

# Billy Box Adventure #1

## July 2009: The maiden voyage...

by j

Due to Bill's recently diagnosed celiac disease (and massive bone infection he's still battling) we figured the best way to travel around the country and start snooping for property would be with an RV so we could control Bill's eating and living environments. So ... we found a lightly used 36-footer with 1 slide-out (so living area expands to 11.5 ft wide) and dubbed it the Disaster bus (a.k.a. the "Billy Box" or BB for short!)



On Fri, 3-July-2009, we left Tucson on our first trip in 2 years to visit family in TX, MO, NE and IA. We stopped at Carlsbad, NM the first night and toured thru Carlsbad Caverns July 4th.

If you've never been, you pay a lot of money to go into a really big hole in the ground. But seriously, it was great! The formations are amazing and you can tour through the various caverns at your own pace (in the Big Room) or do other parts with experienced guides. Most of our pics didn't work out since it was so dark ... but here's a few of the Big Room courtesy of NPS.gov (NPS Photos by Peter Jones)...



Our next stop on the way to East TX was in Abilene and the only reason we're mentioning this one is we learned a very valuable RV tip here. It rained most of the night (which was very cool to hear for 2 desert rats like us) ... and we woke expecting to find the RV park flooded but only had puddles here and there so no biggie. As we were preparing to leave the bus had trouble starting (more on this later).

After a dozen attempts BB finally started and as Bill was pulling away ... SPLASH..!!!!!!! Water that had collected on top of the slide-out during the rainstorm was all over the floors! Even though the slide-out has a canopy over it and squeegees around as it retracts, water sits on top since it drops down an inch or more as it comes in... so water isn't removed on top.

**LESSON #1** ... tilt RV using the front or back hydraulic lifters before retracting the slide-out to ensure no water is on top!

Our next stop was in Mineola TX to visit my family and to attend my youngest niece's wedding. We hogged part of my parents' driveway and hooked up using an adapter to a 30-amp circuit my brother so kindly installed.



The almost triple-digit temps with 98% humidity kept us running both A/Cs and, several days into the visit, BB fried the breaker melting the adapter and a few wires. Bubba (my bro) had to rewire electrical stuff and piggybacked us onto another 30-amp breaker so we limited our A/C usage to one unit to reduce power drain.

**Lesson #2** ... best to hook into a 30-amp breaker with a 30-amp plug (not a household plug using an adapter) so we can run both A/Cs in July!

Then the weird stuff started. BB started shocking everyone with 12-volt zaps. If you touched anything metal on the bus you'd get buzzed. One of Bubba's dogs [Tahoe] even got a little buzz when he sniffed around a tire ... zapped him just before he lifted that leg so it could've been worse!

Bill and Bubba spent hours in the sweltering heat trying to figure out what / where the 12-volt feed might be causing the problem. Two of the 3 batteries are housed in a storage bin where all the A/C condensation and rain runs down the side of RV (dumb design) yet my brother bravely checked the connectors getting zapped many, many times in the process. Even his high-voltage gloves didn't help! (Sorry Bubba and thank you!!!)

There were other anomalies the boys dealt with but, long story short, Bill finally got hold of an RV specialist back in Tucson who suggested they find the ATS (Automatic Transfer Switch) box behind the fuse panel ... and whack it several times with a screwdriver handle. They did ... and lo and behold ... the 12-volt buzzing stopped! (Plus we haven't had a problem starting BB's engine since then either!)

**Lesson #3** ... never underestimate the power of a screwdriver whack!

The next day we noticed a horrible smell coming out of the cabinet where the combo washer/dryer unit is stored. We had never used it (too small) but it smelled like it was vented into the black tank (where the poop water goes!) It was nasty and with the 98F temps and 98% humidity, the smell got worse and worse. We couldn't sleep that night it was so bad.

Turns out it was some type of mold growing in the unit ... our Tucson neighbor said to run the washer with some bleach and Pinesol (no clothes) so it would flush the system. (Thanks Jimmy!) We never had the smell or problem in Arizona since it's so dry but the TX humidity made it flourish.

**Lesson # 4** ... get rid of the dinky little W/D unit as soon as we get home! And find a 12-volt chest freezer for that spot instead.

After the 11-July wedding (congratulations Brooke & Jamie!!), the plan was to head thru Arkansas for a few days to snoop around then go to Missouri to see my Aunt and cousins and their families.

My cuz Ronnie had been diagnosed with cancer a few months ago and had been given about a year or so to live, however he took a very bad turn for the worse over the weekend. So we headed towards Missouri but sadly he died several hours before we got there.

(Ron really loved the outdoors and hunting ... rest in peace buddy.)



After a few days in Missouri we stopped in Omaha to visit briefly with Bill's nephew Dan and his wife Peg before heading to western Iowa to see Bill's Aunt Gladys. Her second husband was dying of cancer so we wanted to visit and do anything we could to help her.

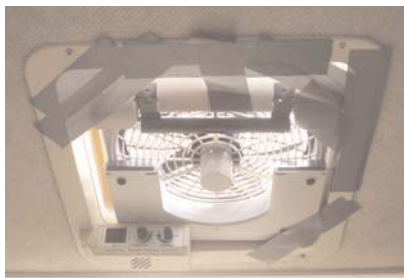
We got to spend some quality time with Gladys (who's 91 years young or maybe 51 ~ she's amazing!) and drove around in Aurelia (where Bill grew up), Cherokee and Storm Lake. It's amazing how towns, yards and homes seem so big when you're a child yet so small when you're an adult.

Sadly Gladys called a few days after we left to let us know her husband had passed (rest in peace Virgil.)

By this time the trip had taken a toll on Bill setting him back health-wise so we decided to go straight home. We considered doing Yellowstone and going west to Oregon but needed some repairs done to BB, had a custom print to wrap up and Bill needed some rest. Driving 6-7 hours a day (even with day or 2+ breaks along the way) was wearing him down and neither of us felt comfortable with me driving. He was white-knuckling it during high winds, construction zones and when semis zoomed by so I knew I would have trouble. Thank goodness he put a steering stabilizer on BB before we left Tucson!

Along the way the bathroom fan died (and it's really a good idea to have one in such confined quarters) ... but it's a bummer to get to since unit's on roof and not easy to fix once inside. So until we can get it repaired we put a \$15 battery operated fan (w/ a charger) under original unit and it worked ... YAY!

Check out our redneck fan ~ the duct tape didn't hold after first few bumps so Bill came up with a better design...



**Lesson # 5** ... be prepared to be innovative (and keep duct tape handy!)

And speaking of bumps ... most U.S. highways are very rough - even though we have latches on everything there were some roads that caused drawers and closet doors to fly open and our table collapsed off the wall!

**Lesson # 6** ... make sure you tighten screws on everything before you hit the road.



Surprisingly we were able to manage our business out of the RV during the 24-day journey thanks to our Blackberrys, my Bluetooth (with noise cancellation), notebooks and printers. And thank goodness for free wi-fi at RV parks and office supplies stores and post offices along the way to grab supplies and drop off book shipments. Plus we were able to share books and ideas with several groups along the way so it all worked out great.

In case anyone is still reading ... here's one last story.

As we were heading south towards Santa Fe we saw this critter in the median so Bill slowed down since there was no one behind us. It was hilarious ... it stuck a little bear paw out, then pulled it back, looked BOTH ways ... then took off across the highway! Very cool!!!!



Stay tuned for more Billy Box adventures..! j & B

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