the Palace”

As a travel writer, I like to visit the unexpected. So, when an opportunity to visit The Palace came up, I naturally jumped at the chance.

I equipped myself with my GPS, car, and First Aid Kit. And, of course, my directions. I pulled the car out of the driveway around mid-morning. It wouldn't take long to get there, but I wanted to make an early start. My neighbors were all out mowing their lawns, filling the air with the scent of cut grass. I rolled down my window as to fully enjoy the scent. I was on my way to The Palace.

Soon, the smell of freshly mown grass had been replaced by the smell of exhaust and car fumes. I was heading towards the PA Turnpike, directed by the first instruction on my list of directions. Lacking an EZ-Pass, I navigated to the toll booth labeled CASH ONLY. An attendant glared at me. I held out the change. A pointed stare told me it wasn't enough.

I groaned and put the car in reverse. “So much for an early start!” I grumbled as I tried to find the nearest ATM.

Forty-five minutes later I had found my ATM, thrust money into the attendant's hand, and was well on my way. In the distance, I saw the sign for my exit, Royal Road.

Royal Road was quite decrepit. Weeds grew in the cracks in the concrete. I turned right as the directions instructed, and started watching for the old stone house that I was to park behind.

After driving up and down the road three times, I finally found the old stone house, which was blocked from view by a cloud of unkept shrubbery. I looked around, but could not find the parking lot which was supposed to be in back. Oh well. There was a nice parking area in front. I unbuckled and got out of the car.

After circling the house a couple of times, I found an overgrown trail marked with a rundown sign which read ‘To The Palace’. Reading my instructions, it appeared that I was supposed to find the ‘Woody Hollow’, whatever that was.

After an hour of walking, I started looking for the Woody Hollow, where I was supposed to find a key to get into The Palace. While searching under a stone, two men carrying hunting rifles approached.

“Hey missy! Lookin’ for the Woody Hollow?” one asked.

“Yeah, do you know where it is?” I asked.

“Nope. But we’ll help yer find it!” he answered.

After a long search, I came upon a hollow tree. Woody Hollow!

“I found it!” I held up the key and then slipped it into my pocket.

“Good. Now give it ter us.”

“What?”

“You heard ‘im! We’ve been lookin’ fer hours! We’re gonna rob The Palace!” the other man said, brandishing his rifle at me.

“Ummm, okay.” I thought quickly, and pulled a key out of my pocket. “Here you go.”

“Kay missy. Now don’t tell, if ya know what’s good fer yer!”

I watched as they ran off to the left, taking my house key with them. Thank goodness I hadn't given them my address.

I took the other path. I was so excited! I was almost to The Palace!

My eyes swept the scene. No moats with man-eating crocodiles. No meter-thick walls. No towers with heart-broken princesses leaning out of them. All I could see was an old outhouse, the type with a moon carved on the door. I stumbled towards it, and read the scratchy writing on the door. It said 'The Palace'.

Dawson, 14 Spooner, WI

Step one: Car wouldn't start and had to ask the neighbor to jump start it.

Step two: Turned on highway 53 drove 3 miles before we saw that it was blocked because a bridge had collapsed.

Step three: Had to backtrack 5 miles to find a side road that went the same way.

Step four: Started storming and had to drive slowly.

Step five: Road got so muddy that we got stuck and had to wait a whole hour before a pickup truck would pull us out.

Step six: Tree fell on the road and we had to backtrack and go on another muddy side road.

Step seven: Car ran out of gas and had to push it two miles until we got to a gas station and by then we were soaked to the skin and muddy.

Step eight: The national weather called for a tornado watch and we had to park under a bridge before they said that all was clear two hours later.

Step nine: Got a flat tire and had to get it towed to someplace that could fix it.

Step ten: Turned off of the side road onto the highway and started going again.

Step eleven: The car hydroplaned and we crashed.

Step twelve: Called a taxi to drive us home.

Josiah Montgomery, NY

"A Troublesome Trip"

I woke up excited, because I, Jim Long was going to Australia. You see, I am a travel journalist and short story writer. I have been asked to write about my upcoming journey. This is my story, come along with me.

I woke up to a high pitch beeping, I yawned and stretched. When I turned over I happened to glance at my alarm clock, "what in the..." my sentenced

trailed off as I remembered why I was up so early. As I sat up in bed my dog whined. "What do you want Roofus?" I asked. He whined again. Then it dawned on me "Hey, boy you wanted to come? well Ms. Ma will take good care of you while I'm gone. I hope she will." He barked, I hopped out of bed and led him to his crate. Looking at the clock again I realized I need to make it snappy. I ran to the bathroom to wash up, as I hurriedly turned the faucet on my hands slipped and I wrenched it to full blast. Water shot and hit me straight in the eye, blinding me for a second. Fumbling to shut the faucet off, I dropped my toothbrush and I am pretty sure most of my toiletries. Regaining my sight I managed to shut the water off and finally clean up the mess. On high rush I gathered my clothes, suitcase, etc. Dashing down the steps, I tripped on a flap of loose carpet. "Whoa..." Tumbling head over heels I groaned and yelled out loud. With a huge "thump" I hit the floor. I sat up slowly as my bones were still rattling from the fall. A collection of thoughts ran through my head, "Aoch that hurt! Where is my suitcase?" On my knees I turned looking for my suitcase, I found it right behind me, grabbing it with a little less energy than I had before, I stood and walked out into the bright glare of the city lights of Hong Kong on my way to the airport.

It was a bit crowded on the plane but I managed to get a seat in between two empty ones. Soon enough I fell asleep, it had been a harried and harsh morning. I was jolted up by a pretty stewardess whose bewildered look confused me. "Are you alright? Could you please get up from the floor?" "Wha....t..." was my incoherent and sleepy answer. She repeated herself. Finally, understanding that somehow I had ended up falling out of my seat, did I even buckle in? Who knows, embarrassed I stood up, dusted off, and politely bowed to the stewardess. Finding my seat I took it and made sure I buckled in this time. Buckling my seatbelt placed some pressure on my bladder, alert to my need I groped to undo my buckle. "Excuse me" I muttered shoving pass the stewardess and another passenger as I reached the door to the bathroom an old man hobbled in before me. "Dagget," I turned for the other door but that one was in use. I could feel the beads of sweat forming on my brow. Squeezing my legs together I closed my eyes and muttered under my breath. "What luck, how am I supposed to survive this day?" The seconds ticked away at a painfully slow rate, can I make it? I can't make it. And then as a realization struck me that I might revert to childhood "accidents" the door opened and the old man shuffled out slowly. Pushing my way in not caring if the man fell I pulled off what I could and finally relieved myself. "Whoosh... thanks goodness" Weak with reprieve I walked to my seat. The flight ended without further dilemmas.

On my way to the baggage claim and oblivious of my immediate surroundings I bumped into a young man with a backpack. I tripped over my own feet and landed on my face. The young man looked at me crossly and without offering assistance walked away. I stood up clutching my nose which, watered my eyes and blurred my vision for the second time today. When I recovered, as it seems I have been doing for much of this trip I walked to claim my suitcase. Silently I prayed that nothing else would happen. I was exhausted and ready for a nap, my stomach grumbled and at once I was famished. "Great, I don't have time for food I need to rent a car if I am going to make it to

Chatanooga, Australia". At the rental sign-in desk an attendant asked me for my information, I paid and asked him, "So, the car is mine for how many days?" "Fourteen, two-weeks," was his curt reply. "Thank you", I replied in my broken English. I found my car and drove off. On the way to my rental house, I stopped for gas and much needed food, I was feeling a bit crabby and light headed. I also needed instructions, what I didn't count on was the fact that I had driven in circles. I asked the attendant for directions to Chattanooga, I had to pantomime my way through this discussion. "Sir, you are about four hours away, it's a bit complicated so here why don't you buy a GPS?" My phone's GPS was not working here in Australia, I thought it should since it's a global device. However, I brought a GPS from the minimart and had the attendant help me input the address. Feeling less of a man than I should have, I drove on my way. Five and a half hours later I reached the house to find an old lady perched on the steps. I parked and hopped out to grab my suitcase from the trunk. "Hello," I bowed quickly, she just glared, not a word just glared. As I walked toward the steps she got up and walked off to the next house and perched herself on the steps. "O.K. That's a bit weird," I thought to myself. Pressing the combination the door opened and I walked in. The house was absolutely gorgeous! I opened the bedroom door and sat my luggage next to the armoire, opened the outer pocket and pulled out my laptop. I flopped on the bed to start writing my story as it was fresh in my mind. After a night of typing and unpacking I needed a long nap. I closed my laptop tossed it to the side of the bed, thinking I needed a shower I drifted to bed.

"Well, Zhème jǐüle, wǎn'ān... "So long goodnight."

THE END!

Christopher Malawi, Africa

"Which bus do I take, Sherry?"

"The one on the left, Bob."

"Thanks, see you at Fort Henry," I said as he strode over to the buses parked in the small lot at this little Elementary school in Seeley's Bay Ontario. I barely noticed that there were two school buses parked on the left side, assuming that Sherry had meant I should drive my normal ride. I climbed up into the drivers and started the engine, the older kids heading for their pre-Christmas field trip to Fort Henry in Kingston had already been loaded into his bus while he was bringing in the first and second graders.

Turning the radio on high, I shouted above its noise; "You guys ready to have some fun?" He never heard the answer, probably 'cause he had the radio up too high. Soon they were cruising down highway 15, that is, until I heard the shrieking of a tire losing air. I cursed, pulling over to replace the tire. I knew that replacing a tire would take at least ten minutes, and that the teachers would be

waiting impatiently for me to show up with their charges. I didn't bother looking up at the windows, knowing that the kids would be laughing at my misfortune to be out in the snow covering myself in tire-grease. I stomped back to the drivers seat, opened the door with oil covered hands, and drove off. We were now coming to the marshland outside Kingston, and the traffic was getting congested as people headed for their job in town. The car in front of me was going at an agonizing pace, and I found a chance to get in front of it. The first thing I noticed when I got in front of the other car was the awful smell. It permeated the air, and threatened to cut off my air supply. The second and third thing I noticed was that -to my dismay- the truck we were now behind was a pig transport, and that the slow car behind us had picked up its speed, now that I was breaking the wind. Its reasons for slowing down soon became evident to me. I tried to open the windows to let some stench out, but that only served to add to my misery, both because of the cold, and the added smell. I turned the radio off for a second and yelled into the back; "Hang in there kids, I'll try to get around this stink-mobile as soon as possible," and then turned on the loud music before their whining complaints could reach my ears. Although it seemed like an eternity later, the traffic soon separated us, but not before the pig farmer gave me a vicious look that sent chills down my spine. I contemplated his menace as we drove on towards Fort Henry.

As we neared the swamps outside the city however, I smelled that stench again. I looked into the rearview mirror and watched in horror even as the pig truck ploughed into the backside of this school bus, pushing us through the guardrail and into the marsh that surrounded the road on both sides. Needless to say, I was back on the road in half an hour, persuading the tow-truck driver that the school would pay for his service of pulling me out of the swamp. "All right, all right, but you had better be right. Say, how many kids you got in here anyway? I haven't heard them say a word." He walked up to the bus door, looking in.

"Probably just shocked to death," I chuckled, glad that the bus had sustained no damage. "They all right?" I asked, concern edging my voice. He smirked. "As good as they could be. Say, I thought you said your bus was full?" He laughed, getting back into the tow-truck. "Have a nice day."

I don't know how long I stood there, staring at the empty bus seats. And to think it all could have been avoided.

Jonathan, 11

Malawi, Africa

"Escaping the Jungle"

"Yea!" I yelled, as I jumped out of the helicopter.

I'd watched all the survival movies and shows and I was ready to try surviving myself. Luckily, my parachute didn't get stuck in the branches of the tall Amazonian trees. Once on the ground, I unharnessed myself and looked around

for a tall tree to climb. I realized that I should have looked for a ravine while I was in the air. Ravines usually mean that there is a stream or river hidden inside. As everyone knew, or at least I did after reading a book, streams lead to the ocean. I found a suitable tree and began to climb. Not seven feet up however, I discovered the hard way that some trees have very slippery moss growing on them. I slipped, and would have fallen the entire way had my belt not gotten caught on a branch. The branch proved sturdier than my belt, however, which broke, and I dropped the last four feet to the ground. I quickly jumped up and brushed myself off. I may have brushed too hard, because my pants dropped, leaving me feeling rather exposed. I was glad that no one was around to see that. I replaced my belt with a piece of vine.

After successfully climbing the tree and finding a ravine to head towards I started to jog to make up for lost time. Just as I was beginning to reach the steep part of the ravine, still at a jog, I was rather unceremoniously tripped by a piece of vegetation. I flew headfirst down the steep hillside. It was rather like tobogganing - just headfirst - with no sled. Somehow I managed to turn myself around and flip over so that I was facing the sky. The "belt" came loose from my pants and I got a rather bad wedgie. To make matters worse I heard the shrill cry of a hog up ahead. Of course I had to plow right into it. It landed right on my lap. Not a very comfortable weight. It began to squeal loudly right in my ear, it must have been as scared as I was of our "little ride." The hog finally managed to get off of me. Leaving me to look straight at a large rock that was rather smoothed and looked exactly like a jump. Which is what it became, shooting me off into midair.

I wondered when I would die. I closed my eyes for the impact. I landed with a rather big splash right in the middle of the stream. I just sat there sobbing like a kid for a long time. I stood up, and, without the vine my pants slid straight down! I found another to replace it and went on my way.

As I walked along towards what I hoped was civilization I picked any fruit and berry's I could find. I had just amassed a decent dinner when I felt something rather forcefully bite my big toe. I looked down and to my great alarm saw that I had a crab biting my foot. I'm terrified of crabs.

With a scream that sounded embarrassingly like a girl's I dropped the fruit and struggled to free myself. It wasn't hard, the crab almost immediately let go. I nursed my foot and my pride until I realized that I had lost all my dinner!

That night I realized, to my dismay, that I still had to make a shelter. I hastily threw some sticks together and tried to light a fire to keep me warm. Lighting a fire didn't work at all since I had never even tried making one with the bow and spindle method. I had just assumed I could do it.

That night a fierce wind sprang up and the rain came along with it. There were more than a few leaks in my "shelter." I was fitfully sleeping when I heard, and felt, a large crash. My would be shelter was just that, would be. It had collapsed under the wind! I spent the night miserably huddled next to where my shelter had been.

I woke next morning not at all refreshed by my sleep. I bumbled towards the stream to begin my way again. As I went, I began to realize that the stream was widening into a river. I was nearing the ocean! The river began to grow

deeper and soon I had to stop and find something to float down river on. I found a log that suited my purpose and was floating down the river in no time. Soon the ocean was in sight and I had to disembark from my log to prevent being pulled into the ocean currents. I set out along the beach hoping I would find some sign of human beings that day. Actually, I did. A large ship passed by. I tried desperately to signal them but they either didn't see me or ignored me. I was furious with myself. How could I have let that happen? I slept on the shore that night, and luckily it didn't rain because I didn't have a shelter. When I awoke, I realized that I must have slept for some time because I had a horrendous sunburn. In the evening I spotted a fire. I took off at a run towards it. It proved to be a small village in which the women were just beginning to cook supper. Everyone gathered around to see the strange white man running into their village and shouting over and over "Hallelujah, hallelujah."

Presently the chief came forward (he spoke some English to my great relief). He asked me what I was doing here. I related my story to him (minus the part about falling out of the tree, slipping down the ravine, being bitten by a crab and having my shelter blown down) and he told me that he had a radio in his house. We quickly managed to radio the nearest person who was going to pick me up in a boat.

"So, go to eat? Yes?" the chief asked me. I heartily agreed and we went outside to see when the meal would be finished cooking.

As we went out the door, the vine that was holding up my pants got snagged on the rough bamboo of the house. The vine snapped. And I, I was left pant less in front of the entire village!

Samuel, 10 Charlotte, NC

Step 1: Silas was so excited that he danced around and nocked the entire water bottle on **MY** head! There was so much water that it took us another 3 hours to get out the door!

Step 2: When we got in the car the engine literally **blew up!** It took 3 days for the repair guys to fix the car and charge up the battery!

Step 3: When we were driving out of our neighborhood, someone backed into our car and we had an hour delay!!

Step 4: As we turned left, the car spun around and nocked us all unconscious for 12 hours.

Step 5: As soon as we turned right we realized we made a **terrible** mistake. We didn't see the road sign that said **ROAD WORK AHEAD** and we

ran right into a diggers scoop! The digger drove up onto a truck that carried it away to **ALASKA!!** At least we fell out at the boarder of New York and Canada.

Step 6: One we finally got there, after 3 months time, we turned left, but right at that very moment, they were testing **Fury 325** and a part of the track fell off and the coaster came flying out at us at top speed, **95 mph**, we were scared to death! Then it hit, nothing was majorly damaged except the car. It took 2 whole weeks to fix it!

Step 7: We had the hardest time ever getting out of the car; three trees had fallen on the back and either side so the doors wouldn't open. It took another day to get out.

Step 8: Getting to the front door was crazy; a golf cart drove by with oil cans on it and one of them had a hole in it so there was oil almost encircling the entire park. Then a little 4 year old kid leaving Carowinds threw a rock that hit a piece of flint that sparked the oil that started a fire that we had to run all the way to the water park side and all the way back to find it was closed for the winter.

That is the story of the worst da- I mean few months of my life.

Brian Lancaster, OH

I passed a sign that had **Lancaster: Home of William Tecumseh Sherman** written on it. "*So this is Lancaster,*" I thought to myself. I passed a shopping center and slammed the brakes of my car. A police blockade stood between me and the way I needed to go. Gunshots rang through the air. I rolled down my window.

"What's going on?" I asked a nearby officer.

"An armed citizen is on top of Walmart over yonder demanding 10,000 in cash," he replied.

"\$10,000!" I exclaimed.

"Yep," said the officer, "By the way, your tire is looking a little flat." More gunshots were fired. The tire exploded.

"Well," I said, "that explains that. I'll get my spare out of my trunk."

"I got to get back to work," said the officer, "nice talking with you," I stepped out of my brand new Mercedes. I popped open the trunk and lifted the spare out of the back. More shots were fired. Air rushed out of the tire. I stared up at the heavens. After placing the tire back into the trunk, I got into my car. A police officer ran by my car.

"We have taken care of the situation," he blared, "Move along." I started my car up, and slowly continued down the highway. I noticed a Buckeye Honda Car Dealership. Pulling into the service station, I asked a repairman if I could buy a tire. He said yes and I paid him to put it on for me. I quickly got back onto the road and drove onward toward my destination. I received a text. While replying to the text, I accidentally slammed into the back of a pickup truck. The owner of the truck and I had a heated conversation, and I agreed to pay for all the damages. Cursing at me while he got back into his car, I safely got on my way. I passed Miller Park, one of the landmarks mentioned in the directions to Lego Discovery Center, my destination. The engine of my car sputtered then died. The car rolled to a stop. I looked at my gas gauge.

"Great!" I exclaimed. "What a great time to run out of gas!" I stepped out of the car and slammed the door behind me. A Speedway was visible on the other side of Rt. 33. I waited for just the right time then crossed the street. I filled a gas can and ran back to my car. A parking ticket rested on the windshield.

"Are you kidding me?!" I screamed. I flung the car door open then realized I hadn't even put the gas in the car. I screamed as loud as I could then filled the car up with gas while humming a tuneless song. I got back into the car, started the engine, and pulled out of my parking spot. I drove into downtown Lancaster. The windshield suddenly cracked. A boy sat in a dumpster with an air soft gun giving me all he had. I sped up to get away. I zoomed over a hill but had to slam on the brakes to avoid a group of Amish protesters.

"Ahhhhh!" I screamed! I honked the horn of my car while rolling down my window.

"Get out of my way," I growled. A path quickly opened, and I drove through on dry land. I looked at my directions. "Turn left on Mulberry Street in .8 miles," the GPS stated. My cellphone buzzed. It was a text from my grandma. I started to text back but crashed into the back of a pickup truck. It was the same dude. I scratched my face until it bled, put on a clown wig, covered myself with a blanket, and began to sing "You are my Sunshine." A red faced demon snaked over to my car. If the devil had a brother, this was what he looked like! He slithered up to my window and studied me for a while.

"Moron," he said, then trudged back to his car and drove away.

"That worked well," I said to myself out loud. I turned onto Mulberry Street and smelled smoke. A building was on fire. The directions said that the Lego Discovery Center had lots of windows and a huge sign on the roof. I looked at the building. A sign on the roof said Lego Discovery Center.

Andrea, 13
Elkhart, IN

"Going Crazy"

One cold slippery afternoon, Daddy said, "Get into the car, we are going crazy!" We all hurried to get ready. I saw Megan crying because she could not find her shoes. I looked under the couches. I looked in her room. I looked everywhere! Megan finally found her shoes in the shoe cupboard. I did not look in there because they are never where they belong!

Mark warmed up the car, while we all got in. One of the seat belts froze, so we all went inside while the car warmed up. The seat belt finally thawed so we scrambled back into the car.

We slowly drive down County Road 24. It was slippery and snowing. When we got to the horse farm, school just got out! There was a line of ten buses waiting to cross the street. It took awhile to get to the four way street. Adrian started asking riddles. Mark gave silly answers.

When we finally got to the next crossing, a bunch of cars were going by. We had to wait at the stop sign for a long time. While we waited, Megan started to sing "Do You Want To Build A Snow Man". When we crossed and got to the three way street, the other school buses where there! We counted fifteen more buses.

Audrey's knitting yarn rolled away while Adrian told a story about a snake. Audrey's yarn rolled with help to Momma's leg. Momma screamed because it felt like a snake! And Momma does not like snakes!

Daddy started laughing and then turned left. We reached the split in the road. There was five inches of snow where we turned. We got stuck. Daddy backed up and tried again. We got stuck again. We tried again and got through!

We turned right in Wings Etc. There was a line so we had to wait. We were seated. It was the waitresses first time on her own. We got our waitress so confused because some of us ordered with someone else and some did not. We ordered a lot of different kind of wings. We were able to help her out. Our order came out right on the first try.

When we got home, it was late. I went straight to sleep. But when I got up, I decided last night we didn't go crazy. With four siblings at home, home is crazy!

Audrey, 11 Elkhart, IN

"The Butterfly Palace"

One gloomy afternoon, my dad was off of work. He said, "Why don't we all go to the Butterfly Palace?" My little sister was so excited! "There be princesses there?" Charlene shouted out joyfully.

"No honey, it is a Butterfly Palace", Mom said with a little giggle. "It's the biggest butterfly greenhouse in the US and we just got four free tickets in the mail!"

"Oh, can we go now?" my little sister said, clapping her hands.

“Yes, go get your shoes on” my mom said. With that, Charlene took off to find her shoes. When we got outside to the car, Charlene started to cry. “What's the matter?” Momma asked her.

“My car seat isn't here!”

“Oh, yes, Daddy took the car to be fixed yesterday. He took out your car seat.”

“I'll go find it Mom”, I said. I got out of the car and my dad opened the garage door. I looked by the shovels. It wasn't there. I looked on Dad's work bench, there were tools all over it! Then I went over to the toys. It was leaning up against the side door.

We buckled her car seat in and started off. We were just about to turn out of the drive way when Charlene said “I have to go to the bathroom”. We backed back into the driveway. Mom said “go fast!”

Then we headed off again from CR 13 to Peppermint Lane. We turned right on to Wisconsin Ave. Then, just as we were about to turn the corner onto Cherry Drive, we got pulled over by a cop! He wrote my dad a speeding ticket. My dad did not realize he was going over the speed limit because he was too busy answering all the hundred questions my sister was asking him.

Once the cop left, we headed straight towards Butterfly Drive. Charlene kept asking “are we almost there? How much longer?” Dad told her just a couple more minutes.

Mom reached down to get her purse to get the tickets. She looked inside her purse, she could not find them. She took everything out and found them in a side pocket.

My Dad parked the car and we all got out. When we got to the entrance there was a sign that said, “Closed for Unexpected Maintenance. Open in the Fall.”

Adrian, 8 Elkhart, IN

“Dinosaur Museum”

It was a sunny day. I was on my way to the dinosaur museum. The tickets were free because it just opened.

As I was walking down CR 9 with my hands in my pockets, dark clouds piled in. I noticed a drop of rain and looked up, it was a downpour! I tried to run.

Suddenly, I slipped in some mud and fell face down. I heard a rumble in the distance and got up and started to run as fast as I could go toward the museum.

I turned right on to Old US 11. The rain poured so hard it slowed me down. I was soaking when I got to the museum.

I gave the ticket man my ticket. I questioned him, “how strong are the holders?”

The ticket man said, “Don't be afraid Sonny. Our Dino holders are so strong that they will hold the Dino bones.”

I went to the first section. It was crowded. My favorite dinosaur was the stegosaurus.

I moved on. I was looking at the TRex, when suddenly I noticed the behemoths skeleton fall! The steel holders held the skeleton but not to the floor! All the skeletons fell like dominoes!

I jumped back just in time as a TRex crashed into the wall. On the other side of the wall was the flying reptile display. The crash was so hard that all the displays swung off the strings so they looked like they were flying. The bones fell and hit souvenirs.

Very soon the air was crowded with flying bones and displays and screams and I saw people running. A bone smashed into some brick and the bone broke in a million pieces.

Then the bricks flew into another wall. The flying and falling settled down. Soon the screams and people running stopped.

I was stuck in the corner, surrounded by the flying reptile display. I could not get out!

The museum guards started cleaning up the mess. The guards saw me. They started to dig me out.

When I got home, I told my Mom. She said, “Your teasing me!”

It was a interesting day.

P.S. I never found out what made all the skeletons fall.

Rayanne, 14 Apache Jct., AZ

“Rayanne’s Trip to Fablehaven”

As soon as I wake up, I have my coffee and try turning on my phone, but it won't respond. Oh no! I forgot to charge it last night; the battery is completely dead. I have to use my laptop. I turn it on and walk downstairs to make myself a bowl of cereal and bring it back to my room. Yeah, it's that slow. It finally turns on. I jump up to the keyboard and run to Safari. While it loads, I finish my food. Before I can run to wash the dishes, it finishes and I type 'Brakken's.com' so I can order the milk. I stand to scrub my spoon while it loads. When I stand, it finishes, and I sit down so quickly I almost tip the chair over and fall out of it. I order the milk and then shut off the main power switch, not wanting to shut it down properly.

I wait aggravatingly until it arrives ... two hours later. I grab the package and see the storm coming. I put my raincoat on, my medicine in my purse along

with the milk and put the umbrella up. I don't bother to jog to the car; I run. This is the hardest rain I've ever seen. I run the car to the I-60, hoping it stays open long enough. I jump over to the lane next to the HOV lane.

My exit is coming up quickly. I jump as I see a stick glide in the water beside me. "It's just a stick," I tell myself. I look up in time to see a sign saying, "I-60 closing. Get off at nearest available exit." The exit is the 404. My exit! I jump over and between cars to get to it ... only to find out that it's closed. I'm forced to take the backroads until I reach my street.

I keep driving until I reach Benny Goodman Ln. I drive onto the street and realize a second too late that I was supposed to get on Benny Goodman Ave., not Benny Goodman Ln. I just passed a place where I could turn around. Oh, well. I guess I'll have to wait for another one. I wait a mile; another mile; another mile; another; another. I wait a thousand miles before I finally see a street. I panic stop, something I haven't done for years, and get thrown forward. As I'm thrown, I see the streets name: Fred Astaire. I look forward, wondering about this.

I see, finally, Benny Goodman Ave., After seeing Benny Goodman Blvd., Benny Goodman Rd., and so on. Now I need to look for a SUV. It'll look like it crashed into a wall from the front; with a sticker on the back that says: Zombie Response Vehicle. It will be hard to see what with the rain and all. It's pouring so hard I can barely see a couple yards in front of me so I almost pass the SUV. I panic stop again, hoping not to start a habit, and slide in the water/mud. I back up to see the back of the car but I can't because of the rain. I take some medicine and walk over to the car's backside, slipping in the mud myself. The back is empty. Ugh. I can feel the dirt and water seeping into my shoes. I should have brought my rain boots. I look down at my shoes to see how bad it is and see a sticker. I try sticking it on the back with no success. I have no other choice. I'll have to bring it with me.

Now I only have a little ways to go, just until the cactus gates. The sides of the gate are two big cacti ... and there it is. It has the warning signs on it, too. This is the right way. Unfortunately, I have to get out to open the gate. I step out, open the gate, drive through it and then close it. I almost crash into the next one. I panic stop yet again. I have to open and close two more gates. Then I drive until I see the old-fashioned two-story house.

I park the car and decide to wait until I see the end of the storm, I pick my book up and start reading. I just started it so I'm not very far into it. The next time I look up, the sky is clear and there are birds chirping and little insects flying everywhere. I take the milk out of my purse and drink it. I walk out of car and look around.

Ethan, 13
Clarksville, TN

“The Gorgons’ Labyrinth”

On the planet Venus, there is an unattainable cave known as The Vault of Glass that is filled with great treasures. My six-member fire team set out to find this cave, but to get there we had to travel through a place called The Gorgons' Labyrinth. We met at dusk at The Templar's Well, the entrance to the maze. After finding the door which led to a chute in the wall, we realized it was jammed. The heavy, stone door wouldn't budge. There was no choice but to blast the opening with grenades, even though it could signal the Gorgons. When the dust settled, we slid dangerously down the chute in the wall until the six of us stumbled out into the labyrinth. From there we needed to make our way to the huge boulder in the center of the cavern, but a menacing Gorgon was patrolling the path. The Gorgon used a monitor that determined the proximity to its prey. The closer it came to us, the louder the beeps became. This noise made us tremble with fright. We cautiously waited for the Gorgon to turn its back as it patrolled around the room, and then we sprinted as fast as we could to the nearest tunnel. We safely reached the location without being seen, but as we dashed on to what we thought to be the overlook, I clumsily dropped one of my weapons in a hole too deep to retrieve it. We also realized this was the wrong path when we looked up and found ourselves underneath the overlook. There was no choice but to backtrack through the tunnel, and by this time our noisy footsteps had drawn out the enemies. We swiftly dodged their attacks left and right until we made it back to the boulder unharmed. This time we easily found the correct tunnel and with a big surprise at the end. It was a dimly-lit room with a battered treasure chest inside. As I opened the chest, I gasped when I saw a legendary gun. A perfect replacement for the one I dropped. The excitement was short-lived though as taking the loot had summoned hordes of evil robots tasked to protect it. They lunged at us from all directions as my fire team escaped into the last cavern leading to The Vault of Glass. This cavern was deeper within Venus than any before it which made it feel very cold, dark, and damp. After running blindly for some time, we finally came to a huge ravine. The only way to the wall on the other side was across a path of floating crystal blocks that disappeared with each step. As we gingerly attempted to traverse the steps one at a time, we heard screams for help from the back of the line. The final team member to cross had slipped and fallen from one of the disappearing blocks into the black abyss. There was nothing we could do but move on to the final phase in reaching The Vault. A vertical, flat ledge of stone lay on a sheer cliff ahead. Nervously, we crept onto the edge and began to shimmy along the wall. Unbeknownst to me, a Gorgon had tracked us from the maze and abducted one of our members, again from the back of the line. As we continued clinging for dear life to the rock face, the entrance to The Vault of Glass at last came into sight. As each team member jumped into the opening, we heard a scuffle behind us. There stood an eight-foot-tall Gorgon with the body of the latest team member at the back of the line crumpled at his feet. I stood frozen as one by one, the team members fell. Just before I became the next victim of this monster, I realized that The Vault of Glass was truly unobtainable because I was now the team member at the back of the line.

Gwendolyn,12
Sammamish, WA

“My Trip to the Dog Park”

I took a right on Dogwood lane.
There was a huge traffic jam that made the road look like it was paved with colorful bricks, and I was stuck for an hour!

Black Dog Street was hard to find. I took a wrong turned and ended up in the parking lot of an abandoned Food ‘n Drug covered with graffiti .

When I finally found Black Dog Street, I began looking for the dog rescue you mentioned. I never saw it.

I got off on route 16, but then it began to hail. The hail initially sounded like small pebbles on the car roof, and then like large rocks. A huge hailstone the size of a boulder landed in front of me, and I had to get out and hack apart the hail with the seatbelt cutter so I could get past.

When I got past the boulder of ice, I took a right onto Dog Street. The hail was so thick I couldn't see.

I tried to look through the hail for the right turn to Dogland, but there were a million right turns you never mentioned!

After an hour of trying the various turns, I finally found Dogland Dog Park.

Unfortunately, the dog park wasn't open, because it was a Sunday. And anyways, I forgot my dog.

Samantha, 14
Norman, OK

“The Odd Museum”

“Hello, and welcome to the Odd Museum! I will be your tour guide for today, so feel free to ask questions.”

“Hmm? What was that? Oh, yes. I *am* in fact a robot.”

“No, I will not do the 'Robot Dance'.”

“I said no.”

“No, and that's my final answer.”

“Eh-hem, our first exhibit, is a wild Cherrysprinkle in their natural habitat. Cherrysprinkle's are a extremely rare species because their habitat is so strange, as you can see, our staff put in a lot of work to prepare this. With rainbows,

unicorns, assortments of different candies, and laptops with different sites on screen, you can imagine how long it took to fix correctly.”

“You see miss, it *can't* survive in the wild normally. That's why they are so rare. It was pure luck that one of our workers stumbled across the only place in the world where they can survive.”

“The location is classified of course, but we have done our best to show how they typically live.”

“Our next exhibit is the infamous 'Soul-Sucking Camera', it is a very dangerous object and we suggest that you do not look directly into the lense, lest your soul be sucked into the camera.”

“Sir, must I remind you of the papers you signed before entering? They clearly stated that you will not, and *can not* sue us. And that we take no responsibility for anything that may happen to anyone whilst in the museum.”

“Now that *that's* out of the way, I suppose we shall move on to our next exhibit—Hey! Running is not allowed!”

“Erm, next is Death Blooms. They are a special type of roses with deadly poison in the thorns.”

“Hmm? Oh, the poison would kill you within the first one or two minutes—”

“Oh dead—I mean, dear, someone fainted. Security? Could you please bring them outside for some fresh air? Thank you.”

“Next, is the Demon trio. Despite the unoriginal name, they are extremely interesting creatures—some of my favorites actually—and their behavior is similar to that of humans.”

“What do I mean by that? Well, it's quite simple really. There are three demons, a Red one, a Pink one, and a Green one. The Red one represents the negative emotions that you humans have, you know, hatred, anger, all that stuff.”

“No, miss, it can not run around freely.”

“The Pink one represents the positive emotions that you have, happiness, love, that kind of thing.”

“Sir, I'm sure that it would enjoy meeting you, but it must stay in it's cage, lest we get into trouble from have our exhibits running around.”

“Last of all, the Green one represents mischievousness. It is quite the trickster but cannot be pinned as 'Good' or 'Bad' unlike the other two.”

“As I said before, no. They are *not* allowed to run around the building. Please stop being so nervous if you can help it.”

“For the last exhibit of our tour, is the Roller Coaster Of Hell. No doubt that many of you have come to the museum simply for the purpose of riding it. Come along now.”

“Now, wasn't that fun? Oh dear, it looks like some people passed out from shock from that last drop...Oh well. I'm sure their fine.”

“That finishes your tour of the Odd-Ball Museum. We hope that you will drop by our gift shop before leaving. Have a good day!”

~&~

“That last batch of people that I took through the museum were especially annoying. At least 7 people fainted.”

“Beh! You think *that’s* bad!? I had a group of 5th graders on a field trip!”

“That *does* sound bad.”

“Yeah, the only thing that made it bearable was the teacher, her face grew paler and paler at each exhibit!”

“No.113! You have another group!”

“Coming! See you No.567”

“OK, I'm going to go listen to relaxing stuff to calm myself down.”

“Don't play it to loud, you'll scare away the visitors!”

~&~

“Hello, and welcome to the Odd Museum! I will be your tour guide for today, so feel free to ask questions...”

Thomas, 11 Lakewood, CA

“The Trip In the Amazon”

My family and I lead a very boring life. My family has four members me (David), Lilly my sister, George my dad, and Lucy my mom. One year, when I was about 12, my family decided to go on a vacation. They won a four person trip to the Amazon that came with passports, plane tickets (for there and back), bug spray, a ticket for a free tour guide, and a map.

When we arrived in the Amazon we found out that our tour guide had broken his leg during a battle with an anaconda. The only other tour guide available was a very inexperienced tour guide called Joe. Joe was very friendly, energetic, and clumsy.

When we got under way there were lots of cool bugs and animals that I had never seen or heard of before. About forty minutes into the tour we realized we were lost, we had forgotten to buy a map, and we had forgotten the bug spray. We were too far to turn back. Joe didn't even have bug spray and we started to notice that Joe was a maladroito.

We kept walking and found a stream that we needed to cross. There happened to be a fallen log across the stream so we started to cross. Half way across the mysterious toe-biting piranhas leaped out of the water and latched onto our boots. We made it across and ate the piranhas that were still on our boot toes for lunch. Fried of course.

After a delicious lunch of piranhas we were walking and Joe started sinking into the ground. He seemed to have fallen into acid quick sand, so we pulled him out before he started corroding. Unfortunately his "how to be a good tour guide" book was lost. Other than that he was fine.

A few minutes later we heard a screech from Joe and he was yanking something out of the bottom of his shoe. Joe said "be careful these are the thorny bugs of sore heels." A few seconds later we heard another scream from dad and he pulled a really big devilish bug from the weakened toe of his boot. We avoided any more sharp foot injuries from bugs and continued on.

After all this we had lost our plane tickets back to the US. We rented a room at a hotel for the night and in the morning we sorted things out and headed back home. My life is not boring any more. We later heard that Joe had become a fully qualified tour guide.

Luke, 11 Lakewood, CA

"Family Vacation"

One fine day in April a family of three decided to go on what they thought would be the best vacation of their lives. Their son's name was Bartholomew. They lived on a cozy ranch in Texas and raised cattle for a living.

While driving over the Golden Gate Bridge they accidentally caused a ten-car wreck. How it happened was they drove a smart car and the smart car pulled a huge rental RV. Before they started driving they ate bacon and put the grease in the toilet. On the bridge the sewage tank broke when they hit a seashell in the road. The RV's hydraulic system also broke and spilled out all the oil. They did not even hear about it till the next morning when they were watching the news in their hotel room.

They started driving again and decided to refuel in Compton. Suddenly two guys walked up behind them and put some tubes to their backs. Thinking they were guns they put their hands up. They could hear the thieves rummaging through their stuff. Their gas was done pumping and the family ran.

The family was so scarred they drove straight to the police station. The police searched their car and found illegal drugs the robbers had left in their trunk. The police did not believe their story and put them in jail over night.

The next day while driving through the desert, Dad thought it would be fun to run over the rattlesnakes in the middle of the road. One of them got stuck in their tire and gave them a flat. Dad got out and pulled with all his might, It flew out and its fangs got lodged in Dad's bicep. Mom pulled out an anti-venom shot and jabbed it right in his Gluteus Maximus. They were stranded and had to walk twenty-five miles to the next town. They had walked four hours when it started to rain. They ducked into a nearby cave. Dad said he would see how far back the cave went. A couple minutes latter he yelled "eureka!" The rest of the family rushed over. It was a chunk of gold with a five-foot diameter. They dug and dug till they got most of it out and walked it to the RV.

Suddenly Bart fainted. They walked back to the cave and discovered a piece of plutonium behind the gold. They took Bart to the hospital and spent the rest of their vacation there. When they got home, dad decided they would go cave exploring next year for vacation. They were so rich they got themselves their own RV and a mini van to replace the smart car. And they lived through many more vacations and found themselves much more gold.

Emerson, 9 Calgary, AB

"The Amazing Pamaam Gone Wrong"

I wanted to go to THE AMAZING PAMAAM AMUSEMENT PARK but it all went wrong. I needed to get to THE AMAZING PAMAAM AMUSEMENT PARK so I could rate it and write about it on my travel website. I just gave a five star rating for a cruise boat on the Caribbean. I needed to get to Vancouver to see this amusement park. I was heading to the airport. It started out with me in my car driving up First Avenue like the directions told me but I got stuck in rush hour traffic. I was angry and bored. I wanted to take a nap but instead I snacked on cold pizza from yesterday. Four hours later I got to the first exit and it was CLOSED. So I had to improvise and took the second exit. My plane was leaving in five minutes. I reached the airport with three minutes left and I ran as fast as my legs could carry me but I was too late. I watched my plane leave and waited for the next flight heading to Vancouver but it was delayed because of high winds. I headed over to the vending machine and checked my pockets for cash. There was none, but I was sure I had change this morning. I HAD BEEN PICKPOCKETED. I was freaking out.. I had lost my wallet, passport, keys, and pretty much everything else valuable that I carried around. Finally, I got on the plane and flew to Vancouver. I took a taxi to THE AMAZING PAMAAM AMUSEMENT PARK. That day I not only learned that I LOVED THE AMAZING

PAMAAM AMUSEMENT PARK but also that not everything will go right on my adventures. Sometimes I will have BAD days and I have to get over it and just be myself!

**Joshua, 12
Denver, CO**

“The Donut Factory”

One afternoon as I, the narrator of this book was feasting on shrimp and wine on my front porch I noticed something different about my neighbors across the street, and because there is something different I have a story to tell and here it is.

It all started on a burning hot July weekday, one of those days when kids would have nothing to do. It was like this with Brady Benjamin Brady, (Tom Brady’s son) or Brady B. Brady to shorten it out, was lying on his bean sack in the basement of their house. He had already done three hours of Madden15, crushing every team with the Patriots on his X box One, and was getting board. So he decided to go outside and skate board in the new skate board park his dad bought for him. But as he was going up the side of a half-pipe He saw a door in the side of his pipe. Then he hopped off and tried to open the door but it was locked so he went to the main servant of the house and asked him if he could show me all of our keys that weren’t to cars (which we had a lot of). He gave me three keys. So Triple B. thought that it must be pretty easy to find a key that works. It wasn’t! Every key didn’t fit. So in the end he had to break in with a paper clip. When he got inside he found a whole land made out of donuts.

As he walked down the main road he saw a huge building. He peeped in to get a better view. His jaw fell down in shock; there in the house was his dad. He was about to say something but at that moment a spear butt hit his head and he remembered no more.

When he woke up he was surprised to find himself in a courtroom made out of donuts. Then somebody yelled as he swung a hammer down on a table, “the court is in session.” Only at that moment did he finally wake up. He was being judged for something but he didn’t care because of a stinging pain in the back of his head. “Sir, you are charged for intruding with the king’s secret meeting what do you have to say for yourself?” “DA’ what?” He said half asleep. “Um sir, you interrupted a secret meeting,” The Judge said. “DA’ what?” He said again. Then the judge motioned to someone who dumped a bucket of water on his head. “Land Hoe!” Brady yelled as the servant dumped the bucket of water on his head. “What the heck was that for?!?” He yelled. “Sir you have been caught intruding with a secret council. What do you have to say for yourself?” The Judge answered. “Oh, that,” Brady said, “My dad was in there.” “So we are supposed to believe that,” the Judge said. “Yup, now gentlemen if you would excuse me I have a dad to find,” he said as he rushed out the opening in the wall he had

eaten while the court was in session. "Get him!" The Judge yelled as he rocketed toward the humongous building that could be easily seen over all of the other buildings. Now he found himself racing through some God-forsaken streets in this fairy tale land in the side of my half-pipe.

He knew right away that he had no chance of outrunning them so he looked for a place to hide. Just then he saw a small tunnel that went underground. He just barely fit through. When he got to the bottom he found a room with two doors, one on either side. He thought to go to the direction of the building.

He went through five doors and he saw a ladder going up into a hole in the roof. He climbed up and he found that he was in the room that his father was in. He looked around and saw that the meeting was in another room. He crept towards the room and he found all of the men in this room. He overheard the conversation, the men were trying to kill his father because of his wealth. Just then his dad going back into the room Collided with Brady. "Dad!" Brady said, "The men in there are trying to kill you, listen." Brady's dad listened and he said "your right son, let's get out of here." But the last word got overheard, and the men ran after the Brady bunch. As we all know Tom Brady isn't the fastest guy around but he managed to out race them to the door. They ran through it and closed the door. "Good thing I have TNT's in the half-pipe." Tom said as he pulled out a button and pressed it. They had to make a break for it again. They dived into the grass just as the whole park exploded.

"Um, dad?" Brady said after he had gotten over the shock, "Yes son," Tom answered. "Can I have a new skate park?" Sure Tom said. "By the way, what were you doing in my half-pipe?" "You don't want to know." Tom said, as they walked happily home to dinner together.

John, 14 Denver, CO

"Gummy Bear World"

A week ago, I went to visit Gummy Bear World. Here is what happened... One day, I was sitting on my couch reading the paper. There weren't many articles that were any good, but then one caught my eye. "Come visit Gummy Bear world, where food and fun collide." "Maybe I should go there." I thought. I looked below the headline to find step by step directions on how to get there. "Perfect!" I thought, "I'll follow these directions and visit Gummy Bear World. The first step was to get to the town where GBW was. I found out it was in the city of Denver. "I'll fly out there tomorrow."

The next day I took a flight from my town (Green Bay) to Denver. I made sure the flight was early so I would have the whole day at GBW. I arrived in Denver at 4am in the morning. Then I looked at the directions. "Step one." I read, "Rent a car." I looked at this and wondered who would write that. "That seems obvious." I thought. Then I went to the bus stop where the shuttle to the rental places stopped. As I was waiting I noticed a man in a red suit sulking around. I decided to approach him and ask why he was sulking. "Well," started the man, "I have no money, I burned my last earnings on this suit. And nobody wants to employ my services." "What is your service?" I asked. "I'm a therapist." he replied. "I help people relax." "I'd like to be relaxed." I said. "How much do you charge?" "Five dollars." was the response. "Ok you have a deal." I stated. "When can you do your treatment?" "Well, right now if you wish." replied the man. "First," he started, "stand up." I did as he said. "Now, close your eyes and stretch your arms as high as they can go." This also I did. "Now hold it, hold it, hold it... and open your eyes." As I opened my eyes I was surprised to see the man running away. "That's strange." I thought. "I never even paid him." When I thought about paying him, I remembered how some buses charge money. I went to pull out my wallet. It wasn't there. I tried the other pocket. It wasn't there either. "I've been pick-pocketed!" I gasped. "I can't believe it, how will I pay for anything now?" I thought. Just then the bus rolled up. I noticed that the other people who entered didn't pay any money. Relieved, I entered the bus.

As the bus drove to the rentals, I remembered that my credit card number was stored on my phone! "Now I can pay for a car!" I thought happily. When we got there, I realized that there was only one building that was open. Hertz. So I strolled through the doors and up to the front desk. "Excuse me. I need a car." I stated to the man behind the desk. "Sorry." replied the man. "We're out." My jaw dropped. This had been a bad trip so far! First I lost my wallet, and then this! "However," the man's voice interrupted my thoughts. "I do have a means of transportation for you." Then the man reached behind the counter and pulled up a tricycle. "You must be joking." I said. "Nope. Not joking. I'll give it to you at a rate of five dollars a day." I thought that was a pretty good deal, so I agreed. As I left the building on my tricycle I read the next step. "Drive on highway 87 till you reach exit 23, then turn onto Cheese St." I looked around and spotted the highway. So I pedaled over and onto the road. Due to my slow speed, it took me a long time to reach exit 23. 3 hours to be exact. But as I was approaching it I saw a sign. "Road Closed" it read. I stared at it in disbelief, but then thought of a plan. I pulled over to the side of the road, got off my tricycle and put it over my head. Then I walked on the grass off to the side of the road till I reached Cheese St. I got back onto my tricycle and read the next step. "Halfway down the street, there is a house with tickets in it. Go there." I did this. Then I read the next step. "Enter the house and buy some tickets for Gummy Bear World."

I walked into the house and up to the desk where I saw a sign. "Cash Only" "What!" I shouted right in front of the ticket lady. "Cash only! How will I get to GBW now!!!" "Excuse me sir?" asked the lady. "That is the sign for our vending machine." I looked up and saw that she was right. "Uh, yeah. I knew that." I said. "Could I get one ticket to Gummy Bear World?" "Yes you may." she replied. "That

will be twenty four dollars." I typed in my credit card number and received my ticket. I skipped out the door and hopped onto my tricycle.

Next, I read another step. "Drive up to the gate at the end of Cheese St. and show the man there your ticket. He'll open the gate." I did this and soon was driving through the gate to GBW. I read the next step. "Park your car in the Gummy Garage." I looked at my tricycle. "I don't need to park this, I'll just put it in the grass somewhere." I got off and picked it up. Then I found a nice spot for it by a tree outside the park. I then read the last two steps. "Walk to the front gate of Gummy Bear World. Enter your ticket and walk into gummy delight." I smiled. I would soon be in Gummy Bear World!

I walked up to the front of the park and saw a large gate. I also saw a slot the size of my ticket. I put it in. But to my surprise it spit my ticket out, all shredded up! "No!" I screamed. "I've put it in the wrong slot!" I looked through the slots in the gate. I could see gummy bear roller coasters, gummy bear ice cream and gummy bear bouncy houses. I sat there in complete sorrow. But then, an idea hit me. "There must be another way into the park!" I thought. I looked around me and saw that one could climb the fence and in this manner enter the park! So, I ran over to the wall. The wall was brick on the bottom and metal on the top. I climbed the brick part, and then jumped onto the metal part. I had failed to notice the sign that read..."Warning. Electric fence." After that I don't remember much. But when I woke up, two police men were standing over me.

The next day, I was released from prison. I took a plane back to Green Bay with a heavy heart, but I learned a few useful lessons. One, don't trust guys in red suits. Two, look before you leap.