

Mother's Day 5/2019

Dear Lio —

I wanted to tell you about a life you had before you can remember. We all have this, and it has been recounted to us to some degree. From photos, and the brief recesses of recalled memories summoned by our folks, we can sort of imagine this life. Since I have these words from the road, I offer them to you as a captured place in time, a snapshot both of your baby years, and of my own young parenthood.

You have just learned about metaphors in second grade English, so I will say: Reading through these entries was like a slow, iron gate rusting open. It took my breath and all of my concentration to be very still and remind myself what these times were made of. Back then, exhaustion and caffeine were primary fuels. In a much more impervious way, I was still waiting to see what life was going to be like. When you are young you hang on the cusp of the unknown, perpetually. At a certain point, decisions start to feel like they might have a lasting impact. Here are marked, the final years before lasting impressions; the last test flights of life before you and I nabbed the qualities that made sense and shed the rest.

You know honestly this always started, to me, as a story about a woman who wasn't going to compromise or draw a thick line between art and family. Eight years later, this story is only really about about learning from a sage little fellow whose very keen and remarkable insight on life has really become a singular North Star. And Lio, you give great advice. You are the kindest, most earnest person I know. Always listen to your gut, because it's totally working. Your instincts and feelings are right on. I am inspired by you, every day, to mirror your authenticity and wonder, and to meet you at your level of presence.

This zine is made up of old journal entries I mused while raising a baby on the road, 2011-2014, on tour for ten days to months at a time. Oddly, having a child added very little to the chaos of tour. The variables and unexpectedness of travel are constant, and so are the variables and unexpectedness of raising a kid. Because anything and everything will already happen on the road, you pretty much wind up in the same boat, just with a baby. You were in many cities, traveling alongside many different folks, in a new place each day. And there you were, just living it and taking it in. Then, it gets tired living out of a van or motor home after a few months, and you do really want a bed that stays still and a place to cook breakfast. So you do that for awhile. And in between, it always felt so good to roam, and especially and sometimes only because you were there.

Being an artist is already a lesson in survival mentality; being a parent on the road compounded survival into a game larger than myself. It felt like not a new style of living so much as incorporating a son into the way things were. The tradeoff was nuclear stability. And rest. And a home. Without stability, you never really get to operate from anything except survival mode. So, you're right back where you started. I thought that's what life was, for most of it — survival. And I backed that up in my head by telling myself I was an artist, and that's just what artists do. Now, as a culture, we are welcoming the thriving artist. I am so grateful to now raise you in a realm surrounded by thriving, creative people. This is no small cause for

celebration!

Sometimes, while living these pages, I'd wonder if the world would ever accept what I was trying to do. Miraculously, most people do now seem to understand and appreciate the value of experience, and the currency of freedom. It turns out that freedom is much more digestible in hindsight to almost everyone you know. In the midst of freedom, you make a lot of people very uncomfortable, and you're generally regarded as reckless and unheeding to the unspoken law of repressed normality. But look, we can't not adventure. I think adventure is something wonderful and important to return to over time! As a kid, your age, all I wanted to have were adventures! I spent every day and night dreaming up a land I wanted to explore and the characters I'd do it with. As it turns out, not that many people even get to go on adventures. So if you can, you may as well.

Family is a singular code that adheres you to your relationship with the rest of the world. Your relationship with family defines your relationship with the universe. Every single thing about your family is a mirror directly back into your thoughts. Lio, your self growth hinges on chipping away at the tarter and blight threatening the bridges between us, each stage with total dignity and humility and the demeanor of someone who has traversed but whom could never begin to capture it all. Even when you get very good at what you do, Lio, remember it is always an option to choose to act like you still have a lot left to figure out. People that I like generally have this characteristic.

This story is about always being excited for the next thing. And, it's about the vigilance of parenting, a trademark that fueled our tours and travels. It's about celebrating transitions, learning how to roll with each season of life, and remembering how versatile and wild is the human experience. There is a great possibility to even being alive. Not everybody will get your possibility. In the end, if you are intentional and nourish true connections, everything else will straighten itself out.

I wanted to compile my tour diaries for you because, in hindsight, it reads as a sort of second baby book. Even this partial account of travels from the first years of your life reminds me of the great lengths taken to spend time together, and that you have really been with me through everything. It takes a long time to develop, test, prove, and rely on a personal constitution; Thank You for your patience as I've ironed this one out. Your resilience and awesomeness continue to make this journey possible.

Thank you, Lio! I love learning from you. Because you are the wonderful person you are, this zine exists in honor of you on your eighth birthday.

Love always,
Mamadoo

10/21/11

'I don't know what to write about.'

'Yes, you do.'

Write about how it's been so far. Write about how it felt when you were leaving town. Write about the people we've already met. Write about Terre Haute. Write about Jonathan. Write about how the motor home dripped water, about the crazy storms, about how beautiful it was today, and how shitty it was every other day. Write what we did today, about our long walk. Write about how it's been with Lio.'

Lio falls asleep to Sigur Ros in the motor home, babbling sense only to himself. Chamero curls up on his cheetah blanket atop the designated 'Chamero cushions.'

We live in a motor home, in a rambling thing hurtling across the land. In a few days Lio will be six months old. The days are just a little cold right before the sun comes up. The lights of the motor home dim right before the heat comes on.

There is a Grimes Lane in Bloomington. Grimes is where we used to live. We have learned a lot about each other, and ourselves: for instance, we both learned I love carports. Hawk didn't want to leave his bowling ball at my friend's garage in Minneapolis, where we had stored a lot of our other stuff, so we took the bowling ball with us. It's riding in the tool box. We told somebody along the way. 'Those are an important twenty pounds,' they said.

10/22/11. What's fairly unexpected is how weird some people are in their reactions to the baby. Sometimes it feels like people think we're bad parents. Part of me is like, fuck it, this is how we're raising our child, it's awesome and it's in action. Then I'm also like, yes this is sort of unstable, what the hell are we doing? Though it seems better to travel now, while we can. And we have so many friends across the country that want to meet Lio, and reconnect. Having a baby in the music scene is a whole other kind of thing. City to city, a lot of people our age just don't really know how to interact with babies and make them a part of what's going on. They think a baby means they can't be themselves, maybe because they're not ready, or don't want, to have children. Our friends, people we already know, are 205% awesome. They see what we are doing, and that we're incorporating Lio into our lives, including traveling and touring. They have nothing but support and love for this project.

10/23/11 Everyone reminds me of someone I know, or someone I used to know.

This whole 'wandering the country' thing is a lot more fun with a family.

10/24/11 Sunman, Milan/Animal Collective

In the liquor store there was a man and a woman and though the man had never been to Maine, he said the leaves would still be on the trees when we got there. And she hated New York City. And California. There was a whole list of places she'd been that she hated. They praised what we are doing, and said they couldn't understand why anyone would want to live in the city.

I drink raspberry shock top as we fly through the hills of Indiana. The baby, singing and talking and shouting and playing his little electronic keyboard in the backseat of the motor home, is playing his own little show, as we're between shows, headed to Cincinnati.

Illinois was raining. Some of my best friends made us dumplings and we played music and Lio won everybody over. Terre Haute was also cold and raining. Then it was cold for two days in Bloomington, but finally it warmed up. On the third day, it felt like the earth was giving us a blessing, and it was gracious as all hell. Sun. Bloomington felt to Indiana like the Utrecht of the Netherlands, the tiny place you'd come to call home during an extended stay.

We met Jonathan our first night in town. He was tending to the restaurant that was inside the venue where we played in Bloomington. First off he was so great to us at our show. He emanated this total peace and acceptance, and awesomeness, and was the best badass without trying. He invited us to stay at his place, and to run a power cord from his house out to the motor home. We spent a night there after one of our shows. His band was playing a big Halloween show that night. Actually I think the guy who was running our show was headed over to Jonathan's show after we got done, cos he stood before me as we left, "Who am I, who am I?" And it turned out he was J. Pheonix on David Letterman. I was unfamiliar and lamely guessed, "Uh, a blues brother."

Before work the next day, while his house mates and band mates slept, Jonathan played us some of his music. Dreamers of the Ghetto. Amazing. He stood in the stark living room and we talked about U2 and he wore his clothes like a soldier for the revolution. Then his house mates emerged and they were also some of the sweetest people we'd ever met. It was so important to know, as we were setting off on our tour, that people like this still exist. Even if it's just them. While we are thinking of working on an album, this is major fuel, and excitement.

I asked Jonathan about the sound guy's Halloween costume, and he filled us in on the "I'm Still Here" documentary, which we've been watching a little of here and there ever since.

Now we're headed toward Civil War territory by way of western New York state and New England. On the nights we don't have a show, at the fist signs of

lesser light, we set our sights on finding a place to camp.

10/25/11 Cincinnati

We want to find a place to live before Lio is five and starts school. To do this we are traveling around the country playing shows.

We've been making our way so gradually that the east coast is sneaking up on us. Twenty-three miles from Cincinnati, we still feel like we're in the middle of nowhere.

A knock at the camper door.

'Did someone just knock.'

'I think so.'

I hop out.

'Hello?'

'Hey, man, I just gotta ask you one question.' This grungy harmless-looking kind of slob is standing there.

'What's that.' I hop out, feel my wallet, slam the door my son plays behind.

'How many miles to the gallon you guys get in this thing?'

'Ah, like twenty.'

'Aw man. I haven't seen one of these things in a long time. A little four-cylinder?'

'Yeah, four speed.'

'Aw, man. How long you had it?'

'Like six months.'

'Aw man. You traveling all over then?'

'Yeah.'

'Aw man. I just had to come over. That's awesome. I had to come over! That's awesome!'

'... Thanks.'

'Aw, man.' He lumbers back off toward the filling station.

Something like this happens at least once a day.

10/26/11 En route, Cincinnati to Jamestown, NY

Lio turned six months old yesterday. We were joking all day with him that we were only going to give him half of stuff, like half his meals and half a diaper and half a hug or whatever. Oh my Lio is quite the little hugger. It is seriously heart melting to have your kid reach out for you to hold them, cos they love you. Fuck yeah. Tonight we see Hawk's Canadian relatives -- and tomorrow, we'll go to Niagra Falls.

11/4/2011 NYC

We have been on the road for five weeks. We have played amazing shows with lots of people. We have played shitty shows with barely anyone there. We have also played amazing shows with not a lot of people. I mean, it works all ways. And in this, our fifth week of travel, we have been struck with the essence of finding a home.

We have stayed out til 5 a.m. We have gone to bed at 8 p.m. We have traveled over 3,500 miles. We

have met old friends, new friends, relatives, acquaintances, and friends of friends. We have met people who know people who know people who we know. We have had conversations with locals. We have been run out of town. We have been praised. We have been stared at. We have been asked 1,000 times where we come from, and where are we going? We have said 1,000 times that we came from the midwest, that we live in our motor home, and are playing these shows around the country, looking for a place to live. We have been front row to a wedding. We have been faithfully kind. We have freaked out. We have been to enormous cities. We have putted through the skinny lanes of very tiny towns. We've explored abandoned buildings and stayed in \$250 hotel rooms. We've seen every leaf in New England. We have not showered in days. We have showered at truck stops. We've eaten out of cans. We've eaten lobster fresh from the ocean. We've been rained on, snowed on, and spent sunny days wandering. We've said Fuck It and we've said Yes Please.

Today, we awoke in my hometown in eastern Pennsylvania. We ran through the woods. My childhood home is up for sale, so we pulled in the driveway and got out. It was pouring rain. And I showed Hawk: There's the garage with the attic where we played. Where Nikki and I spent countless hours reenacting Cats and Really Rosie. There is the shed where my brother chopped through the window with a tall axe to alert for help when the door latched shut behind us. Remember when I told you that story? He did. The shed used to be red. Now everything is a mute beige. And I Showed him: This is where our ducks and chickens lived. Here is where the sled dogs had their kennels. Here is where the orchard was, with a few lone fruit trees after all these years. This is where we had the garden: From here to way down there. Here is my first ditch. It is probably the ditch that made me love ditches. It is probably the ditch that made me renounce everything I ever knew, and to go dig ditches up in the mountains on the other side of this wild, angry country, fifteen years after the fact. Here is where we fed snapping turtles Twizzlers and ate dried wine grapes from grizzled vines. I showed him: These are birch trees we planted with our uncle when we were kids. Now they are tall and strong. Here is the canal with the trees where we built our forts, and the stones we called a native burial site, and the field we called the wheat field. (Once, I cut some of the tall tough grass, and shoved it in a cement cylinder. I was four years old and convinced it would have turned into bread by the time I opened it up the next day.) Once, we showed Nikki's dad, who is an archeologist, the burial site. He investigated, then quietly, gently said he didn't think it was.

Here is our land! This is the place that made me love land. It is how I have always known what land is. Here is the bamboo fortress, the honeysuckle bramble hideout, the old well. Here is where our jungle gym was, our little pool, our hammock. Here is the tree that was hit by lightning. Here is the tree I climbed the most. And since they were all moved

out, we went up to the windows to look: Here is my old room. There is where my brother lived after he was born. We looked in every window. The dining room, the living room, the stairs, the kitchen, the basement with so many spiders. The front porch, the mud porch. Here is the sidewalk and the flower beds. In twenty years, so much is exactly the same, it's almost weird. It is foggy and raining and we are in the Pennsylvania woods and I am bursting through with nostalgia, and with something stronger, deeper, more ready. I do not have to pretend. This is the first place I ever came from. This is where my parents took me when they brought me home from the hospital. This is where my friends came, where my relatives visited. Those are the same hooks on the porch we used to hang plants off of; those are the same light fixtures, that is the same wood floor. This is where I grew up. Now do I make more sense to you? Can you see why I am the way I am. And Hawk said, Yes.

We run through the tall, wet, sopping yard and I show him everything. Nothing has changed. I thought it would be different. I thought it would be smaller, more sparse. But it was as intensely magical as the days of my youth, as incredibly posed and ready to shout happily as the day we left. Hardly anything retains this simplistic beauty throughout the ages, and I am painfully grateful that it is exactly as I remember.

We drove past my old school, now a Waldorf school. We went to Ringing Rocks park, right down the road. We climbed the trail and Chamero darted and sang his coyote song. We happened upon the field of rocks, and took the hammers Patty leant us, and smashed at the rocks til the whole air was buzzing with the quiet crystal-glass hum of the ringing rocks. We were worried on the way there, and asked each other, Will they make sounds in the rain? Then they did.

Let's call it, I said. We were soaking wet and cold, the magic seeping in.

On the way home, Hawk put his hand on my leg. I could tell what he was thinking. He was thinking about our little family. When we got back, he said, Let's find a home. I don't care where it is. Let's set up shop and save some money and buy a house. I don't know what would be sadder, staying here or leaving for someplace else. But it was never an option to stay. In this moment in time, there are a couple dozen of shows left in the books. There are seven states to go through. We are a world away from finding a place, but somehow we both know that the search has already begun.

We are mixing our new songs in the motor home along the way. Some of the tracks we recorded while we were still in Iowa. We've recorded vocals in the motor home twice now. Even our songs are on the move.

11/12/11 The bowl of dollar bills for toll roads, the

change spilled all over the floor. We pass a sandwich back and forth. A 'Yes, we're Open' sign along the highway implies a lot of people would think the place is closed at first glance; or would drive by. It would not be apparent. Lio coos in the backseat.

This trip to Upper Black Eddy has really done something for me. Peace of mind. Assurance. Can't wait to do what we are going to do. Comfortable. Relaxed. Like, we are going to find a really amazing place to live, because there is always this place. You don't have to be anybody, you are exactly you. Our home is going to be fucking amazing. It has to be perfect now, because there is no other time it is going to be perfect.

Saturday, waking up in Maryland. We found the last campsite and I settled in to write. Lio screamed part of the morning. He was sad and then I picked him up and told him about how we are always around him, except that once when we went to the childhood home and Ringing Rocks and left him with Patty, but that was pre-arranged, and for not long. And it was pouring rain. He was better off at home. And he had loved it, being watched by Patty. But other than that, I said, didn't you notice we're always around? We're not going anywhere. And all Lio really wanted was this hug. He calmed, smiled, and stood off my chest. Earlier ten Chinhooks had flown overhead. Ten Chinhooks, and an airplane.

Hawk dances, singing lyrics to my old songs in different voices while adding oil in the morning: 'Food not bombs wouldn't get arrested,' gyrating wildly at the gas pump.

An Escalade pulled up to us at a red light after our first show in Baltimore, motioned to roll the window down. Every interaction we'd witnessed in Baltimore seemed to be a drug deal, and we hesitantly leaned forward to receive the message. "Are you part of the movement? A possible recruit shouted. "Which?" Hawk asked. Like, you define it, so we know we're talking about the same thing, and then we'll say Yes or No. "Guess not," the man said angrily, dismissively, and sped away, his pre-adolescent son in the passenger's seat.

Had a dream last night I was sure to remember, but didn't, and I didn't write it down. Sadly, it was important – the event, then solving the problem.

11/26/11. Leaving Virginia, now I feel free. Like the shell of the last many years of life broke off, six weeks in, setting us free. An eggshell snakeskin. Like every single story that everybody is living makes sense, is an epitome. Like everybody's hardship could've happened to me.

Now we are in a Charlottesville diner making jovial small talk with the family at the next table – the father sarcastic and wry, Lio making eyes at their daughter. "She's too old for you," her father says. We laugh. Then another father follows his son over, the

little wobbler. Lio turns and grins from ear to ear at the prospect of so many new friends in one place.

If each show were an invitation by the town's secret ambassadors who understood we wanted to make us a home, and were thus trying to get us to stay there, Charlottesville would be the clear winner. It was as if the town was secretly on showcase, offering us the cream of the crop: we had the best breakfast, the strangest random encounters, saw the craziest sites, the weirdest people in action doing strange things we felt akin to. The parks were always right around the corner, with special areas for unleashed dogs; the weather sunny and warm, the sun just right so it wasn't in your eyes, and welcoming; the breeze temperate enough to only just not wear a sweater. I think Charlottesville was trying to lure us to stay.

This is what I imaged tour would be like. This is the feeling I thought I'd feel. We spent Thanksgiving with one of my oldest friends visiting her family in Washington, DC; in a four-story Victorian with separate quarters for every little family pod. We ate, we played piano, we entertained, and, as usual, we waited for it to stop raining. After a few days, we left the City, dropping my friend's brother off at Twin Oaks, the nation's oldest functioning intentional community/commune. We took a bunch of scenic, curvy, no-shoulder roads to Charlottesville. We play an amazing show in a giant performing arts warehouse where we identify with all of the guests, speak in real language, stay tuned, and juxtapose in a beautiful, mysterious space in a big old Pink building with a history. We would live there, and I would feel pressure to do something amazing.

There is an air of impossibility about touring with a baby. If you don't travel with a caregiver, the logistics aren't totally concrete. My main takeaway? There needs to be a lot of breathing room, along with a dedication to adaptation. You need to be able to say, "I guess we'll both do solo sets," or be ready to perform as a duo if Lio has a babysitter or the venue is kid friendly. It's important for us to remain expectation-less about how a show is going to go or how our child is going to respond to the energy of a venue or the people there. And really, it's all about Lio -- we are just orbiting around him, and fitting him in -- he guides our decision-making. Other parents we meet will say, "You're very brave." People who don't have kids often say, "I thought life was supposed to be over when you have children." They also say, "It's good to know it's not." Everyone asks, "What does the baby do while you play?"

When we found out that Lio was on his way, we spent a few days in August staring at each other with serious faces (the kind of faces people who are going to be parents make) and discussed making down payments, finding a house in the country, or taking over the family business. Little by little we came to and realized our vision could adapt. Wouldn't it be cool for our kid to say, "When I was young, my parents took me on tour with them all over the coun-

try?" Our plans expanded to fit the pending little one. Our parents and extended families mostly pretended this wasn't actually what we were going to do. We decided we'd start traveling as soon as the baby was "ready." We didn't know when "ready" would be. We guessed he might be strong and sturdy enough by the time he was six months old, so we circled a date in October and watched my tum expand.

As soon as he was born, Lio favored and recognized the tunes he'd heard so many times in the womb — albums we'd recorded, songs we'd listening to many times. We'd shot a music video a couple weeks before the baby was born, and had played the song, "It Isn't Mine," probably a hundred times between the video shoot and band rehearsal for the album release. Now, this is Lio's favorite song. Hawk plays it, and he just... stops. Stares. Smiles. This is his song. Lio loves drums. He loves messing around on keyboards and pianos. And he's absolutely fascinated with watching drummers and guitar players. Seeing Lio as a music lover in training also helped us realize our decision to take him on the road could be incredibly formative.

We did a few show-and-baby test-runs, traveling to Colorado when he was just a couple months old for Blank-Tape Records Fest, then playing a handful of shows closer to home near Des Moines. The shows cast some light on the unpredictability of simultaneous child rearing and show playing, but we were lucky in that we almost always had family or friends in the audience who were eager to hold the baby while we played. We weren't quite getting the full picture of what shows would be like on the road, where we wouldn't have the support of relatives and where the number of people and unfamiliarity would turn baby-holding into a mom-or-dad-only scenario.

I started booking shows for our east coast tour a few months after Lio was born. Instead of the web of bars we'd been accustomed to scheduling, we turned our focus toward house shows, galleries, cafes, art spaces, collectives and DIY venues, coffee shops, record and book stores, and other all-ages venues and clubs. I told the contacts we had a small son. People were very receptive. We booked almost thirty shows from Iowa up to Maine, and down the coast to South Carolina. We gave away or sold everything we owned, put the important stuff in a friend's garage, bolted the baby's car seat down inside the motor home for extra safety, and fashioned a crib out of the motor home couch. I sewed little motor-home curtains, and Hawk caulked (try saying that one) extra waterproof layers onto the roof and windows. As the midwest weather turned chilly, we set sail in *The Big Ship* (named after a Brian Eno song) and headed east.

We pretty soon learned that traveling with a baby isn't a whole lot different than a regular tour. You might stop a little more frequently, or you might not — at least no more than if you have a tiny-tanked bandmate. You still need to stretch your legs and get gas, and that's when you pop on a fresh diaper and

feed the little guy. You set out to explore a city, and you stuff the little fella in a sling or carrier, and off you go. You can still stay at friend's houses, only now you have a bassinet. There's a lot more stuff – toys, clothes, a walker, baby blankets, stuffed animals – but tour is usually kinda cramped anyway. And there are always non-baby-spurred predicaments: Like how we didn't plan on campgrounds in New England shutting down mid-September. What's one more variable? Lio, though, makes it easy on us: he's kind of a jackpot baby. He loves music and meeting people, it is fairly easy to coax into a long nap, and doesn't often cry.

Our nights usually go something like this: If there's no show scheduled, we'll explore, find an early campsite, make a fire, and watch movies, read, and talk. If there is a show, we'll pull close to the venue and one of us will scope the place out while the other stays behind to gather baby stuff and ready equipment for carrying. (Lio is at the age now where he'll usually fall asleep in the motorhome as soon as it starts moving, so this is when he slowly comes-to and begins his big Grin!-I'm-awake! Woot! game.) The first person'll come back with a report: It's cool in there, and the people are really nice! We go on at nine! Or whatever. We'll bring Lio in, get him set up with some toys, haul in our instruments, and hang out til the show starts. Sometimes Lio will race around in his walker and make friends. Other times, he'll drift off to a sound sleep before we even start. Sometimes he'll be in a Mood, and only Mom's arms can soothe him. We have a together-set worked up with keyboards, drums, and electric guitars, and we've played with Lio asleep in his bassinet right on stage, or in the green room right behind us. If the place is less kid friendly or it's just not the right vibe for a baby, then we take turns playing solo sets while the other person takes care of Baby Lio in the motor home. If the show goes late and Lio's not yet asleep, Hawk and I take turns hanging out in the motor home while the other person packs up and gets paid. We'll bow out together at a certain point to run the heater, cozy up, and talk about the show and the day.

While there are plenty of things that haven't made touring any more difficult with our baby, there are also plenty of considerations we take that probably seem first nature as new parents. We have to figure out nap times. We keep bedtime in mind. We're always surveying our venues, hangouts, and potential non-motor-home sleeping quarters for baby-friendliness. Luckily, we're self-sufficient: we have two forms of heat (propane and electric), plenty of blankets, and everything we need inside our mobile house. We're often offered extra rooms and places to stay, but the motor home is usually our best bet. It's quiet and cozy, we have the freedom of not having to worry about Lio interrupting other people's sleep, and we don't have to run back out to the street in the middle of the night if we've forgotten to bring a baby essential inside. It always feels good to pack up after a show, say goodbye, and head off to find a quiet campground.

A few things about touring with a baby are flat-out different. While musicians and bands in general often get strange looks when they pile out of large vehicle, especially in certain parts of this country, we now get even more, and stranger, looks. Something about our motor home, which we've nicknamed Glen, just makes people stare. Sometimes it's in wonder, sometimes in awe, and often, it seems, in disbelief. The expressions are exacerbated when one of us emerges from the back door with a baby in our arms.

One thing I was pretty nervous about is breastfeeding in public. I prefer to feed the baby in the motor home, because it's more comfortable and private. But at least once a day there's a point where Lio gets hungry and it just makes more sense to feed him right there wherever we happen to be, draping a blanket over us. I'm pretty good at it, as I imagine all moms on the go are – so good, in fact, that people often come up to talk without even realizing I'm feeding him. Sometimes they'll even leave the conversation still not having realized – they'll just think he's sleeping. There have been a couple of eye-rolling moments where some dude clearly pointed or motioned to a co-worker to look at my not-even-visible boobs, gasp, in public. But, as our story goes, most people are super accommodating, recognizing the extreme importance of a nursing mom.

One thing I was a little surprised by is how some people are not as comfortable around the baby as the baby is around them. We have had sound engineers exclaim, "Hey, little dude!" and pay just as much attention to the baby as they do us – maybe even more – and then we've had people who didn't even acknowledge his presence. The latter just feels plain weird. Bringing a baby to your show shouldn't necessarily garner extra attention, but it's a bit of an elephant-in-the-room feeling when someone plows on ahead, clearly uncomfortable. Especially when Lio is obviously smiling at them, ducking away, being "cute" and trying to get their attention with a gigantic grin – some people stone-facedly cannot bring themselves to interact. I know not all people are "baby" people, and for a lot of us, being "into" babies doesn't happen til you have your own. Or it never does, even when you have one! So a lot of people don't even realize when a baby is trying to get their attention, or is trying to make friends. For whatever reason, babies just freak some people out. They're not used to seeing them, being around them, or being put in a situation with them. So to them, it's shocking. As time went on, it became apparent that it wasn't that Lio was causing a problem – he was just hanging out in our arms – it was more what he represents. Adulthood! Responsibility! Life over! Confusion! Why is there a baby HERE? In this coffeeshop? In this all-ages club? Um, because it's all-ages. That's what brought us here in the first place. Treating kids (or anybody) like aliens will only cause them to feel alienated. Hopefully bringing Lio around on our tour (and on subsequent tours) will help break the ice a little when

it comes to children being a regular part of society. There are certain places we are steering clear of on this tour, because they aren't cool for a kid. And there are tons of places that can accommodate us. Although we communicate to all the venues in advance about Lio, other folks - be it staff, other musicians, or the audience - sometimes aren't expecting it when all-ages translates to "baby." And truly, I think it's shocking because to a lot of people, especially young people, babies are the antithesis of rock and roll. Seeing a child in the context of a show, even a low-key show, is jarring, because it's just not 'typical.'

Dec. 14, 2011 There are a few factors we're considering as we think about getting off the road and hunkering down for awhile. For one, we have been touring for months. As time goes on, our downtime and days off have been very lacking, just few and far between. The baby is clearly enjoying himself more and is more relaxed when we have days off and it is just the three of us. I can see that he is tired of sharing us, and sharing our energy. His sleep patterns are starting to be affected by the places we stay. We need every moment of precious sleep, and don't want Lio's cries to disturb our hosts, so we are more apt to take Lio into bed with us at strange hours, or pop up to walk him around instead of letting him cry for a few minutes til he falls back to sleep. When we camped, we worried that he was warm enough in his crib, and would usually bring him into our bed in the middle of the night. Lio's kind of a bed hog - covers, the whole bit - and we'd usually wake up to his toes in our face or his hands pinching our noses as he stretched out, long ways, taking up more room than either of us on our motor home bed, which is really only big enough for the two of us in the first place. We just know that we need to spread out and enjoy our own space for awhile. With an album on our minds and projects brewing in our hearts, we are opening the floodgates for possibilities of places to live.

So far, touring with our son is easily THE favorite thing I've ever done. Seeing and experiencing all the places we've traveled through our baby's eyes has been the ultimate joy and reward for our hard work as a traveling band. Whatever Lio enjoys becomes instantly enjoyable to us. A huge sense of satisfaction comes from watching Lio learn, pick up new information, and meet new friends. Seeing him stare intently at the fingers of a guitarist, or lean forward to soak up someone's song from our laps, front row, enjoying all of the music around him, feels so good. Our methods aren't foolproof, but they're ours. We're creating memories that are a priceless part of our family story.

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We landed in Greensboro, North Carolina, at the end of 2011, and started our band. In May of 2012, friends from Omaha came to record a live, one-take music video with us in North Carolina - our first actual performance. By July, we'd been contacted

by a record label and started playing shows as The Golden Hearts around Chapel Hill, Durham, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, and Greensboro. We changed our name to Eros and the Eschaton to avoid being sued. Then, again, we began to tour. Our sixth show ever was in New York City, a trip set up by who would become our label. This set in motion several more years of bringing Lio on the road with us - this time, with a band, and often with a nanny/friend to watch him off-site while we played in more standard clubs and venues. I wasn't always keeping journals during these tours. There was so little down time. Yet there are hundreds of photos of us in every city sprinkled across the east coast, traveling, living life, and playing shows. In the meantime, we were recording in our Greensboro country home, working, creating, writing, and exploring.

12/12/12

Well, dear Lio,

The year is drawing to an end. It's the last repetitive digit of our lifetime, and we have just returned home from a short trip to NYC. When a label you sent teen-aged demos to invites you to play a show in the Big City, dear Lio... you go.

Your father worked a grueling double on a rainy Tuesday, and the next day we had our earliest practice of all time. It was freezing and we were drinking coffee; you ate oatmeal. We kept you awake with Baby Signing Time movies, and housed the dog, and loaded up our keyboards (4) and amps (2) and guitars (2) and cords (1 billion) and pedals (4) and kick drum pedals (3) and drums (6) and cymbals (2) and everything all those things stand on or require. Then we waited for your loving nanny, Wajiha, in the driveway, the snub nose of the van pointed toward the road.

When Wajiha arrived she first held the slight lifted composure of a newborn dear. Somewhat quickly, after a brief episode of making ourselves at home in this van with overstuffed lounge seats (making leg room, storing things, and making you giggle), she became almost instantaneously comfortable; and then she did not stop talking for three days. She told us all about her life in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and the U.S., about her family and their traditions and customs; about her uncles and aunts and their wives and husbands and them not really having a country to claim, moving to America, struggling, but forming a community, and living and growing and moving and learning and Chai tea and boyfriends.

The first night we spent in Upper Black Eddy, Pennsylvania, a stone's throw across the Delaware River in New Jersey from where I was born. It is the town I lived in for the first eight years of my life. Having traveled near and far since then, I still consider it very much to be where I am from. We stayed with your Aunt Patty, who is not really your aunt, but a lifelong - both mine and yours - family friend. It

was your second trip here, to this childhood haven of nostalgia. Not a single thing I can tell has changed in twenty years. We drove past the old apple orchard, the post office, the general store, the Frenchtown bridge, and the high water line post etched to mark the major floods of recent years. The town is always exactly how I leave it, year after year. All the sandbars are still the same. The factory is the same. The little town and the cliffs and ridges and dwellings and the homes and the feel and the attitude are still the same. Bushes are in the same places; little gatherings of bamboo sticks. It's unreal and infinitely reassuring. That night, you heard us talking at the dining room table. You felt it your duty to entertain us, giggling and hopping about and singing in your little footed pajamas. We ended up letting you run around the house at 1 AM (a definite first) to spend some of your energy so that you could continue to sleep through the night (which you then, thankfully, did).

We breathed childhood air. The next day, we drove a couple hours into the City. New York was rousing & wonderful. We played music and met dear friends and carried our equipment up awesomely narrow, long staircases while you slept in a Brooklyn apartment in winter with the windows open, because the fourth-floor boiler-room heat — which your Uncle John (who is not really your uncle) doesn't pay for — is too hot.

And so, everything is relative to you.

On the second night, after our second show in the city, we arrived home late again, at 3 or 4. And just as we had stopped chattering and had begun to fall asleep, you woke up. When you awoke, your Auntie brought you in to us. We set your bed up by our bed. You started to think this close proximity was hilarious & laughed with charm and would not lay down. Your father said, very sternly (which he does not do very often), "Lio, lay down." You went from dancing to completely prostrated in about 0.0002 seconds, in an unbelievable twist, half jump, half fall, totally propelled, but also delirious & perfectly funny. Your first pratfall? It was all your father and I could do not to laugh out loud. We turned to each other and as silently as possible busted up into each other's col-larbones while not making eye contact with you, and also seeking sleep.

We played two more shows, and you stayed home (for home is wherever we are staying). We combed rainy Brooklyn streets looking for hot food. You threw authentic New York pizza on the floor & refused to eat. You made friends with everyone who walked through the door, getting people to smile and stare at you for minutes at a time, and holding their looks with your own intense gaze. In you, they see something; may-be it is themselves, may-be it is their own child, their future child, their nephew, their friend.

I, your mother, sang "Song for Katey Sleeveless" to the very person who wrote it; your father sang "The

Joys of Getting Older" with an Omaha crew of backup vocals in a giant Brooklyn open-space apartment. Singing louder each time, the noise built until we realized we'd been singing this song for years — and would be singing it for many more.

We didn't want to leave. We left our hearts on the other side of the Holland tunnel. On the way home we stayed with your Great-Aunt, then met your Great-Grandmother and other relatives for a wonderful breakfast before stepping back out into the rain to return to North Carolina. After a stint of driving by your father, I knocked out five and a half hours listening to the Future Islands Pandora station while you slept soundly, and your darling Jiha answered my religious and cultural questions.

Since we've returned, the van emits a pleasant, if not slightly stale, scent of a strong Indian spice. Having toured prominently throughout my adult life, I know this could be for a number of reasons.

Now we're watching Heima and setting up our recording space in the living room, ready to work on our album again, stare at the rainy sky, dream, and remember.

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We continued to travel up and down the east coast, and also hosted a great many traveling bands, and booked many shows, until in 2013 we decided to relocate to Colorado. Our record had come out on Bar/None, and we toured for several months in support of the album before landing in Colorado Springs. Lio was two, and at this point had spent over half his life traveling in some form.

The Calm Before the Tour

8/25/2013 Ants are taking over the house. They know we're leaving. They scurry in a new way, a way of pride, a way like they know we aren't going to try to force them off with lemon juice or soapy water or poisons. They think, "We can stay, because you're leaving." In the end, in a world of impermanence, the ants win out.

I don't remember what you're supposed to do before you leave a place for an endless tour. Cancel things? Gather important papers? And then on top of that not-remembering is me asking my non-remembering self: Do I not remember because life is a blur? Because it just doesn't matter what I remember and what I don't? Because we could leave, tomorrow, with three things, and be just fine?

Or is the memory fog just exhaustion (I am exhausted) from a year and a half of switching back and forth as we both work nearly-full time jobs, so the other parent can stay home and raise our son. Which is our preferred method, no doubt — we know our son. We know the cravings of each of his baby molars — raw carrots or ice. We've heard practically every single word he's ever spoken. We've watched him develop. We have followed and lived the arc and trace of his obsessions with various wheeled and winged mobile vehicles. He is our son,

truly. We raised him. We were poor and we worked our asses off and we did it ourselves. I'm proud of this. But it also meant (and still means, ten days before we leave) that we have no days off together. We have no relaxing family mornings that are not chopped at the seams by responsibility. If we want a family outing, we have to pry it from the cold, dead fingers of being guilt tripped at our jobs for taking time off coupled with a loss of money, money we use to pay rent and buy food and play more shows. It's exhausting. Whatever form your parenthood takes, it's exhausting. A new kind of Tired, one where you just keep going.

Now more than ever I love and appreciate tour, because we get to spend it as a family. For our entire last year and a half we, as a family and thus as a band, have had just hours, collections of ticking clocks and snippets of bonding and getting shit done book-ended by one of both of us charging out the door in weird clothes and hopping in the van and clunking off south down Church Street for work. Every time we have a show, one of us works that morning, sometimes right up til the time we leave. We pack the van in a flurry and cook dinner and welcome and set up the babysitter and get dressed and then soar off. Last week during an interview the interviewer made the connection between our family life and what he called a 'sense of urgency' on our record. And it made us laugh. It made sense. Yeah! Give any parents the task of making an album, and it's going to sound fucking urgent! Ie, Lio's napping, I need to record this part, please don't wake up, please let me get a good take, please let me record this before the dog barks and wakes him up. Urgency – a nod of respect to the present and a middle finger to the foot we have anchored to paying rent and working all the time. And that's why there's a direct correlation between living your dreams and not wasting them. It's urgent. For you, for me, for us, for everybody. We don't get a lot of time together. Not in a day, not in life. You don't have a lot to start out with and you don't have a lot at the end of the day. So fuck it, let's make albums and quit our jobs (again) and go on tour and not know where we're going to wind up (again). We worked hard so we could do this. We get to do it together.

What's coming is tour, our especial time to break free from all earthly constraints as individuals and as a unit. Shows are awesome, good things happen, we get to meet great people and reconnect with old friends. But the best part is we're doing it together, as mom-dad-son-dog, and we're a barricade, we're a force, we've got each other. We share it all. We were there for it all. No matter how many good things I have to say when we get home from a tour, the number one thing I tell Hawk is "it's so awesome we got to spend all our time together, every day."

So maybe I'm forcing myself to forget exactly what there is to remember today. It's easy to erase the field of technology and jobs and economic society when you've been living out of your van for even a

few days, let alone weeks, let alone months. And in my mind, having been there before, I'm already there. In our own heads, we're gone.

The ants know this, they can sense it, and with no sense of urgency at all they begin to slowly invade and take over the North Carolina kitchen we're leaving behind.

9/9/2013 I was thinking it wouldn't feel like tour til we left the state, but it felt like tour the night of our first show in Greensboro. "It's your mentality," Jiha told me this morning, standing on the porch in Richmond, sweeping dirt onto the sidewalk from the tall, tall stoop. "You're ready to go. You're ready to take on the world." She made a swooping motion with her hands.

The momentous kickoff in Greensboro swept us and engulfed us and folded us and swallowed us whole, and shit us out the next morning on our best friend's bed, tired, sleep deprived, and maybe even still a little drunk. Duke Energy had shut our electricity off a day early, and without light or water, the house we were leaving behind felt silent and weird. We opted to spend the night in town, with the luxury of amenities and hope contained within watts on the ceiling. I used to live in abandoned buildings, squatting farm houses on the New Mexico border, without hot water or electricity. I loved it, then; it was my pride; now, with a family, this sentiment has shifted. Outlets and light switches have got me.

Lio woke bright and chirpy, "Hiya, Mama! Hiya, Dada! Mayo, outside!" ('Mayo' is what he calls our Australian Cattle dog Chamero). We piled in the van and drove to our old home, snatching articles of clothing, tossing trash, hauling items to the curb that were garnered by pulling-over passerby almost as soon as we could move them out there. In the planning and excitement of tour, we had yet to really finish moving. Months before, we'd started the gnarled practice of slow-cooked giving away of everything, exuding, delivering, shedding, excavating, unfurling, cracking off, chipping, pulling away, all of it, our home, our stupid earthly possessions. We kept some stuff. We kept practically every drawing Lio ever made. We kept rocks he'd collected on trips to the trails or the city park, leaves and acorns – he'd held those cherished treasures to his chest from such an early age. It was the reason he discovered what pockets are, and still, at two years of age, the only purpose he has for them. We kept a bag containing peanut beginnings he'd chewed on at a seed exchange in Winston-Salem, and a raisin box he once held onto for days on our passage through upstate New York in the middle of a cold winter. His first pair of tiny shoes, the first time he drew a circle, letters from his great grandma – these are the things we put in boxes and drove halfway across the country to our friend's garage prior to going on tour. These are the things in another friend's basement, stacked to the ceiling, waiting, wondering, probably, where they are going to go next.

For weeks, we continued to scrape, pry, toss, exile, shove, push, pull, and cast off every last thing in the house. Then we gave our album to the world!!! We

had an album release party. We kept working and dreaming and purging ourselves of everything that wouldn't, couldn't, fit into our van. We are okay at this. We have done this before.

Our day jobs ended. We stepped out of them lightly, nimbly, but still, their residual scenarios worked themselves out in our nightly dreams. One day went by, one flustered and celebratory and nervous day, and then, the next morning, we drove to the airport and picked up our band.

That was the beginning!

The beginning continues.

You should embrace it! An Interview with our Child Tender Jiha
{9/12/2013}

Jiha and I got down over some crappy hotel breakfast in our room in Baltimore with Sheryl Crow playing a new tune on Colbert in the background. Miss Crow had the whole hotel room singing, "Give it to me!" But nobody had ever heard the song before. We continued our interview on the windy freeway on the way to one of the Baltimore airports, where Jiha was to make her return home after a week on the road with our band watching two-year-old Lio.

Kate: This isn't the first time you've been out on the road with us. What made you want to come back for another leg of tour?

Jiha: For one, I adore Lio. It was a really nice experience last time, going up to New York with you guys. Traveling together last time gave us a closer connection. I was able to learn a lot more about you both through that trip, as well as get closer to Lio. So why wouldn't I want to? You guys are awesome!

Do you have other little ones in your life that you get to care for or see frequently?

I have a niece and nephew that I don't get to see too frequently. They live in Toronto. I got to see them last month. We get to see each other about once or twice a year, but we Skype pretty often, about every couple of weeks. I'm definitely really close to them. I've always really loved kids. And Lio is just so easy to love, you know?

Can you recount this trip for us? This portion of the journey?

For me, because I'm so comfortable with you guys and have known you guys for some time now, it feels as though I'm a part of the family. Spending time with Lio isn't anything out of the ordinary for me, so I don't feel like I have to put any extra effort into it, it just comes naturally. I think a lot of that has to do with Lio's personality, too. He's such a laid back, relaxed kid. I think because he's around a lot of people, and traveling a lot, he's comfortable in a lot of differ-

ent situations, so it makes it pretty easy to take care of him. I didn't feel like a nanny tagging along as much as I felt like a close friend who cares a lot of Lio and loves you guys. So it's been awesome. It feels like time has flown by. It feels like it was short, but really sweet, for sure. And I would totally do it again any time!

What's your favorite place that we went to on this leg?

I liked a little bit of everywhere we went. I thought Charlottesville was super quaint and definitely has a lot of history, and it was nice to kind of get a feel for that. We spent a bit more time in Richmond, and that was really nice - just getting to be outside, and checking out the river, and meeting really nice people - complete strangers who opened their homes to us. You don't see that very often. Most people are skeptical about letting people in to their homes. It goes to show that there are super nice people that are willing to open their homes up and be hospitable. Having the morning in Baltimore to get a feel for the city and to explore was really nice. People always give easterners a bad wrap, but everyone I've encountered was definitely super nice. So that was kind of a change in perspective. It goes to show you can't generalize people just because they're from a certain area.

Do you have a favorite Lio moment from the trip?

Seeing how he instantly connected with Mona (a 9-year-old rescued puppy mill momma Basset hound in Richmond) was so sweet. Their bond was super sweet. Getting to experience that was so wonderful. They were so great together. And when I was making Lio mac and cheese, and he was so excited to eat his mac and cheese - that was great. Being around Lio in general, I always have a great time because he's such a good kid. For the most part, being able to chill out with the band, and the sweet little moments I had with Lio, are the small things that made the trip what it was. Seeing how much Lio has changed since the last time I went on the road with you guys, and how observant he is, and how much he has grown - spending this time with him has been precious.

We'll be touring a lot in the next year. Do you have any advice for other caregivers that may come along with us?

For anybody who decides to come along and take care of Lio in the future, you want to come with a completely open mind, and have a go with the flow attitude, and just embrace everything. When you're in this situation, you never know what the day is going to bring. Sometimes you need to find a last minute place to stay. It's important to have that open-minded kind of outlook because you're with a lot of people, and there are a ton of things going on. Sometimes it's chaotic. You should embrace it!

{9/13/2013 kate} Time zapped us to now. We've played Greensboro, two Raleigh shows, Charlottesville, Richmond, and Baltimore, and are on our way to

our seventh show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. We're set to roll into Philly fairly early. I think the prospects of a few hours of down time outside of the van sound pretty damn enlightening to us all.

We've been on the road for one week as of this morning, and it's been one of those myriad, mysterious, edgy weeks on the road where it feels like we left Greensboro either a day or a year ago. Has really just one week passed? We were dragging our furniture to the side of the road and hugging our GSO pals goodbye til the next, and then, POOF, we've got seven shows under our belts, we've already waved goodbye to our first sitter, and we're headed toward NYC. I've finally taken deep, full lungs of air, shaken the residual effects of moving and planning out of my bones, and am nesting down for the pulp of our journey. It's hard to believe it has already been a week, and it's hard for me to fathom that it's taken a full seven days to shed my skin and morph into the touring lifestyle.

Now that I'm here, it could last forever! We've got the knack. Hawk drives anything under four hours, no problem. Chamero's nestled in between the driver and passenger seats, smiling, alternately gazing at one of us adoringly and laying his head on Hawk's lap for cuddles. Lio and I are camped out in the middle row. Before we left, I sewed special detachable curtains for around his car seat. There's one that blacks out the big picture window, one that covers the space between he and the driver, a curtain behind him to separate the third row, and a big curtain that goes up between he and I. It seems Lio has also fallen into the swing of things; his out of the blue "No nap, Mama!" signifies that it is, indeed, nap time, and I pop the curtains up on to the Velcro. When I peek through two minutes later, he's out, awash in a sea of racing car noises and wind whooshing through the windows, in a neat little dark box of Napville, Pop. 1. We'd talked about curtains after the last tour, when, no matter how tired and cranky Lio became, he simply wouldn't shut his eyes in favor of saving face in front of whoever else was in the van. The slightest conversation, cough, radio change, or sunlight peeking through to him would have stirred him twice over, and the times he fell asleep on his own accord were too few and far between to make for a consistent napping schedule. Now, I'm amazed how well this curtain idea has worked – how easily he drifts off, how refreshed he awakes after sleeping in darkness. And how much he loves the curtains – when I put them up, there's never any protest. He gets this giddy look on his face, and I say, "Are you ready for your house, Lio?" Oh, hell yes, he is ready for his house. He's so excited to have his own little area. I remember how much I loved that as a kid – having my own little niche. Every treehouse, passing motor home, and fort in the woods was an open door into imagination and expression. And for Lio, it's clear he also feels safe in his little nest, snuggling his stuffed fox Woo Woo, feet up on a soft pillow, a light breeze floating in and swirling around his sweaty little neck.

I still have a crush on Charlottesville. Once again I find it has a Truman-Show-like quality, but sincerely, not creepily, of everyone being ridiculously kind and put together and gentle and observant and open. We filled up The Garage by Lee Park, Ben's guitar scrapes and Matt's beats and our keyboards and voices and rhythms bouncing off the brick and sailing over the giant horse statue and surrounding shrubs and spilling into Downtown Charlottesville. Lio sat on the hill in the dark next to Jiha, clapping, "More, Mama! More, Dada!" and cheering after every song. There is nothing like your two-year-old son in the audience to boost your spirits, I'll tell you what. The fact that he digs our music is something I savor. When Lio got tired, Jiha took him into the van to watch movies and relax while we loaded our gear. Though there was a huge house available to us next door to the venue for their comfort, it seems Lio felt more at home in the van, snuggled in Jiha's lap with his head on her shoulder, watching bulldozers pushing dirt around on a DVD playing on a little screen. We really put the "all" in an "all ages" show, and I love that.

Richmond was next, another city, another world. We drove there after the show in C'ville and spent the night at a new friend's house. Here was a fellow, named James, who heard our music online, enjoyed it, asked when we were coming to Richmond, and, when the answer was, "Maybe next month," took it upon himself not only to offer us a place to stay, but to find us a venue, set up our show, and be our host for the whole visit. It still sort of boggles my mind that someone could and would be this open hearted to complete strangers. James had a Basset hound named Mona who Lio immediately fell in love with. During our visit, they snuggled, kissed, leaned in to each other, sat by each other, slept next to each other, and were inseparable for the whole day and a half we were there. After we went off to play our show, Lio tucked his stuffed fox in with Mona on the bed, then climbed up and lay by them, with plenty of kisses and nuzzles. James said Mona had been a rescue from a puppy mill, where she was made to churn out litter after litter without the satisfaction of raising her pups. We thought that between Woo Woo and Lio, Mona was feeling pretty motherly.

Our show in DC was canceled at the last minute, and we took advantage of the extra time off by hanging out with a couple of our favorite people, Tara and Jared in Church Hill, Maryland, about an hour and a half outside of Baltimore on the eastern shore. Tara is a radical homemaker, and upon arrival we hung out with her chickens and raced around her garden and yard before feasting on spaghetti with home made tomato sauce (with tomatoes from her garden), and some locally harvested venison. We had freshly harvested greens, wine, and home baked bread with garden garlic. After dinner, relaxed and stuffed, we turned to conversation out of doors. Lio pretended to ride their lawnmower and poked around their garage full of gardening implements while we caught

up and chatted. A bit later, Tara and Jared shared with us their elaborate stock of pickled vegetables, homemade moonshine, and homemade fruit vodkas. We drank blueberry and cherry vodka, the best moonshine I've ever had, and had tastes of pickled beets, pickled garlic, several different types of pickles, pickled carrots, and much, much more. The spread before us was daunting enough, but Tara informed us she had also baked a fresh, from-scratch peach and custard pie that morning. So, we, and our stomachs and minds, were in heaven.

In the morning, we fired up some tea and coffee, caught up on some paperwork, had some awesome conversations, and, before we knew it, were packing up the van in dankly humid temperatures and heading back to Baltimore for our gig that night.

{9/19/2013} We recorded a Daytrotter session this morning after waking up at 6:30 to eat sandwiches and not shower and roll our things up and pack up and head out to the van... trips carrying bedding, suitcases, coolers, bags, more bags, down flights of really tall Chicago stairs, down half a block... and back up... it was dim and cool, and the street people smiled at us even though we were so so so groggy. We played a house show in the basement of a three-story artist's paradise in Chicago last night, a night after playing at the college in Beloit. Which was the day after a 15+ hour drive from NYC. It traces back two weeks now! Of awesome shows and good times and great fucking people.

Our Daytrotter recording was so much fun, definitely a highlight for me (among many on this trip) and I think for all of us, as a crew, as a team, as a roving pack of wild sweaty people who like to bash on instruments. The engineer, Mike, was a super guy who spent a lot of time figuring out where we were coming from and honing in on our mix. It put the recording bug in me 1000x more than I already feel. Something about wires and levels and headphones and mixes in a recording setting is just the best feeling. I'm excited to continue to figure out our live instrumentation as a four piece, and to see how far we can push ourselves next month when we go back to a two piece now that we've had a full band. But there are so many songs sitting in the brim of our hearts that what I truly can't wait for is to hide out and record our next album. I have thousands of miles to look forward to this!

We got to hang with our label peeps in New York this weekend. They came to both shows in the city to support us. It was like this big fucking awesome collective sigh. These people are so fucking awesome, humble, and cool, and just amazing and fun to hang out and talk with. We get to spend time with these people, and be artists.

In Beloit, Hawk and I talk about how much we love playing for younger crowds because they are so hopeful and give so much sweet energy. Beloit made me super nostalgic about when I was really young and at

college. I realized a big difference between me now and the me of my youth is that, at 29, I don't romanticize depression.

In the bathroom in the Beloit College's Women's House, there are many things hanging on the walls. Poems about how it is okay to find your own stride. Inspirational shit. Also shit about cigarettes, and boys, and cheesy stuff. That was totally me at eighteen, and I'm glad. But a lot more awaits.

One of the signs said "Someone once told me the definition of hell: The last day you have on Earth, the person you became will meet the person you could have become." That one really punched me in the gut after I stood up from taking a whiz and was washing my hands. Wow, I thought. All of a sudden it was like, embarrassing to give anything less than 100%. And the easy fixes and corrections to chiropractor my soul seemed evident. I felt entirely and suddenly effortlessly ready to participate in a big change.

{9/29/2013} Here I am in James' apartment, alone (napping kiddo) for seemingly the first time in the month since this tour began. It was all scattering feet and chaos and chaos and chaos and bringing food in from the van and friends and rocking out and Lio talking about bulldozers and shows and carrying equipment in and out and out and in and driving and meeting bands and setting up merch and a show every night and then, POOF! Lull. Everyone is going home.

In a sad but glorious goodbye, Ben and Matt took off for Omaha this morning, where giant metal pods will sear them through space and time and deliver them home to their lovely ladies and cat/dog, respectively. I am uplifted after traveling with such two badass and wonderful people for the last month. In hindsight (they left about an hour ago) it was pretty fucking incredible. Together, we met in Greensboro, practiced for two days, then played 17 shows, including two festivals (Hopscotch in Raleigh and Maximum Ames), did a Love Drunk session, recorded a Daytrotter session, recorded a radio in-studio for KRNU at Fuse Recording in Lincoln, reunited with some of our first bandmates and best friends, traveled something like over 4000 miles, and went to see Yo La Tengo, who dedicated a song to us. We sat at bars and watched football and shimmied cables along thin stretches of slim stage real estate. You guys, we were doing this! We were living on the road for four weeks playing shows and raising a son and taking our dog on walks and runs. We were pushing notes together at various frequencies and nodding and bouncing around. We were a four-piece. Ah, those were the days!

Our tour quote was, "If I didn't have to TELL YOU 46 TIMES!" in a southern accent, after witnessing some pretty intense bickering between two country-style southern dudes with some drug histories outside of the venue at Hopscotch. The first guy was being real reasonable, trying to give directions or

have a simple exchange. And the second guy stormed off, shouting in this drunken prima-donna way, "Well if I didn't have to TELL YOU 46 TIMES!" If I've ever witnessed some kind of classic moment, this was the one.

Our Tour Family was pretty solid. Mom and Dad, a two-year-old, a tour pooch, and two other band members, sometimes with an extra babysitter. They loved and perhaps even came to understand our hyperactive border collie/coyote dog Chamero, and for that, I am grateful. And now they are basically family to Lio, which is beyond meaningful to us all.

I feel like Lio might feel like he's in the cast of "Three Men and a Baby" or "Full House" or something. Here are all these goofy, quippy adults with a wavering adeptness at popular culture shooting one-liners and introducing him to cool family friends and playing games and kidding around with him and dealing with everyday life. I feel like he likes it a lot. He enjoys the freedoms of millions of new activities. He loves Matt and Ben and John and all of our dear friends. He truly knows them. They are his pals, too, and have a unique and independent relationship than ours. For our friends who know and love Lio, which may be one and the same, we are very fortunate. He is so lucky to have so many amazing adults in his life.

In the coming days, Hawk and I will rest and practice and figure out new songs. We'll start some demos and kick it with our best songwriting pal, James Finch. When we hit the road again later this week, we'll be a lonely little two-piece, back out for a couple more months. And I bet we'll both still hear the band playing in the background for awhile.

10/6/2013 A man walks out of a bar with his friend to enter a ship departing from the Bahamas. "Do you want a cigarette?" Asked the friend. "No," said the man, "I don't smoke." Then he thought, "I am going to go tell that woman from back in there that she is the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." So he did, and she asked him if he wanted to split a cigarette. "Well, sure," he said.

We picked Chad up from a bus depot in Des Moines. Then Grandma made a delicious meal of green beans, mashed cheesy potatoes, banana pudding, and pork tenderloin. Lio stuffed a massive pile of green beans down the hatch and began running in wild circles around the living room, which usually means he is ready to nap. He collapsed on a pillow on the floor and lay motionless for a moment. "Do you think he's ready for his N-A-P?" I ask Hawk. "No nap!" Cries the weightless lump on the floor. Crap! I think. He can spell!

In the van, Lio and I giggle and talk about bulldozers and fire trucks and Lio recounts the story of riding the lawnmower with Grandpa the day before. "Rode lawnmower with Grandpa," he says. "Loud. Pushed the button with my knee. Lights." He is thrilled to get a lawnmower ride from Grandpa each

time we visit.

Right before we leave town, I think I saw a flake of snow. "I see snow!" I call to Hawk as we're loading up the van. "I see snow, too!" he shouts back. Hawk finds the Chiefs on the radio, and it begins to rain in sleety, frigid droplets. Chad tells us it's snowing back in Omaha, just two hours away. With silent resolve, we plug into the van and set off toward Rock Island, hoping we're chasing Fall and leaving winter behind, at least for a few weeks.

Lio is weary. I velcro his blackout curtains to the ceiling of the van, separating him from the rest of us. It's the keenest tour improvement of the year. Today, he fusses, and says, "No house." "DVD player," he says. "Cat and mouse, please." He wants to watch Tom and Jerry. Since our show went til two last night, and we got home at three, went to bed at four, and got up at seven fifteen (Hawk) and ten fifteen (me), I don't feel like listening to tired wails quite yet. I hook the DVD player up to the car lighter, and set it on top of the toy shelf in front of Lio's car seat. A minute later he gasps, "Cat fire, momma!" and six minutes later he's sawing logs clutching his stuffed fox Woo Woo, cozy under a blanket, nestled within stuffed animals in his own private house. That's what being a kid is all about – tiny, fun spaces to call your own, and feeling safe and comfortable in them, with your mom right outside the door.

The sleet subsides, then turns into rain, which trickles off until it's the tiniest of droplets, then nothing. The landscape of eastern Iowa bends and folds, some trees lime green, some bursting already into red and orange hues. I remember again and again that it is October, that we left two years ago from Iowa in October, thinking we'd be chasing Fall, but instead, finding ourselves in the beginning of winter everywhere. Last night, in bed after the show, I scooped the tops of my feet into the bottoms of Hawk's, reveling in their absolute heat, convinced I'd found the warmest spot in the house.

We've been on the road for almost five weeks, with seven left to go. The rain quickens once more, and we carry on, floating along on the freeway, admiring midwestern views and slowly leaking out of the middle of the country.

Monday, October 14 2013 | Brooklyn, NY

It's been 41 days and 32 shows, in so many cities.

There are big swoops: Lio is aging. He is tall and nimble and merciless. Everything is a bulldozer – the bright yellow ceramic lemon squeezer on John's kitchen shelf; a small empty shoebox beep-beeping backward through a pile of rock; his bare hands in the gravel outside of a deli in New Jersey.

Inside, an old man, ostensibly a customer, espouses rampant feelings toward both presidents and food. He is belligerent, and is lecturing the Indian man-

ager of the store about “American history” as I walk through the door. “Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492!” he was shouting. “I’m not kidding, I’m serious! Did you know the names of the three ships he sailed?” Chad, who is traveling with us, tells him the names of the ships, because, yeah, everyone knows the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. And weren’t there more ships? Ships that didn’t make it? And wasn’t Columbus trying to prove something to the Queen? And who cares, anyway? It’s an algorithm for a steady stream of disasters and misfires, manifest destiny, no real truth; and we’re in the center, trying to do things we care about.

“I’m telling him this,” the old man says to Chad after hearing the ships identified. He gestures in the rudest possible way, with his hand digging into his pants pocket, his elbow sticking out all wobbly, toward the man behind the deli counter. “He’s from India. Not America. But he’s from a true democracy. Not like we have here, with this _____ character we have in office. This is a tyranny!” So this is my baseline of this guy. Who has the energy to validate this? I don’t. This dude doesn’t give a S what I think. Lately I feel like my energy is this small and sacred thing, boundless but necessitating good use. And I don’t want my parrot two-year-old son to hear me talk smack to a stranger.

That’s what I think about lately, on these long drives – is it better to engage, or to ignore? And it’s not clear. The engagement is tough because you give your whole self, and then your whole self is susceptible. But it feels crappy to ignore things, to pretend they don’t exist, to think they’ll go away if I just don’t feed into them. I don’t know if that’s true, either. All of life seems a gentle balance.

I order a cheese sandwich for Lio, and the old man says, “Hey, you? Is that a cheese sandwich for your son? Listen, do you want to hear a story about a cheese sandwich?” After 41 days and 32 shows, I just pretend I didn’t hear him and turn my back in an effortless and concentrated denial of this person’s need for attention. Lio and I go to explore the OTC medicine counter and then make a break for it outside in the sunshine, on a near perfect Fall day, the second of two perfect fall days in a row amid a short series of heat waves and cold snaps. No, I do not want to hear a story about a fucking cheese sandwich. My story is right here, in my arms, 3’3” tall and 33 pounds.

Well, Hawk got the story about the cheese sandwich when he went in to grab our food. The story was this: “My granddaughter came to visit me, and we went to the Cracker Barrel, and do you know what she ordered? A cheese sandwich!” Scoff. “Now, I just don’t understand how you can go someplace and order a cheese, sandwich.”

I think he was losing his marbles, and needed a reassurance from the world that what he is thinking is true and real. But I also didn’t feel like I could give him that. Should I have gently taken his hand, asked

for his address, and escorted him home to unwind his excitability with tea and a warm compress? Part of me thinks so. Well, we’ve been using cheese sandwich quotes all day now.

And there are these bigger swoops: there are the people we meet, many of whom know each other, who were introduced to us by others, who know still more of the people we know and love. Facebook tells me how many friends we have in common, and I’m startled. I played a show at a Prague club in 2009 while visiting my pal Izzy on tour in the Czech Republic. And then in Omaha, now, years later, a girl who used to work at that same club in Prague is working the door for a show at the Barley Street. Of course she knows Izzy, a girl I met when I was 16 in California at a sort of summer camp at Stanford for potential future lawyers. Of course she’s here now, smiling and nodding from partway around the world. These are the big swoops.

There are smaller, mini swoops. Each night contains within it new friends, old friends, friends who know friends, several works of art, and your own performance. There are the places you stay, bombarded by our pasts and presents and futures. We shack up with friends we haven’t seen in years, with friends we see all the time, with friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends. We stay with the Olympic gold medal winning mother of our international digital distributor. In Ohio, we stay with a country man whose father was the Reverend at a church attended, as a child, by a man who has come to a couple of our shows in Virginia. Friends who used to live in towns send their old pals out, and friends who never lived in those towns at all – Cincinnati, Baltimore – live there now, suddenly, in the weird puzzle pieces of life, and we reconnect in lands foreign to our friendship. We play with bands of friends we’ve had for years, friends in new bands with other old friends, friends in old bands with new friends, bands of friends of friends and people who used to play together and people who still play together, just not that night.

{10/23/13} Presently soaring along the New Jersey interstate with beautiful changing leaves, en route to Philadelphia. Son-Son just fell asleep after an energetic morning at Great-Grandma’s. There’s a fund drive on the radio. It’s raining in a million pin drop specks. After a week in New York City, it feels good to be on the road again, to watch trees go past and see the dog’s head bob up, and to stop and get coffee.

This is home to me. This is where I was born. The leaves and trees are my leaves and trees, the dips in the earth are carved from the same knife as my body. And Hawk loves New Jersey, can never believe how nice people are, how they’re down to earth and real and present and not aimed to impress. We fall into step and love the food and I breathe a sigh of relief, this is why I am the way I am, these are my tics and mannerisms. Sometimes we think about living here.

My Grandma makes a huge dinner for the whole family on the night we arrive, fresh off a recording session at WFMU – Jersey City, a community radio station Rolling Stone named The Best for years running. My aunts and uncles and cousins all come over, and the kiddos play and we all talk for hours around the dinner table. Lio, who did not take a nap, has drooping eyes and sagging expressions as the night wears on. A little after 9, we tuck him in, and after a few minutes of puny wails, he's out, and sawing logs.

That morning we'd left Brooklyn for Hoboken, and in a happy, short journey landed outside the stately building of Bar/None. We parked down a narrow street, let Chamero run around, then carried our napless child up to the second floor, where the magic lives. But really, the whole building is magic – once a furniture warehouse and manufacturing center, the building was purchased with the intent of turning it into a musical haven. So there's an entertainment lawyer, several recording studios, storage space for artists not on the road, a huge rehearsal space where the greats come to learn dance moves and set up their super-stage shows without entering the hustle of the city. The lawyer is a super cool dude who has a daughter slightly older than Lio, who more than happily invites us into his ground floor office (after Lio catches sight of a life-size stuffed tiger in there) to have a meeting instead of a toyless upstairs. So Lio entertains himself while we chat with the label. Chamero the road dog stretches out and falls asleep on the wood floor, and we settle in and chat about this tour and the next tour, and this album and the the next, and these plans and those plans and this and that. The longer we talk, the more I realize how lucky we are, and the more I love these people that we get to work with.

We root around in the office for awhile afterward. Every time a band comes up or a story surfaces about some Bar/None history, Mark or Glenn reach into a certain cabinet or flip-down box or stack and pull out the corresponding band's album, and hand it to us to take along. There are mounds of demos and outgoing mail and I can't even imagine how many metric tons of vinyl and albums prepared and ready for their new homes. The art on the walls is enviable. Chamero takes a certain liking to one of the pictures on the wall, jumping up to look at it again and again and whining as if it's a portal he could somehow jump through.

The Hoboken/Weehawken border is kind to us as the great epic Music Hall spits us out into the light of day. The sun isn't harsh, it's inviting; the streets aren't narrow, they're gentle and quaint; the construction worker taking a break on the back of his truck grins with great admiration and without inhibition at the cute beast at the end of my ragged leash. The transition is fluid, we're headed to WFMU to record a taped in-studio session, though without a time limitation they might have had to drag me away.

14 minutes later we're nabbing the last metered parking space in front of the 4-story radio building. A couple minutes after that, we're buzzing in. A cheery

woman replies, "Come on up!" But we don't really know how far "up" to go, and we stop one floor too soon and disembark at the massive listening library. I poke my head into the library, and the back of a man is facing me, his posture articulating the awareness he's creating between himself and whatever record he's got spinning before him. "Um," I say, but he doesn't turn. I wait a few awkward minutes for him to notice I'm there, caught between not wanting to interrupt his "moment" and knowing damn well that I'm about to interrupt it anyway. By the time he realizes I'm there, Hawk has already gotten the green light from another staff member, and we're trudging the 50-odd stairs to the next floor. "I see why you took the elevator," the kind gentleman says, as Lio hip-hops each stair individually in tiny bursts of accentuated energies with one hand firmly adhered to the railing. We all laugh.

WFMU rules, and they rule hard. They rule in an unencumbered way that says they've long been in the lead, but you get the feeling that they don't give one crap about it. So though they far surpass the status quo, they make it look easy, like they're somehow kicking back and letting the waves of goodness just roll on in. But the stacks of pledge premiums sitting in the staff room say otherwise. The volume of volunteers and supporters are veins to the central nervous system of an intelligent being of its own force, and that's WFMU.

"Does the elevator here go sideways?" Hawk asks our host Julie. "Why would it go sideways?" she says. "I don't know," Hawk says. "It just felt like it was going sideways!" There's some Willy Wonka shit going on in our bones these days. The millions and billions of trips up and down elevators, and seven weeks in a van traveling down interstates, and standing on top of subway lines and riding trains and lack of sleep and poor nutrition and all that – our knees are wobbly. The elevator may as well have been moving sideways.

The session room is awesome. The drums are solid and sound great. We realize we could really use a new cymbal. They have my favorite Fender twin reverb amp, the one that's 50 times louder than I'd ever need it to be. The one that I probably could not move by myself, even with casters. After years of touring, I never use a collection of gear that's more than I can carry on one trip if necessary. But today, I'll use this studio amp.

Irene engineers. She's magnificent and sweet and mellow and taking it all in stride. We play a bunch of songs and say some goofy things in between some of them, and start one of them over three times because of various personal mistakes. It's all good, it's taped. Still-napless Lio eats host-provided veggie sticks and half a bag of mint Milano cookies from his nest in his play pen in the studio while watching "Cars" on mute on Netflix. Right when I think I'm going to get him to lay his head down, like he'll finally crash out (he often falls asleep when we're playing or

practicing), he instead bursts awake with a newfound Milano chocolate resolve. Julie and Irene invite Lio into the control room, which they decide he'd love. After the next song, he asks into the talkback mic for his stuffed fox Woo Woo. I bring him Woo Woo. Lio and Woo Woo hang in the engineer's booth for the rest of the afternoon. I don't know how they get him to keep his little twiddly fingers away from the 3,000 knobs on their studio board. WFMU, I'm tellin' ya!

The next day we head to Philly to play a show. We stop off to have lunch with our good buddy Dom from DRGN King. Lio eats most of a PB&J and Hawk and I swap bites like Bridge players, left and right, reaching over and under each other's arms to steal fries and dips. I wonder if this means we're cute cos we're a couple, or we're like, gross because we've been on the road for two months and we just don't fucking care that we smell bad and unabashedly eat each other's food. I think our social graces have evaporated. It's kind of awesome to start from zero.

I'm beginning to think that 7 weeks on the road is the magic crux, the secret door, the critical mass for everyone you've ever met and every place you'll ever be being inextricably and extricably tied together in past, present, and future. At the restaurant in Philly, when we're walking up, I'm like, holy shit, there in the window, it's Keith! Of all the places & people. "Hey," I walk up immediately, "Kate!" he says. Woah! It's my old pal from New Mexico, and Food Not Bombs co-founder, Keith McHenry. And here he is now, in Philly, getting lunch after speaking at a convention. I met Keith working for a NPR affiliate in the southwest. He had moved to New Mexico, and his activism preceded him. In his initial stint in Taos, Keith re-invigorated the town's FNB chapter, organized marches for peace, and began a community center, all while facing ongoing charges in other states for non-violent sit-ins and for feeding homeless people free food, which, surprisingly, some people find perversely threatening. As a reporter, I interviewed him several times. Once we were doing a live interview in the studio, talking about FNB and upcoming events. Keith was waxing on FNB, talking about all these great new chapters opening up all over the world. "There's even a new branch in Germany," he said on-air. "I got an email from a girl in Frankfurt yesterday." "Was her name Nikki?" I asked. And it was. Naturally, my lifetime BFF who had recently relocated to Germany had also been talking to Keith, unbeknownst to either of us. That is so Keith. That is so Nikki! Christ. I wished I had a button or a t-shirt or an album or something to give him, but we'd walked to the cafe, and I couldn't scrounge up anything. Keith showed me pictures of his abundant vegetable harvest, and we commiserated over the fact that once New Mexico is in your blood and in your heart, it's just damn well there for good and for always.

Then you find out that the owners of the shop in Philly are great friends with the sister of the woman who once put you up in DC through a mutual

friend, and your kids played together, and they wore the same socks...

And on and on and on.

After lunch, Dom walked us back to our van and said he'd see us at the show. We crawled into the van and immediately, Lio said, "Where's Dom?"

There's something in the air. As we were setting up at Red Hook Coffee, a man walked up to me with a sheet of paper. It was my long-lost second cousin (as in, twenty years since we last met up, as in, I was a little kid), who handed me a family tree, and watched as I slowly put it together with my dulled 7-weeks-on-the-road brain before giving me a giant hug and sticking around for the show.

{11/1/2013} We're in Durham, soaking in the rain. Hawk's making grilled cheeses with tomatoes, mozzarella, sharp cheddar, and basil paste; KZ's got the tomato soup spilling over on the stove top. Larry pops on a live Tom Jones concert from 2011. Lio affectionately and physically adores the cats in a way that's borderline antagonistic. Chamero yips from the guest room; Larry whisks the cats off to be fed; Chamero emerges; it's the cycle of the guest house, and here, 40 shows in, with 11 left to go of this nearly three-month tour, we're loving every minute of it. This is Life. This is the good stuff. It's hectic, it's insane, it's full of details and decisions and inquiries and caffeine-fueled benders of tour-planning and babysitter planning and "Hey, can you watch Lio on Friday night?" and, "Hey, do you mind if we crash at your house? We'll make dinner!" And I feel like I could go forever, on a marathon of cities and short sleeps and long sleeps and highways and thresholds into venues; of van straightening, of tidying, of admiring our sweet little travel nest that is the innards of a '94 Chevy G20 named Sarah, the endless amount of cashing in on the host-karma of all the bands we've taken in, all those meals we've made. I can't shake this feeling that most people don't like their personal space invaded, their schedules inflicted upon, their home life interrupted – that no matter how benign we can manage to make ourselves as guests, we're almost always in some way infringing, even if, in reality, we're just more added molecules in a room. But our hosts are unequivocally unruffled. And the energy it takes to be a house guest, I'm realizing, might be equivalent to the energy expended to host one. Thus, we've paced ourselves, a mighty feat considering we've been social every day and every night for going on 9 weeks. It feels a bit over the top, cramming this many new friends and faces and places into each 24-hour increment. It has me fantasizing about quiet mornings to ourselves, about thoughtful pondering while looking over mountains and making coffee in silence and playing guitar and writing songs and recording drums and coming up with new keys parts! Ah yes. All of these things will come when we get off the road. But holy shit, for now, we revel the hell outta our pals, new and old. The connections we make, the conversations

we have, and the stories we share bind us and bond us. We're lucky to know so many incredible people who are doing so many incredible things – that has always been abundantly clear. But then to visit them, to sit around a table and drink wine and listen, is something else, entirely. I feel enormous gratitude and luck toward life and the magical people it has brought our way. Or have we brought the way, and life is coloring it? Which came first, our desire to see the world and infuse it with pop songs, or this web or fantastical people revolving and spinning like neurons around the country? Were they raised together?

We usually have no trouble finding a venue – it's just one sweep by and an electronic voice telling us its weird psychoanalytic way, "You have arrived." Then, there it is – no, that one – and then we park and and we'll walk in and survey the scene and figure out where to load in. But tonight, driving around in the pouring rain and ill-lit streets with a malfunctioning GPS, we simply have no idea where Duke Coffeehouse is. Primary to many college layouts, the streets are small, curvy, and unmarked. Plus, as I mentioned, it's pouring rain. Hawk rolls down the window and asks for directions from a youth-faced young man, for whom, it turns out, it may or may not be a first time ever giving directions. He tells us it's a brick building (setting it apart from zero other buildings in plain sight) and that it's "over there." Except, he doesn't point, or anything. After lucklessly trying to extract more information from this incommunicative member of the next generation, we drive "over there" and proceed to get tangled in a web of tiny one-way maintenance roads for small college service vehicles. We stop again to ask directions – this time I buzz my window down to two students. My god, they look young. I remember being that young. Suddenly, my experiences crumble me. Wow. The collective experiences of my 20's rise up to greet me. These people have so much before them! I think about this time-frame and am astounded so much has taken place. So, um, where's this coffeehouse? "Just, like, go down there," says one, motioning in the general direction of every other building on campus. "You'll see it." "Yeah, just like, right down that road?" The other points, too, in the same general direction. "It's behind that other building." "Is it brick?" I ask. "Yeah," they say excitedly.

At the Duke Coffeehouse (which ended up, in the end, being fairly easy to find) we toss Pink Flag some whiskey money, joke a lot, and set up. There's a lot of confusion about whether we're doing a sound check or a line check. We go back and forth about 50 times, even going so far as to set everything up, but then we don't really check any house levels, just our own, and shove it all in the corner so Pink Flag can warm up with some CCR tunes and a few of their own nasty beast songs. Now, I love Pink Flag! They are one of my favorite bands we've ever played with. They are great people. They are OUR people, ya know? We drink some Maker's Mark and Whole Foods ginger beer/club sodas, toasting all the way. I give Betsy a cd for her car. Some people better show up, because this

is going to be a fantastic fucking show!

After the show (which was amazing on many levels), we take our sweet ass time loading out before hopping in with Betsy's roommate to find some burritos. We spend our merch money on a meal and talk forever, dreaming of tours and collaborations. Finally, we head back to our van, happy as larks, another 3 AM morning that makes for an early rise with the youngster. But oh, worth it.

{11/4/2013} A billboard in North Carolina speaks to me: "Be the rich, eccentric relative you wish you had."

Tour is a sensory explosion, and Lio is loving it. He has grown up so much on the road. Speaking in sentences, knowing the proper names for things that we don't see regularly, using his little manners... it's such a trip. We communicate so much better after this 9-week stint, like our family unit is a symbiotic sponge, half esp and half hashing it out. We're testing the waters, we're watching Mighty Machines and mouse movies, we're drawing bulldozers and refusing to say the ABC's, requesting "Pubba J's" (PB&J's) thirty times per day and sleeping in different places every night – together.

Together, together, together. I feel like the luckiest fucking family in the world. It's like working from home, and home is all over the United States. We were worried, before we started, that three months on the road for a two-and-a-half year old would mean tantrums, resentments, and a lack of cordial order sacred to most young families. Yet we've managed to carve out a pattern, a rhythm, the buzz-worded "routine" – waking, meals, playtime, nap times, bedtimes. Maybe cos he's our spawn, and we dig this. I'm surprised by the efficient, flexible little path we're walking. It's so liberating to let the days shape you. It's relieving to embrace something that's living for exactly what you want to (minus the horrific number of dollars we spend fueling our van. Have they made a tour-worthy hybrid yet?). And it's just kind of frickin' awesome. I don't know all the reasons why. We're poor, but we're rich with experience. We're tired, but we're breathing great full lungs of air. It's like an Alanis Morissette song for the weary traveler!

Growth spurts are incredible waves. Lio grew some pretty wicked molars at the start of tour, and ate little, with slightly restless sleeps and cranky post-naps. Now that's beyond us, and he's a butterfly from a cocoon, eating his weight in food every day (he had three separate breakfasts today – a PB&J, a blueberry muffin, and an egg and cheese breakfast sandwich) – and has turned wonderfully chatty, chipper, and hyper-aware. His love for bulldozers is undiminished, his mouse-movie obsession remains, and his beautiful little soul is unfolding in time-lapse succession right before our eyes.

This morning he was in stitches over the fact that

the fire alarm went off at our pal's house while I was taking a shower, the steam overbearing the cool air of our room. Hawk flew out of bed, flapping a blanket at the ceiling, which caused the type of deep-belly laughs I remember Lio making as a super young baby. So Lio's laughing his baby bum off on the bed, Hawk's laughing now because Lio's laughing, the fire alarm grinds to a halt, and Lio jumps up with his own blanket, flapping it over his head at the ceiling, mimicking dad, laughing gleefully.

This is the part that I'm ever so grateful for. I know we'll have to find new jobs when we hunker down, and figure out ways to have an income so we can continue to provide for our family and build up the next nest-egg to hold our future dreams. And I'm excited for that, and ready for it, too. I can't wait to see what it holds, to reunite with old f-r-e-n's and forge new musical friendships. But these days, I'm savoring every moment of our togetherness. I can't even tell you how much it means to me to have my own little close-knit family that grows and learns together. We're becoming thick as thieves.

{11/20/2013}

Our dear, old pal Chad stepped into the role of co-traveler on tour as we again headed east from the midwest, marking the midpoint of our journey. It was early October, the whole country was awash in flames, and Chad was the easiest traveling companion we'd ever had: smart, caring, courteous, and adaptable to each varied scenario. By day, he added conversation and friendship; by night, he watched our young son as we drove off into the sphere to play whatever gig was on the table.

The following is a guest post by Chad about his time on the road with us!

*"I don't wanna live my life
Feelin' bad all the time
About 20 different days
I coulda spent better."
— Eros and the Eschaton*

The reality and romanticism of the road aren't always aligned, but when they are, it's one of the most beautiful things in the world. I certainly won't be feeling less than joy about the days I spent on the road with Adam, Katey, Lio and Chamero anytime soon.

It started in Des Moines, where I caught a Megabus from Omaha to meet Eros and the Eschaton midway through their fall tour. They swooped me up at the bus stop with their conversion van and the text message:

"This all feels very stealth. We'll roll by slowly, hop on like a freight train."

So, I slumped into the front seat with my book bag and nothing else, and we were on our way. After the initial how ya beens there was no need to say any-

thing else as we had days of road ahead of us and it was the kind of grey day that is more suited for silence anyway. Adam tuned through radio stations trying to stay connected to the Chiefs game that eventually crackled into noise as we drove out of range of the signal. From then on, most of the days, places and faces blurred by in a flash and faded into white noise as most of my travels do. I got a unique look into the life of my friends, with little clips and blips that still stick sharp in my memory.

Somewhere, two-year-old Lio and I played in the dirt for hours.

In some town, we stayed with a 1968 Olympic gold medalist in swimming who was there for the Black Power salute—historical encounters.

In a basement corner somewhere, Adam and I laid out blankets and traded e-cig vapor flavors like old baseball cards as if we were in some kind of secret boys clubs—a late night throwback to boyhood forts.

One morning, water was pouring from a kitchen ceiling.

"Fuck! Oh, Fuck!" Adam was yelling while I laid there dreaming that the sound was rain and wondering why Adam was so upset about it. I woke up and realized that the bathtub upstairs had flooded the pipes and Jumanjid us downstairs where we attempted to pot and pan the destruction. I don't think any major damage was done.

At some sports bar, Adam and I had lunch and a heart-to-heart about life, technology and fatherhood. I told him that out of all the things I've done, I thought raising a child would be the most challenging and rewarding. He told me that everything he worried about before having a child seems trivial and now worries about his son's well being. He half jokes, "Someday he'll be 30 and trying to figure out his career and blaming me for all his inadequacies." Afterwards, I went for a walk and watched a lumberjack competition.

In a deli, an elderly man was lecturing the Indian man behind the counter about American history. He was clearly slipping into dementia and had no filter and never stopped talking and was slightly racist but I wasn't sure if he realized it. I wondered if this was how he spent his days, harassing the deli workers and customers with his opinions. I also wondered if he was lonely. Adam and I shot each other glances with every remark he prattled our way. "Obama's a dictator." "These black kids would climb in through the window." "Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1942" To Katey he said, "Hey, girl. Hey. Come over here. Wanna hear a story about a cheese sandwich?"

At one point, there was some delirious late night confusion about a Kindle as we set up Netflix to

watch a documentary.

“What is this?” I asked Adam about the device.
“What is this?” he tried clarifying a moment later, pointing at the Kindle, which now had Netflix loaded up.
“It’s Netflix. What do you mean?” I was confused.
“Wait, what? Who is Harry Nilsson?” Adam asked.
“He’s a singer song writer. He’s pretty great,” I answered.
“No, I know. That’s the name of the documentary,” he replied.
This story is funny, but not if you weren’t there.

On a farm somewhere, Lio and I rode a tractor through the woods where he pooped on my lap and I learned how to change a diaper for the first time.

Some lady somewhere told Adam and I we looked like musicians. I told her he was a ballerina.

At one of the shows, there was a strange atmosphere and timid glam rock.

On some subway, some girl showed me how to get home.

On some street, I was given free chicken wings.

At someone’s house, we ate cheese from France.

As a general overview, most of the days went like this:

We’d wake up early,
We’d drive for hours,
We’d arrive at someone’s house,
They’d leave for the show,
I’d entertain a toddler,
I’d put him to bed,
I’d wait for the band to get home,
We’d have a few drinks when they did,
We’d go to bed around 3 a.m.,
We’d wake up early,
We’d drive for hours...

Of course, there was more to it than this with a million little moments in between that could probably never be properly explained, as with most things.

A lot of our time together was spent on the road where we exchanged stories, music, insights and farts. Some days, we’d sit in silence and listen to the rain tap on the windshield or Alan Watts through the speakers. On others, the sun would shine through and we’d have those unclouded conversations about life and love. I’ve spent a lot of time traveling, which has made me incredibly bored of small talk and, luckily, Adam and Katey are easy to talk to about more interesting or entertaining topics. I valued our thousand-mile dialogues about our perceived views of the universe—or making poop jokes. Anything

but that compulsory, tiresome weather talk. I’d rather just be silent and usually am.

For the tour, their van is their home and it felt like a home. It’s decorated with knickknacks and blankets and coffee mugs and clothing. Lio has his own little area that can be sectioned off by blankets with toys and Tom and Jerry DVDs. I usually rode shotgun to converse with whoever was driving while whoever wasn’t rode in back to take care of Lio. Sometimes, I’d drive in silence while the others caught up on sleep and sometimes we’d speak in accents. At one point, Adam was trying to hammer in a fuse he just bought that didn’t quite fit and in a southern drawl was declaring he was, “wasting all our hard earned time and money.” Characters.

Chamero is a super loyal dog. We could stop anywhere to let him out and he would never run off. He would take care of his business and hop right back in. Whenever he was allowed to stay in the house with us, he would share the couch with me and we became good pals. He was loving with Lio even though Lio would sometimes test his love.

Lio is a great kid. Probably one of the cutest toddlers I’ve encountered. Much of his upbringing has been on the road and he seemed to do fairly well with it or because of it. He enjoys movies about mice and playing with dump trucks. Most nights with him were spent watching *The Great Mouse Detective* and playing with toys. Sometimes, I’d make PB&J sandwiches or “boobajay” as Lio called them—they usually ended up fingerprinted onto my shirt or fed to me when Lio was feeling generous or full. We’d often pretend I was a bulldozer or chase a ball around or I’d get chased around by Lio as I jumped in the air like Mario. Sometimes, when he was sad about his parents leaving for a show, I would start filling his dump truck with rocks and he would instantly feel better. The difficult times came when there were cats around because Lio loved them and would sometimes test how hard he could love them. And reasoning with a two year old is damn near impossible—an oxymoron in verb form. Somewhere along the line for Lio, my presence began to represent that his parents were leaving for a show and anytime he saw me, he’d shout, “No!” At some point, he started declaring, “Naptime, Chad!” like he was in charge. He might have been trying to reverse our roles by telling me to go to bed or maybe he was just sick of seeing me around. The road wears on everyone, especially a two year old, but when we got along, we had a blast.

Katey is quite the matriarch. She juggles many things at once. She is often setting up and promoting shows while making sure we have a place to sleep, keeping up a daily tour blog while updating their social media, or giving an interview over the phone while giving Lio a bath. She does all of this while balancing playing in a band and being a caring mother. I don’t know how she does it. I was exhaust-

ed with my little role on the tour and, still, she had energy to make great conversation on the road while constantly putting up with three dudes.

Adam is an entertaining character and sings like a damn angel. He also has this unique ability to purposefully make any given moment subtly awkward, which when you pick up on it, is quite amusing. He usually has this sly look in his eyes like he doesn't quite buy what anyone's selling and is one of the most naturally talented people I've ever met.

I wore the same clothes everyday like a cartoon and thought the fall was beautiful.

And now I'm writing this little blog entry from a coach class seat of the California Zephyr and Amtrak my way back to Omaha from water tower rooftops of Manhattan. Earlier in the dining car, there was me standing at the window with a coffee and Chardonnay in hand, smiling out at the blurred scenery as America rolled by, listening to the hum noise of the rails and thinking about how quickly my life blurs, crackles and flashes by, telling myself not to hold on to anything but to just sway back and forth with the train and appreciate the flash. I'm thinking about the past ten days of my life and the uniquely whimsical, musically familial, mini adventure I just experienced while touring East with Adam, Katey, Lio, Chamero, Eros and the Eschaton. I miss them already and probably will for quite some time. But now it definitely is naptime, Chad.

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{11/24/2013} An open window on the freeway is a force blow dryer; every city has a welcome mat. No matter where you go, you are home. There is a certain resilience in anyone's traveling spirit, that emotes and grows each time a host shows where the towels are kept, and each time we go over sleeping arrangements, then take a minute to gather ourselves in the guest room before making a run out to the van to get supplies.

Claire M. made blueberry pancakes; KZ made buckwheats. The Houfeks grilled. Jeremy and Cori made steaks once, then, two months later, a pot roast; we made baked mac and cheese. James got us Thai food. Tara paraded a litany of delicious local/homegrown and prepared items-pickled everything, liquor flavored from the hard, plain earth. In Minneapolis, my mom bought our whole band something like seven Pizza Luce pizzas. Hawk's mom gave us a leftover wedding feast. The Normans made spring rolls and fresh juice and fed us whiskey and chocolate. A friend of a friend in Cincinnati took us out on the town. Best friends put us up for days, and our child napped in a spare room while we got oil changes and did laundry. What is this world? Is this what happens, in life? Thank you, everybody.

And this goes on, forever, every day! Part of me wonders where our stamina came from, but, look at this long list of people who fed us amazing food and gave us great love and company. It is a very long and heartfelt list. In that way, you could go on maybe forever. How could anyone be luckier? And then, we are playing music every night. It all flies by faster than one could truly soak it in, but I know it is going to mean a lot to us for the rest of our lives.

Your pals put you up and you take care of each other and you all cook for each other and share warmth in boxes made of wood and brick. In every house there is a look exchanged between humans that means more than the host or yourself can describe. What is the look, exactly?

The look means, Is this life? What is real? Are we just playing roles? What role are we playing? What role are you playing? Can we forget our roles, take them off like sweaty T-shirts, and toss them in the corner to rest and air? Should we burn those T-shirts? This is what the look says. It is an underground form of communication that can only be communicated through voice or first-hand, direct experience. It is not something you can write in a Facebook post. It is not rare or undignified. It is the best thing a person can accumulate. And everyone gives you this look – your best friends in Greensboro who put you up for a week, and you are all raising your children in between park visits and dinners and shows – and your radical house-maker friends give this look almost as their natural expression – for some it's a hasty thing they throw on before running to work. But guess what, everyone, it's all the fucking same, which means we're all fucking in this together and we're all in it together for the same reasons.

Well, that's news enough to celebrate.

See you on the next tour.

* * * * *

{3/5/2014} We started our drive to Alamosa from Colorado Springs on a beautiful, bright morning. La Veta pass was a breeze, soaring up and over and cutting through the thin air. I thought the pass would be dangerous; I remembered it as a treacherous journey; but it was nothing, a snap, over and gone before I even had time to realize we were descending the incline. Lio slept in his little cabin, we listened to some weird podcasts, Conor told jokes, we laughed, then we kept grinning.

Alamosa is a dream. Having lived here for a couple of years in my early 20s, I am reminded of the magic taking place, the wildness of those years, and then I, and my family, are reunited with the beloved hearts of some of my favorite people on the planet. Allison, a dear old friend with a million passions and talents, cooks dinner while entertaining all of the kids and keeping a vibrant conversation up. She's miraculous,

and before we can even blink, she presents several kinds of gluten-less homemade pizza and raw milk and coffee to fuel the rest of our night. We fill her beautiful adobe house with vigor and excitement. As we're standing in the driveway talking, a huge UPS truck flies up to drop off our t-shirts from Starman Press in Minneapolis. I dance on the gravel, so excited. Friends stop by to say hi, and then we whisk off to the venue.

The Cottonwood Syndicate in Alamosa is a new collective of San Luis Valley artists who work and sell their art together. They are superbly talented and running an amazing space that doubled as a venue for our first show of tour. Kids danced and played with toy cars as we sound checked. Friends old and new mingled and perused art. Lares and Bothe began with an awesome set of banjo/electric guitar rock songs. We loved it, and the kids danced and bopped. In fact, the whole crowd was dancing and bopping. Conor played next, introducing The Changing Colors to some new folks. While we played, I was overwhelmed by the smiling faces looking back at us. So many old pals, so many memories. Deb and Frank, two of my old radio station/jamming friends, were there, front and center – after the show, Deb came up and said, “I want to give you the shirt off my back. Want it?” She unbuttoned her top layer to reveal a Ryman Auditorium long-sleeve. “I can get another – I have friends in Nashville,” she winked. Then she went into the bathroom, changed out of her shirt, and gave it to me. Love is an understatement, folks. I wish I'd taken a picture of us together. Deb has been such an inspiring and loving presence for me over the years.

Rocky came, and Becky, and Lurette, and Julie and Melissa and Bella and Allison with all of the kiddos. So many floating faces representing such a magnificent life.

I feel like this is the start of a new era for us. Prior to today, we released an album in August, went on a three-month-solid 11,000 mile tour, then landed in Colorado, where we've spent the last three months changing bank accounts, license plates and insurances, reworking our live setup, writing new songs and arranging them, judiciously recording experiments, adopting light day jobs to sustain ourselves, and just enjoying being in one place for awhile. We were all geared up to do another long tour this year, but now that we're here, we're realizing we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to just BE. We may gratefully forego some of this running around and the total stress of booking long stints in order to, you know. Create. I want to spread out on my living room floor and hook keyboards up to weird things and test how they sound. I want to run mics from amps to other amps to pedals and old things we find on Craigslist. I want to experiment, to write songs together, to bask in the day-in-and-day-out of recording and to put our noses to the grindstone.

But right now, we're headed on tour to Texas for two

weeks, to spend our SXSW experience loving life with pals from around the country.

{3/7/2014} I am writing from a driveway in the middle of nowhere in New Mexico.

It's a two year old's paradise, and Lio is using a rake, shovel, a pair of tongs, and an arsenal of bulldozers to create a dirt road system in the dirt by the van. He's also playing a game where he runs up and down a board throwing single rocks at a time over the edge.

Now the boys sleep in the wood-stoved house while Lio and I adventure outside. Later we'll go to Taos and eat breakfast and explore. Our cell phones don't work out here, so we're just livin' life. It's heartwarming to me. I've spent so much time on these roads, in these little pockets of the southwest. It's hard to believe the trip continues – that this is only day three. Show three is tonight in Amarillo.

Before we left New Mexico, Lio wandered into the sagebrush fields while we were playing hide-and-seek and got quite lost. It was terrifying, and I couldn't find him right away. I thought he was hiding in one of the greenhouses, or behind a fence, and spent a lot of time looking. Then realized he was way out there, in the sage brush, and could barely hear him calling back when we called to him. My legs are stinging from running through the fields at top speed, the gnarled branches slicing my bare shins, to get to him.

When we got out there - way out there - he was composed, his shoe had fallen off.

{3/8/2014} I wrote on my napkin that Amarillo is the kind of place where people come up to you after the show to make sure you have a place to stay. I drank herbal tea all night. It felt great. We got a super hip, young crowd who bought albums and made us feel really good. After the show I think, “Okay, that was it, we're a band now.” Like maybe up until now, it has all been one long practice session. The 806 and its staff are very welcoming, and our host Lindsey stays back to watch Lio while her partner Devin checks out the show. We have awesome conversations with several people after we play. It's rejuvenating, like somehow this little Texas town gets us.

Lio is amazing during the long drive to Amarillo. When we get to our hosts', he flattens out and is suddenly weary. Hawk and Conor head to the venue to scope it out and unload. I hang back to play with Lio and Zephyr, who is nearly a year old. Lindsey is a beautiful, calm mama. It's no wonder Z. smiles all the time. The kids pretend to be cats and take each other's cars and fire engines and eat an avocado and that kind of thing. Lio is a little punchy and unrestful, maybe too tired to not feel overstimulated by a new room full of awesome baby toys and people. We tuck him in before we leave, but after we're gone he gets out of bed and goes to watch a movie with the

rest of the family.

{3/8/2014} We woke up on a couch in Amarillo.

My eyes always flit a little when Lio rises in the morning, like my psyche knows he's awake and a subconscious part of my brain and awareness activate to meet his cognition. I need to know my child's awake because I need to know what my child is doing. Somehow, every morning, I come to just a matter of moments before he stirs. It must be biology, it's happened since he was born. My body can feel it. Isn't that weird?

Somehow, even though we've only spent a few hours here, our things have accumulated in every corner of the house. I fish our snacks out of the fridge and our tomatoes from the counter, gather our pillows and blankets, and begin to carry things out to the van.

The first seven hours to Austin were mine, having a seven-hour-long conversation with Conor while Hawk slept and Lio played with tractors and ate popcorn and cheddar bunnies and mixed tree nuts. We stopped at a gas station for a luxurious leg stretch, followed by hitting up our first Texas thrift store (irresistible).

For the past couple days, I've felt people look at us, and then at our Colorado plates, and think, "Oh, it's begun." It's that time of year again. It's clear the influx of bands is felt from every corridor, seeping in from surrounding state lines, even from the air. It's like a nervous system driving against the grain deep into the heart of Texas. (Clap clap.)

At the thrift store I search out cowboy boots. I find a pair of sweet ones for \$15, and an attendant tells me I need these boots, that they were made for me. I believe him. Conor finds a sign that says "Live, Love, Rock" and takes our picture in front of it. We're sort of tired and delirious. We don't really feel like getting back in the van right away.

Conor has really taken to Lio's Halloween Wee Sing tape. If Lio ever starts to cry in the van – which is rare – we pop in the Wee Sing, and then everything's cool. Hawk takes over to drive the last two hours, and we pop in the tape to ride out the last few minutes of the trip. People drive REALLY fast in Texas. I don't feel the speed limit has dipped below 75 in 12 hours. We're all time traveling, it's not even a big deal. I actually got a callous today from the steering wheel.

Now we're spinning along in the van, still on our way to Austin. I'm next to Lio, and in the dark, we're holding hands.

{3/11/2014} "I feel like I am not going to be able to write about this til tonight," I scribbled on a slip of paper.

We pulled into Ranger Creek Brewery in the midst

of a heavy rain. Puddles and mud grew from the downpour as we ran inside to see where to load in. We talked to the staff about maybe playing inside, instead of outside as planned. There had been talk of canceling the event, but luckily a little rain never hurt anyone. By the time we met our promoters, the Music for Listeners duo of Orlando and Michael, outside and inside was filled with hundreds of happy San Antonians ready to sip away their afternoon. They wore ponchos and held umbrellas, snaking back and forth waiting in massive lines to get delicious beer.

Oh a whim, since the other band had to cancel, we asked if Conor could open the show. This idea was met warmly. Suddenly he had a show in front of hundreds of people instead of just watching Pee-Wee Herman in the van with Lio. (By the way, the two of them do an amazing Large Marge impersonation.)

Michael and Orlando are awesome, and they ask if we will do a three-hour radio show for them sometime, and we nod without a moment's hesitation. We talk Yo La Tengo for so long that I feel like I've accomplished something – like I've been studying and critical thinking about real subject matter. Michael from Music for Listeners met Terence McKenna in 1997. I do the math and am continuously unphased yet saddened by TMK's early departure. I am so entranced by this fellowship of TMK and YLT. And not only are we playing this huge brewery party – but we are playing for MFL again tonight, in San Antonio, with an electronic band Michael says he hasn't seen in almost 15 years. Reuniting for tonight. Is today the most epic day or tour, ever? Possibly.

Ranger Creek Brewery simply rules. The patrons are from San Antonio and beyond. It's clear that the Brewery's open houses are a staple of entertainment for a ton of people, one of those things you always just show up for, knowing it'll be a great time. The staff did a flawless job, and we got to talk to lots of people who work for the Brewery and/or who have been coming for years. Before we left, one of the bartenders got the attention of a brewer, who snuck us into a back room and unearthed two bottles of fine whiskey for our trip, as well as two commemorative Ranger Creek glasses. Score! We decided we'd drink a bottle with Desi once she gets here, and save the other for a special occasion, maybe even something years down the line.

I text our label to tell them the show rocks while Lio puts his "house" up (velcro curtains we've attached to the ceiling so he can sleep). Lio is the greatest kid on earth.

After Ranger Creek, we pile into the van and drive to the hotel. Michael from MFL hangs with us. We order pizza and relax, and are only there for a little bit before running off to our next show. We play at Hi-Tones, a SA staple. The first band, formerly Fun Machine (hey, we know all about cease and desists!), now AM Transistor Ghost, open the night. Orlan-

do tells us how they used to be a band 16 years ago, went their separate ways, and reunited to play this show, practicing for 6 hours just that morning after their Moog came out of the shop. They were awesome. Also, I want a Moog!

{3/11/2014} When we got back to our hotel in San Antonio after the show it was 2AM, but with Daylight Savings f'ing us, it was actually 3. We walked through the door and Lio was croupy. He's only had a croup cough once, when he was very small, over a year ago. At the time it was so freaky to hear that seal rattle coming from a kid. Our midwife (who became Lio's pediatrician after he was born) suggested rotating bouts of Tylenol and Advil at the time, which we travel with. We steamed out the bathroom by running hot water incessantly until Lio calmed down. Hawk cradled him in his arms, swaying back and forth. We put Lio back to sleep, and Hawk flew off to buy a humidifier. He returned around 4:30 AM, we plugged it in, rocked Lio some more, and finally fell into bed around 6:00. At 8:00 we awoke, knowing we had another long drive ahead to Dallas. Lio was still coughing, and we were running behind, but we packed up and jumped into the van. I drove while Hawk caught up on sleep.

We gave Lio some melatonin, and he slept. By the time we got to Dallas, Lio was chipper and alert, happily back to his old self while his nose ran and his little cough surfaced just once in awhile. He's such a tough kid.

Our show in Dallas was a SoFar Sounds secret show! We loaded in to a crazily posh and fabulous hotel called Nylo, met the other bands, and set up our gear backstage – which was poolside. I had only slept a couple hours and was pretty shaky from the long drive, but the sunshine felt great, and the warmth of the promoters and audience was genuine. Sofar Sounds is an international movement of secret concerts that attendees RSVP to, not knowing where the show will be (only that it's in their city) nor who will be playing. They have a reputation for bringing eclectic bills together, and this was no exception – British crooners, jazz piano, and stompy honkey-tonk with a shoegaze band. Cool.

Lio jumped in mud puddles and moved dirt with his tractor set outside while the party finished up. We met so many wonderful people that I developed a Perma-Smile®. I did feel really crazy after staying up all night with Lio, driving, hot sun, etc, so I didn't feel super confident about my personal performance, but everyone was so overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the event that it was hard to hold onto any of that. They really made us to feel that we're all in this together!

After the show, we drove to our host's home in Little Elm. We got Lio in the bathtub, and I finally laid down. I tried to stay in bed and rest, but when I heard The Last Waltz being broadcast over their TV, I had to get up and join in the fun. I think I would

have regretted not spending social time with such incredible hosts and people as Ryan and Niki. Niki is a lifelong Texan, and Ryan is an Iowa boy like Hawk. They have a six-week-old baby named Otis who is so darling and wonderful I think my ovaries started to pang a little. I just can't thank these guys enough for making us so comfortable and opening their home to us. We bonded over our children, the family life, music, and travel. They even sent us off with snacks and travel fare in the morning. We love Texas!

{3/12/2014} First thing Monday morning, we confused ourselves over and over at the Dallas airport, finally coming face to face with our friend who is watching Lio in Austin! We chatted, we drove, we ate road snacks and had divine rest stop experiences hill-rolling and tractor-ing and making Lio laugh. We made it to Austin in no time and got to work enjoying the sun.

We hit up an incredible thrift store. We got Lio a dump truck as promised for his overall admirable road behavior, and Hawk got some cutoff shorts. Hawk also tried on a few pairs of pants to be hilarious, like gigantic overalls that were already hanging in his dressing room, and male jeggings. Conor browsed books and cat napped in a comfy-looking rocking chair while we pursued for a mind-numbing length of time. After dropping Conor off with his Austin hosts, we made our way to Hawk's pal Joel's house to settle in for the week. We broke open our Ranger Creek whiskey, sat back, and enjoyed getting to know one another while mentally stretching our road legs. It felt SO GOOD (and still does!) to be in one place for more than a few hours! Woohoo!

The night ended with reading a book about San Francisco to Lio. It is such a pleasure to see Lio so cozy and happy. I know I always say this, but I just love that we get so spend so much great time together as a family on tour – and with our best friends, too.

{3/14/2014} Day One of SXSW!! We wake in Austin, make breakfast, kiss Lio goodbye for the morning, fly outside, zip downtown, get a free bike cart ride, and are dropped off by our nice peddler Jacob at the Convention Center – the hub of all that is Sx. After some startled milling about, we sign in, get bands slapped fairly unceremoniously onto our wrists (VOID IF SEVERED, TAPED, STRETCHED, OR NOT SNUG ON WRIST), and race with our boots/sandals to Proof Advertising a handful of blocks away. I'd been eyeing a panel on tapes and zines, as I'm in the eye of the creative storm of kndling up a zine project when we get home.

After the panel, we jumped onto the sidewalk and loomed behind, then scared the shit out of Conor, who of all people we saw walking on the sidewalk. We all got street dogs and Hawk and I headed over to the Convention Center to recharge and plan the rest of the day. We stepped inside the Center's Sx Trade Show around noon, amazed at the hundreds

of booths full of technological advances and free branded t-shirts. We proceeded to make the rounds, literally, traveling up and down every single row, entering contests, getting what people kept referring to as “swag,” drinking large amounts of free beer, joking with booth attendants, eating great snacks, and chatting up dozens and dozens of people gathered to share their music and news from all over the world. It was such a highlight of our journey thus far – sort of like a weird date, roaming around together, enjoying each other’s company and the company of all of these hundreds of ideas and the brains that thought them up.

We snuck in to see Neil Young give a speech about his music listening device Pono. Neil Young is my hero, so this is pretty much the best day of my life. (The Austin portion of the SXSW tour diary hereafter is centered around our wild, weird, and wacky alcohol-fueled 7 shows in 5 days. We’ll resume post-SxSw outbound to Norman, Oklahoma!)

{3/19/2014} We woke up way too early, forgetting many things in Joel’s apartment. We carried our 86 bags down to the van. We said goodbye.

Widely regarded as the “weirdest show on tour,” Norman, Oklahoma was a rather strange first stop after our departure from Austin. We were set to play an early show, and arrived to a bar full of smoking pool players drinking Pabst and listening to Modest Mouse. Hawk started off with a solo set while I went next door to a burger place to get us food. When I returned, he was playing “War Comes Home” to a vastly uncomfortable crowd. At the end of the song, though, everyone clapped appreciatively. E/E played next. We were loud and all of the people in the bar were sitting on the opposite end of the room. Oddly enough, although some inexplicable potentially drug-fueled/politically oppressive vibe permeated the room, we met a bunch of super nice people who were into it. It really wasn’t our crowd, but then, magically, it was. We took turns watching Lio in the van, and were out of there by 8:30, Norman on our heels.

{3/20/2014} I love coming back from tour; nothing seems real. You see the true light of your home for the second or third time. Every potential stands, ready to burst forward. We walk into our home and it is sparking clean from the housemates, and everyone is waiting for us. They help us carry things inside, we hug them, we stand around smiling, soaking it in. We take celebratory shots of whiskey in the souvenir Texas shot glasses we got them. We talk about how awesome it was, how incredible of a time we had, how Lio whined only once, and how that was ten minutes before we pulled into the driveway. They have leftover steak and Hawk cuts it apart to make fajitas while I unload the rest of the van.

There is a show at the house this week, and Bill asks us if we’re ready to host 60 people the day after next. “Fuck yes,” I say. Of course the best letdown to meeting new people every night and traveling from city

to city is a day’s rest followed by hosting 60 people for a show you can’t wait to see. I am excited to repay our tour karma. I want to make sure the bands are happy and healthy and comfortable as so many of our friends do for us when we’re on the road.

Still, nothing seems real. The house is so sunny and sharp and beautiful in the soft light; our housemate’s faces so wonderful to see. The long drive, a slight cold, returning in the afternoon sun, the whisky, all of it, blur the slight edges of everything. The afternoon turns into evening in a fit, cold and windy. In Kansas we’d traveled through snowstorms, many of them, followed by a few miles of patches of sun, then blizzard, again. Just when we felt we’d never make it home or we’d have to pull over, the sun came out and eased us along.

We stopped in little towns in Kansas and Colorado. None of them had gas pumps, and we were almost out of gas. We used bathrooms at a State Farm agency slash c-store, we traveled on down the road. We stopped at an auto store slash c-store, then again on down the road. We made our stops short and our leg stretches valuable. Lio read books, kicked his legs, looked out the window. Hawk saw a giant sales lot full of tractors and combines and farm implements, and we drove up and down, row by row, for Lio, slowly driving past a hundred shiny tractors, diggers, and graters. Lio was totally amazed and told us to Look!, was mystified, and, in his mind, had won the lottery for the day.

In the van, with a few hours left to go, we go around rating the tour on a scale from 1 to 13. First, 1 is the best, but it makes our scores sound wimpy, so we switch to 13 being the best. Conor gives it a 9, says his highlights were our first show in Alamosa – meeting the community there – and also touching butt sweat with Sean Lennon at a show at Sx when he used the bathroom after him. His “worst” is Norman, Oklahoma, because it was such a weird show. He hadn’t felt heard from the stage, but from the crowd it sounded wonderful and people were loving it. Sometimes it’s hard to tell those things when you’re playing music. I guess one of the hardest things in life is to just feel listened to, which is why it’s so fucking special when it does happen.

Hawk gives tour a 8.5 out of 13. He loved the Trade Show at Sx where we’d strolled around drinking free beer and obtaining a large collection of t-shirts from high-dollar companies and other things with images of Texas on them. And our beery cozy collection increased like 800%. We visited nearly every booth, and there must have been 500 of them, or more, with talking heads eager to show their latest advancements. For most of them, it was like, “Why would I pay you to do that?” Like the company was grasping at straws to think of something new and hip that was also basically completely worthless, especially to any culture except the one shoved down consumer’s throats. Where are the booths about air, water, creativity, food, and shelter? No booths like that. Just

promotional materials from my heart to yours. But whatever, fuck that, we made friends with everyone, found a common connection to literally every person we talked to. Everyone lived somewhere one of us has lived, was from somewhere we are from, loves something we love, knows someone we know, or has enthusiasm that's genuine and exchangeable. I don't know if it's ever dawned on me how totally fucking exchangeable energy/enthusiasm is. The real human connections are special in this sea of thousands of people milling about. We loved it, that connection-making.

Anyway, Hawk gives it a 8.5. His other best part was us staying with his high school buddy Joel and his four-year-old daughter, who made Lio's week five hundred times as interesting, between her company and all their fun and playing and the heaps of new toys to explore. On the last day we were in Austin, Joel got a call that their third musketeer from high school, Jason, was in San Antonio for a conference. Within minutes they had convinced him to drive to Austin. That kind of convergence is rare in life, and beautiful, and they stayed up all night giving each other shit and telling tall tales. It was so cool that something so meaningful happened on our last day in Austin, out of the blue. It made us all feel so good.

I gave the tour an 11 out of 13. My favorite parts were our official Sx showcase- hanging with our record label, meeting the cool bands from the other showcasing label, Old Flame, being a part of the magic and mayhem, seeing our label mates again. My other favorite part was sneaking into Neil Young's lecture, and getting to see him in that context. The worst part of tour for me was probably the five minutes before we just snuck into Neil Young, thinking we were not going to get in because we only had an artist's badge and you supposedly needed a press pass to get in. There were tears, and sympathetic ushers snuck us in.

Also just seeing so many awesome friends from all over the country - running into Twinsmith at Valhalla, Emily Price in the street at 2 AM, Isaac and Claire and Holly at Waterloo Cycles, and seeing so many Omaha friends who came out to support the band - seeing familiar and friendly faces is such an anchor during a whirlwind of part industrial complex, part Mardi Gras, part festival, part scene explosion. Sx is a "hip" thing to do, and/but there are a million really wonderful things going on around every corner, if you're up for it.

So we breeze into Colorado, and it feels like such home. I am surprised by this, but then, not really. After lots of hugs and cheers and love we scatter, tour fam disassembled. Our house mates are there to sweep up our pieces, listen to our rants and reflections, and, maybe, most importantly, to make plans.

In the morning I stare out at the desert landscape as I wait for the coffee water to boil. In the traces of the sky I see deer antlers, rising above the junipers,

scraping the blue sky, poking at the clouds. Then a movement, and a small gray rabbit double-backs against one of the little landscaped ridges outside, scattering itself this way, then that. What do rabbits think of, when they double-back?

Lio is in such a good mood, I can hardly stand it. He eats two bowls of cereal and asks for more. He grabs onto my feet and pulls himself up on the bed with them. He dances to music, brings me his little record player, changes the records and asks me to sing along. He loves Humpty Dumpty, Camptown Races, and Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. And the Children's Marching song.

"Yesterday, Remember? We saw some pieces for some tractors. And I want to see more tractors with more pieces," Lio says, dancing on top of a chair, holding onto my feet. "What are we going to see tonight?" he says. "Who's going to be there?"

"We're home, bud," I said. "We're gonna hang out here tonight."

"Is this our house, here with the mountains?" Lio asks, pointing. Whenever he got sad on the trip and missed Bill an Cole and Streeter, we'd say, we'll see them soon! And also, the mountains. We always mentioned the mountains, the landmark.

"Yup. This is it."

"This? Here? Is our house?" his eyes get wide, incredulous, all-knowing.

"Yup."

He settles in to re-explore his room. Lio's amazed by all his old toys. He can hardly believe they are all his. After his shower, getting ready to go back to work, I hear Hawk strumming a guitar in the next room, a beautiful tune that seems to resonate the entire house. It dwarves every other sound in the house. It gives our return home a tune to hum, a pace, an inclination. It gives our bodies a purpose. I write, I stop to think. I compile laundry, make stacks of each cities' alternative weekly and show posters and magazines and all the little items collected over fifteen days.

15 Days: Long enough for your spider plant to thrive, thinking you'd forgotten it. Long enough for your dog to learn how to behave, thinking you'd forgotten him, too. Long enough for a thick spiderweb to grow between the doors of the outside entrance. Long enough to feel renewed, anew. Long enough to remember it all, to capture it all. Long enough to know exactly what you have to do when you get home.

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