Thank God for a “Toadal Detour”

The road had a way of reminding us who was really in the driver’s seat—and it certainly wasn’t me.

On October 1st, bound for a motorhome rally, I managed to commit the cardinal sin of flat-towing: I failed to follow my own written instructions for connecting our 2018 automatic Ford Fiesta behind our 2006 Safari Trek. The transmission, thoroughly displeased with my oversight, when we hit 65 MPH promptly exploded all over Interstate 26. The damage far exceeded the little car's value, and a week later, I was handing over the title to someone buying it for parts.

That left us in a bind. We needed a new "toad" to pull behind the Trek, launching us into three weeks of scouring Facebook Marketplace, enthusiast groups, and automotive classifieds. Dottie had one firm requirement: it had to be an automatic so she could help at each end of an RV rally trip in parking or retrieving the toad. . It mattered less to me than finding one at the right price – as we had previous experience with both.

Eventually, we narrowed our search down to pre-2014 Honda CR-Vs, manual MINI Coopers—both of which we’d successfully towed behind previous coaches—and Jeeps.

Before long, our eyes locked onto a promising candidate: a 2012 Honda CR-V up in King, North Carolina. We exchanged

emails, swapped info, inspected photos, and ran the VIN. Everything lined up perfectly.

Early Monday morning, October 26, we loaded up our two dogs—Emi, our Kai Ken, and Sora, our Shiba Inu—and rolled out of Greenwood, South Carolina. The plan was simple: drive north, hit a bank branch in North Carolina closer to our destination to pick up cash for the purchase, buy the CR-V, camp overnight at the Mayberry Campground in Mt Airy North Carolina then head home Tuesday morning.

The road, however, had other plans.

About 30 miles southwest of Charlotte, electronic message boards warned that Interstate was closed up ahead at Exit 22. We pushed on until red taillights stretched to the horizon, prompting us to bail off at Exit 17. For the next hour, we meandered behind a crawl of displaced traffic while the Trek's dash GPS and our iPhones engaged in a silent, stubborn disagreement over the best detour. By the time we neared Mooresville, traffic ground to a complete halt for a five-mile stretch of construction. In the sudden lull, I rolled down my driver's window. That's when I caught it: a harsh, unmistakable sound of metal scraping on metal coming from my front wheel—even when my foot was nowhere near the brake pedal.

We need a repair shop right now, I thought.

As Providence would have it, we had just passed one the moment I rolled my window down. Siri redirected us back, and three minutes later we pulled into **Lake Norman Tire and Auto Center**. As luck—or grace—would have it, they specialized in RV brakes. Within a few hours, the Trek was lifted up on the bay, and the diagnosis came in: the front brakes were completely shot. The repair order called for a new disc brake pad set, new calipers, rotors, and wheel seals.

They graciously set us up for the night, connecting the coach to their 50-amp hookup and fresh water right on the lot. Resting in the quiet of the motorhome that night, the weight of the moment hit us. Had we stayed on the interstate at highway speeds, a sudden stop could have resulted in a devastating crash. Crawling through traffic with the window down was the *only* way we ever would have heard that faint scraping. It was yet another reminder that God was watching over us—one of the many reasons we praise His name and pray before every single trip.

The next morning, the shop crew jumped right to work. To help us get around while they worked, they offered us a loaner vehicle—25 cents a mile, just fill it back up before returning it. We piled Emi and Sora into the loaner, hit the bank branch to withdraw cash, and made the rest of the drive north to King to inspect the CR-V.

When we arrived, the Honda looked decent enough, matching the seller's photos. But the moment we took it out on a test drive, the illusion vanished. The ride was brutally harsh, feeling as though

the suspension had completely collapsed, accompanied by a front driver's side rattle that sounded dangerously like a failing wheel bearing. We popped the hood to investigate. We never located the rattle, but we did find something far worse: the automatic transmission was bone dry, not even registering on the dipstick.

We politely passed on the deal and turned back toward Mooresville.

After refueling the loaner, we pulled back into Lake Norman Tire and Auto Center. When we tried to pay for the 200 miles we'd put on the loaner car, the shop refused to accept a single cent for the mileage. A couple of hours later, the Trek's brake overhaul was complete. We handed over $3,100 in cash, thanked the crew, and pulled out around 3:30 PM.

With heavy I-77 South traffic and reports of yet another crash near the previous day's closure, we decided to ease our pace and spend Tuesday night camping at Spacious Skies in Gaffney, South Carolina. I had briefly seen an ad for a yellow Jeep for sale down in York, SC, but decided not to push our luck by squeezing another stop into an already long day.

Wednesday morning brought a quick detour to Boiling Springs to pick up a set of heavy stage speakers for some Christian friends launching a new worship experience targeted at young adults seeking spiritual growth. It was a quick 10-minute stop, and by lunchtime, we were back home in Greenwood unloading the rig.

The speakers were picked up the next morning, leaving Dottie and me to figure out our next move. We sat down and looked at the numbers:

We had originally withdrawn $9,200 in cash for the CR-V we didn't buy. We had paid $3,100 for the Trek's emergency brake job, leaving us with exactly $6,100 in cash in hand.
Then I checked the listing for the yellow Jeep in York again. The asking price? **$6,000 cash.**

The math was too perfect to be a coincidence. God had been orchestrating the numbers all along.

On Halloween morning—Saturday, October 31st—we fired up the Trek and drove two hours over to York, South Carolina. We met the owners, Tom and Cynthia Tillis, in a Food Lion parking lot. We crawled inside outside over and under that yellow Jeep. We took it on a thorough test drive, looked at each other, and knew: *This is the one.*

We lined up the Trek, hooked our BlueOx towbar directly to the Jeep's BlueOx baseplate, completed our safety checks, double-checked the pins, and hit the road home with our new toad trailing smoothly behind us.

After a phone call with my daughter whose husband is a Jeep fanatic, we were told that we needed to name our Jeep. T he theme for the new rig quickly crystallized with the help of Gemini AI and, after a few seconds, we had focused on The Wizard of OZ.

You see, our hometown of Greenwood, SC, is known as the *Emerald City*. My wife's name is *Dorothy*. The Jeep sitting in our driveway is as yellow as the Brick Road. Back when I worked in IT, my favorite line for troubleshooting mystery bugs was, *"Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain".* I dabble in magic, a craft passed down from my father, Rajah the Magician (a true wizard in his own right). And as an actor whose favorite role is playing Santa Claus, I've always figured that if I ever earn a lifetime achievement award, it ought to be an *OSCAR*—or rather, an **OZ-car**.

The name was obvious from the start.

Welcome to the family, **OZ**.

- Tim & Dottie Keppler
- Greenwood, South Carolina

Proverbs 3:5

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

"**Rejoice always, pray without ceasing**, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."


SAFARI
Jeep


WRANGLER
Sport
Jeep