

A Transcendental Journey: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition

Stephen Evans

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A Transcendental Journey is a road-tripping travel memoir that's graced with humor, adventure, and wisdom.

Stephen Evans's eloquent memoir *A Transcendental Journey* is about his inward-looking, post-divorce road trip.

Abandoning the deadlines that drove him for forty years, and armed with a map, a stuffed moose, and Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Essays*, Evans quit his job and wandered west down 1-90, fueled by french fries and soda. His plan was to travel by day and write at night, with the silence of his solitary drive designed to give rise to potent personal and social insights.

The book's prose is variously witty and lyrical, whether it's recounting adrenaline-spiking or awe-provoking adventures. Evans muses on his lost dreams and uncertain future. Along the way, Emerson becomes akin to a guide into new ways of thinking and being: he "had shared the same life-altering encounter... [he] understood [and] had undergone the [same] transformation." Details about Emerson's life and thoughts add some context to the book's impressions of the outer world, which are made to intertwine with Evans's inner reflections, all winding toward a stop in South Dakota, where Evans recalls "breathing emancipation in with the prairie air."

Indeed, the text is consumed by its unfolding, chronologically shared personal revelations, which seem to come to Evans on a daily basis. These revelations push the book toward unfolding joy and a few pithy insights, like "I believe in respecting other people's beliefs. I just don't believe in believing them." Further, the book indulges in humor alongside its expressions of fear and vulnerability. Accounts of driving at the edge of a tornado, and along frightening mountain heights, mark the text, standing out alongside Evans's visits to caves and monuments, as well as alongside his random observations of natural features, including waterfalls, hawks, and stars. The book's descriptions, as of the "diffused luster [that] emanated from the saffron hills, illuminating the high drifting clouds," hold attention.

To flesh its personal accounts out, the book also reflects on the histories and backgrounds of the sites it covers, as well as including Evans's thoughts on topics including the nature of God, random number generation, and questions about "How [people] act in a world [they] have not evolved to comprehend." These winding considerations conclude in a natural place, with Evans arriving back home and taking a literal look into his rear view mirror, intoning that "everything looks different."

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KRISTINE MORRIS (April 4, 2022)

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