



This book has many stories related to a lifetime of travel I have enjoyed, be it during road trips, home nursing visits, or a simple ride on an old family draft horse. I also love fishing and camping. Both have yielded story after story.

**A MILLION MILES AND COUNTING:
A Story Behind Every Mile**
By Gloria Jean Hansen

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A Story Behind Every Mile

A MILLION MILES AND COUNTING

A vibrant, cartoon-style illustration of a red off-road vehicle packed with travel gear. A dog is sticking its head out of the back. Three children are driving with excited expressions. The license plate reads "GO TRAVEL".

Gloria Jean Hansen

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TO BACK A BOAT

Many of my driven miles included getting to my favorite fishing hole. If I was fishing with a significant other, I needed to learn to put the boat in the water or at least help with what sometimes could end up a complicated procedure. All it took for the boat launching or docking to become difficult was a change in the weather. Coming in off a calm lake and a wind springs up out of nowhere and poof—waves splashing over the side, pushing the boat out of reach of the driver, not obeying the steering inside the boat, rain pelting down on the fishermen, not that rain much bothers us, but when you are tired out after a day or evening of fishing and dreaming of supper and the couch, a storm at the docks ruins that dream fast.

You see I have reached a point in life where I think I know everything there is to know about anything. I don't. I am humiliated on a regular basis to ram home that fact. I find no shortage of critics to keep me abreast of my incapacities, like backing a trailer into the water at a boat launch, for instance. I like driving. I believe I am a fairly good driver, and have been behind the wheel of everything from farm tractors to stiff-gear passenger coaches. I always practice defensive driving habits (meaning I drive like everyone else on the road is either asleep or crazy). I can parallel park with the best of them, and generally back nicely into tight spaces. Yet nowhere in that broad knowledge base of road smarts did I learn to back a pick-up into the lake while towing a boat and trailer.

Circumstances of recent years dictated that I either learn to do this, or stay home while the captain went fishing. Not about to miss a single opportunity with my fishing rod, I opt for the crash (?) course in trailer-backing. As we approach the landing, I am given the choice of maneuvering the boat onto the trailer, or taking the wheel of the truck.

Memories of learning to dock a boat the previous year still fresh and horrible in my mind, I choose the truck.

Many obstacles present themselves on shore. Two other trucks wait their turn, the drivers sour-looking and impatiently revving their motors. I figure they've been skunked at the fishing hole, and need to get it off their chests. A huge thunderhead is already spitting raindrops and streaking lightning across the bay, and the wind is rising. My captain waves cheerfully and hollers, "Give'er shit"

The first ten feet to goal are text book perfect. The trailer is beautifully aligned as I crest the slope to the water. From there, things go to pot. I am looking at too many things—my grumpy launch mates, the tree on the right, the rock pile on my left, the waiting boat doing a bump and grind on the darkening waves. Suddenly, the trailer edges to the right, and I try vainly to remember the action of the truck-versus-trailer in steering. The direction I yank the steering wheel is definitely not the right one. The trailer does a perfect jack knife, at right angles to the truck. I quickly pull ahead, not missing the fact that one waiting driver is rolling his eyes, the other has squeezed his shut while he shakes his head. My captain pretends he doesn't know me and hides under the canvas.

My next attempt backs me straight and true—directly into the tree. Ready to dissolve into tears of frustration, I take a moment to concentrate on the task at hand, line up the trailer in the rear view, and use only the visual field on the driver's side mirror to guide me to the water's edge. In five humiliating minutes, I have learned to focus. The captain plants the boat neatly on the trailer with a congratulatory wink. I add another notch to my driving skills belt, although I know it will be several more runs before I attain the "expert" status enjoyed by my captain.

The best moment of all, though, is watching the next driver go through almost the identical ritual as I in retrieving his boat, worse because the storm is now in full fury. I regret I did not stick around to roll my eyes skyward or shake my head at him, drum my impatient paws on my roof top as I watched, but nah. I had other fish to fry. Literally.



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