



GRAVEL ROADS

BY DAVE KEMP

“I close my eyes wishing we could be, at the end of a gravel road”

I’ve spent most of my life on gravel roads. They’re called dirt roads, county roads, caliche roads but by any name, they’re still gravel roads. That’s what we called them in Tennessee where I grew up. Some of my earliest memories are of walking down those kinds of roads in bare feet. A gravel road was the front most boundary of the yard at the house where I spent my impressionable years. Cars flying by would leave a smothering plume of dust, so to combat this problem we spread used motor oil on the road in front of the house. This was long before the EPA decided it wasn’t prudent to do so. We reasoned, oil came from the ground so what could be the error in returning it? We were just simple country folks.

Gravel roads can speak to you and have their own rhythm and voice. If you get off the highway and let a gravel road take you, you’ll hear it. They say things like “slow down, take your time” or “just keep going a little farther, let me show you what’s around the bend”. They often remind me of experiences kept safe in the shady, winding pathways of my mind. I only have to take that lonely pathway and I’m

transported back to that very moment in time as if it were some personal time machine. When the moon is full and bright you can drive without headlights unencumbered by the stark light of the city, and there all alone in that stillness, listen and you will hear the voices of a thousand travelers, their stories too numerous to tell.

I guess I eventually had to end up in the hill country of Texas. It seems a natural transition from my early experiences in Tennessee. If you have the luxury of living here and not having to commute to town for work, you are one of the fortunate few. You understand the richness and value of living in a small town, maybe on a gravel road.

Most of my inspiration and memories come from the rhythm and soul of a country road. I can still hear the sound of my old balloon tire bicycle plodding through the gravel in front of our house. Our old swimming hole was at the end of a gravel road. My dear brother and sister lie in a cemetery at the end of a gravel road. The old church where I first felt the tug of the Holy Spirit is at the end of a gravel road.

I can still smell the honeysuckle vines and the sweet fragrance of the tea weeds growing along the side of those gravel roads. I love to come home at night and turn on to my gravel road and see white-tail deer jump the fence in front of my truck. I think I’ll always live on a gravel road.

