



PHOTOS BY JOE RAY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

At an old-school western classic, The Mint Bar in Sheridan, Wyo., Mom and a group of men in town for a video cattle auction. Below, roadside refreshment in Pierre, S.D.

COAST-TO-COAST SIDEKICKS

Third time's another charm for the author, his mother, and her meditative, rollicking, on-the-road self

BY JOE RAY | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT



When I told Mom I was writing a story about our upcoming cross-country drive — our third together — she balked.

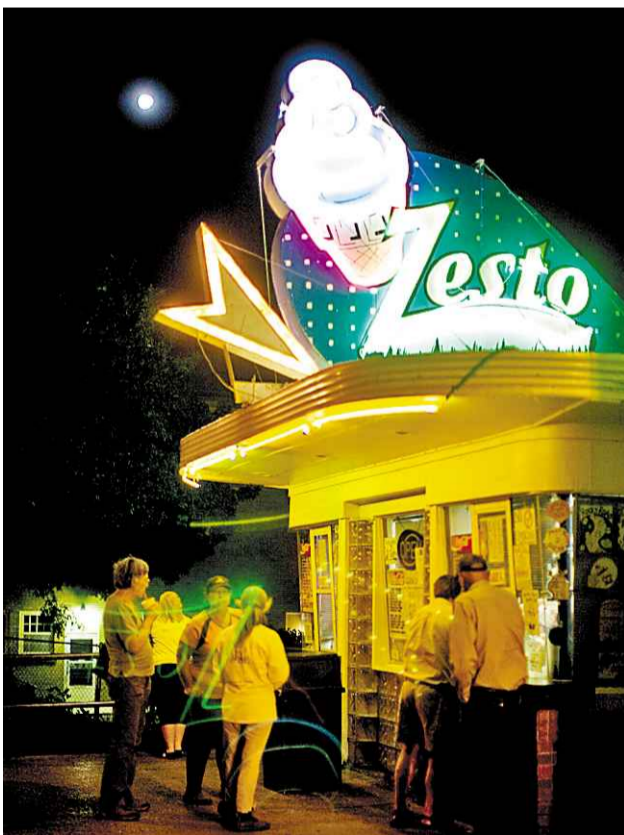
“Does that mean I have to watch my mouth?” she said.

“Nah,” I bluffed. “If we go into Canada, though, maybe don’t get snappy with the border agent again.”

We were driving from New Hampshire to Seattle to deliver one of my dad’s silver Volvo station wagons to my sister, a tradition that started years ago once Dad figured out how much it costs to ship a car coast-to-coast.

Because of our previous trips, Mom and I already had rules, routines, and rituals in place. I prefer small highways to interstates. Mom does not camp. We read a book aloud together. We try to eat well and bend that rule every day at around 4 when we stop for pie. We learn more about our country and each other.

This trip is a mix of all of these elements. Much of the time, we will blast down the highway. At other times — such as our first stop in Milford, Pa. — we’ll see beautiful,



small-town America, with its large porches, tiny shops, little restaurants, and waving residents.

The first changes from what we know well are almost imperceptibly gradual as we cross Massachusetts and head into southern New York and Pennsylvania. Birds change, trees change, land contracts and expands differently, and the sky opens with a vertical quality unlike what we see in New England.

Each trip, Mom has a place to visit that, to me, seems pulled out of thin air. Last time, she voiced a longtime desire to see Niagara Falls. This time, she wants to show me Gettysburg.

“Gettysburg?” I say, wondering why she has chosen it. “Could you imagine if it went differently?” she says.

I pause for a second, see her point, and we head west.

There they are. These fields. These few square miles where the decisive battle of the Civil War played out. We’ve bought a CD tour that you follow by driving from one battlefield to the next, and there’s this peculiar point where the narrator, actor Stephen Lang, asks us to close our eyes and imagine the fighting as he describes the last day — something that sounds hokey until we close our eyes and imagine.

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INSIDE
Find your way to **Nashville** for music and more, including a trip to Loretta Lynn’s Ranch. **M4**

EXPLORE NEW ENGLAND
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JEFFREY ROMANO FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Among the exotic treats, voodoo and its instruments

BY MARTA ZARASKA | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

COTONOU — It’s a hot, humid day. I follow Paul, my guide and a voodoo practitioner, down a narrow path wedged between houses, navigating among goats, chickens, and half-naked children. “Yovo, yovo!” I can hear the kids shout even as I reach the doors of the temple. “Yovo,” means “white man.” There aren’t many of those in Benin.

Paul enters without knocking. The sweet smell inside, a mixture of dried leather and herbs, is overwhelming. Half of the floor is covered in bottles, some of them containing hard to distinguish animal parts. A young man in polyester robes welcomes me. He’s a Fa priest, a voodoo oracle. I note all the mysterious objects cluttering the room. “Can I take pictures?” I say. “Only if we pray to the spirits for permission,” the priest replies.

He reaches for a dusty bottle with a snake inside, takes a sip, then spurts the contents over statues of deities. Then he picks up a bulbous rattle made of calabash, which he shakes vigorously to encourage the gods to speak. After a while, I receive the gods’ authorization, take the photos, then sit down to have my future told.

The priest uses a necklace of cowrie shell to communicate with

BENIN, Page M3

A voodoo doll at the market in Lomé, Togo.



MARTA ZARASKA FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE