



I've lost my keys, my temper and my heart. At times I've lost my marbles. Certainly, I've lost opportunities, my wits and my nerve. Not to mention money, glasses and concert tickets I carefully put someplace so I'd know where they were, and then they weren't.

There's a physics principal that states it's impossible to know simultaneously the exact position and exact speed of anything. I understand that because when I put my keys in one place, the little devils move at high speed to another place. Ergo quantum physics explained. And don't get me started on lost pounds because they always come back at high speed and there's no pinpointing their new location in reference to their old location.

Vacations are a prime time to lose things both material, such as phone chargers, and fears, such as expecting the worst or "awfulizing." Sometimes it's good to lose your inhibitions on vacation, although I'm not suggesting losing your conscience and respectability simultaneously. There's a difference between enjoying tubing on the river because you no longer care about looking bathing suit perfect (good for you!) versus acting like a jerk while tubing (bad for you and everyone else!).

Most people want to lose stress on vacation, but then obsess about the fastest route and how many activities they can stuff into a week. That voids the best stress busters--enjoying the "getting there" and "being in the moment". I had to explain this to friends as I planned my first driving trip alone outside of Texas in thirty years. I got advice on driving 500 miles a day, the fastest route through St. Louis and zipping in and out of fast food/gas station franchises on the interstate. Not my idea of a enjoyable trip.

I was traveling to Chicago to see family but also wanted a quiet drive, seeing the country and escaping daily routine. "Making time" on interstates while whizzing by orange burger outlets wasn't a concept that added adventure or fun. Then again, I would be alone and I'm older now, so how much adventure and fun could I stand?

In my younger days, I drove my pickup from Texas to the Appalachian Trail to Pittsburgh to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, back to Texas, and from Texas to Colorado. I wasn't by myself, however. I had a giant canine guard, mostly Rottweiler. Lone females driving a pickup with a gun rack across the back and a 101-pound dog on the front seat were pretty safe even without cell phones.

Now I'm older, drive a Subaru, and neither of my dogs are willing to travel politely. Although I love paper maps, learning to use my phone GPS was one common sense solution. I did gather maps and travel magazines, which thankfully still exist, but having GPS helped me lose "awfulizing." What was the worst that could happen? If I got lost, so be it. Every road led somewhere else eventually. If I had gas, I could handle it.

What I didn't count on was losing the charge in my phone, then two phone chargers and pieces thereof. That experience strengthened my belief that objects purposefully move themselves at high speed while snickering at humans trying to locate them. You may think I'm losing my marbles again but be honest. How many times have you lost something, searched everywhere, replaced it, and later found it exactly where you had previously looked? I tell you, it's a plot.

I lost my phone charge while driving, not realizing how quickly GPS would eat it up. I dutifully recharged the phone

overnight but in the wilds of backroads Missouri the GPS gave up the ghost. I soon came across a hamlet with a post office and little else. The lone postal worker was fun to talk with and I learned that this was one of the few U.S. post offices that lacked plumbing--no bathroom. That wasn't a lot of fun but it added to the adventure and I got good advice on the best roads to take toward Hannibal.

I know you're wondering why I didn't plug my phone into the car portal and recharge. That might have worked if I had found the portal. Seriously, I thumbed the Subaru booklet, checked the dashboard high and low, looked everywhere so I thought, but no portal. Since I had lost my fear of traveling alone by this time, I just settled in and enjoyed the drive the old-fashioned way--no technology aid.

I made it early evening to Hannibal, Mark Twain country along the Mississippi River, which I needed to cross to get to my hotel in Quincy, Illinois. Signs pointed the way downtown but there were no bridge crossing signs. Downtown Hannibal was devoid of stores and closed down for the day. No gas stations in sight and the tank was getting pretty low. My maps weren't much help because this area wasn't detailed.

Then, I spotted firemen washing their trucks outside their station. Luckily, they hadn't lost their sense of humor or patience and listened to my plight. One asked me if he could look in my car, flipped open the arm rest, removed the DVDs and uncovered the portal which had been hiding there all along. "Where's your car charger?" he asked. "What's a car charger?" I said. After they stopped laughing, one fireman insisted on giving me an extra plug that fit on the end of my charger and into the portal. Who knew? Not me!

None of those Missouri firemen are likely to read this so they'll never know that the next night I carefully tucked the car charger away in a safe place. I couldn't find it the next morning. Why didn't I leave it in the car? Beats me. Guess when I did find it? Back in Texas

while cleaning out my purse, I discovered the little critter had hidden itself inside the lining. On purpose, I know. I also lost a regular charger cord on that trip somewhere between my car and hotel room. It just walked off on its own.

I may have lost my wits a few times on this trip but it turned out to be a great vacation because I lost "awfulizing" about what might happen. I just accepted the moment when something did happen. That's the secret to not losing it entirely and enjoying yourself.

If you want to lose yourself in the fantasy of quitting your job and opening a Hill Country shop, read Susan Wittig Albert's "Witches' Bane." Set in a fictional town near Austin, it's a perfect Halloween read. If you bet you can spot the killer you'll lose, but you will win an appreciation of how hard it is to run a one-person retail shop.

Lost treasure movies just for fun are "Romancing the Stone" (1984), "National Treasure" (2004) and "Time Bandits" (1981). A classic movie about losing one's conscience and moral values to overwhelming greed is "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre (1948)." Humphrey Bogart never got better than this except for "The African Queen" in which he causes Katherine Hepburn's character to lose her inhibitions.

"The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" is famous for a particular bit of dialogue. You might be able to use it to your advantage when you can't find those concert tickets you carefully hid away. "Tickets? We don't need no tickets. I don't have to show you any stinkin' tickets." But I wouldn't bet on it because I think you'll lose. Best to take the advice of the Federals in the movie: "Why don't you try being a little more polite?"

