



President's Message

BRN 4361

dietz4361@gmail.com

Hello from the World of Outlaws! All of the Keystone players are on the starting line and the feature has just begun. As of today (the 25th) we have been pacing ourselves with clean up, bike riding, meal planning, Jigger's ice cream, Root's Market, siteseeing, campfires with and without fire and moving our rigs to the Speedway for the first night of Outlaw Racing, which was killer. But wait, there's more racing, camping and sites yet to come. Stay tuned for pics and stories!!

In the meantime be sure to get your reservations in for the upcoming rallies as spaces are filling up for the "Apple Festival Rally." I was contacted by the campground for the "Gonna Need Campfires Rally." Booking starts now and campsites being held for us closes August 16th.

Last but certainly not least please support our incoming officers at the Installation Rally the end of September. It's always a proud time for them and our Keystone Family when we all can get together as one to say thank you for your dedication.

See you around the next lap, Jody and Sue.

Club Officers

President, Jody Dietz dietz4361@gmail.com
1st VP, Jennifer Eggers jeggers@leadershiftinsights.com
2nd VP, Brian Mulligan mulligansix@rcn.com
Treasurer, Richard Pitts r_pitts@verizon.net
Secretary, Susan Dietz sdietz4361@gmail.com
Immediate Past Pres., Howard Mergelcamp howardsan70@gmail.com
1st Year Trustee, Don Harrington pastordkh21@aol.com
2nd Year Trustee, Katherine Mulligan mulligansix@rcn.com
Newsletter Editor, Bill Earle info@occasionalrv.com

Stay Connected

[Facebook – Keystone Pennsylvania Airstream Club](#)
[Keystone on the Web](#)
[Airstream International Website](#)

Interested in joining the club?
Contact Jody Dietz dietz4361@gmail.com

Attention!!!

The Club's annual meeting and election/installation of officers will be held at the September 27-29 Installation Rally. Please let Jody know if we can twist your arm to become a member of the Executive Committee!

Remember, you do not have to be present at the installation rally to show interest in a future position.

Message from the Editor - Bill Earle BRN 10333

A huge shout out to Matthew Keiner for his "On the Road" piece "The Keys in my Life" in this issue. I wish I could take credit for the brilliant writing but I can't. Matthew gets all of the credit. It's incredibly well written and a wonderful encapsulation of an Airstream adventure. Please take a few minutes to read and enjoy it.

I know I had a lot of questions with regard to rallies and caravans when first joining the Airstream community. Jennifer Eggers has written a wonderful article on this topic which is included in this issue.

Thanks to Rick Pitts for his write up and pictures from the Raceweek Rally included in the event spotlights section in this issue.

Below are a few thoughts regarding possible content submissions. As you consider submissions, please give some thought to things that would interest you and possibly benefit others. I'm always available to answer specific questions you may have regarding the newsletter.

1. Photos from your trips as well as those from Airstream rallies are always great.
2. Campground and campsite photos and reviews for the "On the Road" section. I always find it valuable to see photos and details of places that I'm considering visiting.
3. Any and all club related details such as history of the club, rally and caravan experience.
4. Ideas for content: This is a big one and it would be great to hear from the community regarding what they would like to see in the newsletter as well as what they enjoy as club members along with ideas for events, caravans and rallies.
5. Airstream tips and tricks. Do you have some favorite hacks and things that you'd like to share with the community? Send them in, however, we need to be cognizant of not placing any of us in a position of promoting products. Let's try to keep it generic.
6. Recipes. We all enjoy good food and some find cooking in an Airstream challenging.

The club and this newsletter belong to all of us and the more participation we have the more benefit we all receive. We're always looking for content for the newsletter and we need your input. Photos, trip reports, history of the club. Airstream tips and tricks, rally and caravan details from leaders.

Please send all submissions to Bill Earle Newsletter Editor via email:

info@occasionalrv.com



New Member Spotlight

The Keystone Unit continues to grow. Let's all extend a warm welcome to all of our new members for 2024. Some of you have already joined us at the Maintenance Rally or Lums and we hope to meet all of you soon.

January

Scott & Mary Lou Anton

BRN 14462

Home

March

Tabb & Ruth Adams

BRN 5561

Affiliate

April

Steven & Bonnie Farrell

BRN 9392

Home

May

Brenda & Charles Como

BRN 4306

Home

June

Darren Westenberger

BRN 10374

Home

Krishna & John King

BRN 13510

Home

July

Allen & Sharlene Moyer

BRN 12046

Home / Renewal

Airstream Club Gatherings for Newbies by Jennifer Eggers

What is the difference between a Rally, Caravan, and a Gathering?

There are all kinds of ways to get involved with the Airstream community and these are just a few.

A Rally is usually a weekend-long event with one camping location. Rallies are usually coordinated by local clubs or regions, although there are a few “International Rally’s” as well (Galax Fiddle Fest, Albuquerque Balloon Fest, etc.). Your ACI membership entitles you to attend any club’s rally, so long as you register with the host. All of them can be found on the ACI website under events. Feel free to check out what’s going on in the areas where you will be traveling and join in.

Rallies usually include a lot of free time, traditions like campfires, pot-luck dinners, happy hours and some organized activities interspersed.

A Caravan usually involves traveling to multiple campgrounds over several days or weeks and often has some kind of theme. Some Caravans can be over a month long and are large part of Airstream’s legacy. Most Caravans are coordinated by International, but if you look, you’ll find a few led by local clubs as well. Last year, Keystone led one across central PA. This year, we have the Outlaw Caravan, and next year, we are planning the Grand Canyon of PA and Dark Sky Caravan. Club Caravans tend to be shorter and smaller than the International Caravans.

If you aren’t quite sure if Caravans are for you (or are working full-time), I recommend trying a short one to start. Last year I spent 10 days on the Blueridge Parkway with the Smidge of the Blueridge Caravan and simply could not have had a better time. I was pretty skeptical as I’m not a fan of too many organized activities on vacation, but it was a lot of fun and the people were amazing. I did things I never would have done on my own.

We like to do our own thing. Will we have fun at a rally?

In a word, it’s up to you, but I hear this a lot and I asked this question when I got involved in the Keystone Unit too, so it’s worth answering. My suggestion is to try a few different events and see what you prefer. My experience has been that I have never felt pressure to join in any activity. It has always been completely “safe” to say I’m going to do something other than what the group has planned. I need a certain amount of alone time, and I’ve never once felt guilty for taking it, even on the caravan.

Keystone Rallies tend to be informal and low-key, so feel free to join in where you are comfortable and back off when you want to. There is no pressure. Just let the host know if you’re not going to participate so they aren’t waiting for you or counting on you for something.

What is a Rally coupon?

Some Rallies are more formal than others. Generally, when there is a Rally Fee, there is a simple registration form to fill out that is referred to as the Rally Coupon. The Rally Coupon usually contains a description of the rally, what’s included in the Rally Fee (sometimes called a Kitty Fee), instructions for registration, and a bottom portion for you to fill out and send to the host. It lets them know who’s coming (how many in your party), how big your rig is, and what you will participate in. In recent years, Keystone seems to have gotten away from Rally Coupons on our more informal Rallies, but for those that include organized activities, dinners, or have costs involved, they make sense. Be sure to send your coupon in on time if you plan to attend so the host can plan.

When someone says to “bring your set up” what is that?

Often the Rally Coupon or host will tell you there will be a meal and to “bring your set up”. This is Airstream lingo for your place setting. Generally, Airstream Rally’s do not provide plates, cups and silverware. I have a small set-up bag in which I carry my plate, cup, silverware, napkin and salt and pepper. I grab it and bring it to dinners with my chair.

Airstream Club Gatherings for Newbies by Jennifer Eggers cont.

How can I host a Rally when I've never led one before?

In short, you've got this! One of the articles I read early in my Airstream life said "There's no "right" or "wrong" way to plan a rally — let your personality and preferences guide you. Have a favorite camping location? How about making it the site of a rally? You can take cues from other rallies you've attended and include the elements you like best." The rally can be very simple (even a "no host" event) or more involved - it's really your call!

With Keystone, the President generally plans the schedule. Talk to them about what you want to do and how you can fit it in. The easiest thing would be to offer to host (or co-host) a rally that is on the schedule that hasn't been fully planned. We are always looking for people to do that. Here's what is involved, and our officers are always willing to help:

- Select the campground
- Call and ask about availability. See if they would be willing to hold 6-10 spots for a week or so, so we can announce it and invite people to make reservations. Be sure to communicate with the campground so you know when sites will be released. Ask what people need to do to reserve spots with our group.
- Plan any organized activities or provide a list of things to do.
- Post the rally as an event on the Keystone Facebook page or ask someone to do it for you.
- Think about meals. We've had rallies with catered meals, reservations, potluck meals, cookouts and everything in between. You can be as simple or elaborate as you want.
- If you need to collect money, create and distribute a rally coupon.

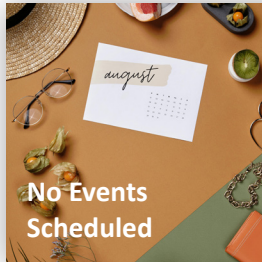
It is super easy to host a rally and if it seems like too much, consider co-hosting one. We've had rallies where the only organized activities were campfires and happy hour and others where we've had caterers, host-cooked meals, and corn-hole tournaments. We've done boat rides at state parks, hikes, and all manner of tours and themes. Be creative if you're so inclined, but if you're not, host anyway.

How else can I get involved in the Keystone Unit?

Glad you asked! In addition to Rallies and Caravans, Keystone holds off-season luncheons, tours and gatherings. Volunteer to organize one. We are always looking for newsletter articles and stories from the road. There will be lots of volunteer opportunities to help with International in York next year (in fact we're looking for someone to coordinate that). If you've got a talent, we can benefit from that you would like to share, let us know. And stay tuned to the Keystone Kourier for more volunteer opportunities.

If you have questions about hosting or want to get more involved, please call Jody or Jennifer. We would be happy to talk through some options and are excited to see Keystone grow!

2024 Event Schedule



August 2024

No events scheduled at this time



September 5-8 2024

Pennsylvania Rally
See form for more info:
https://form.jotform.com/240015014_357039



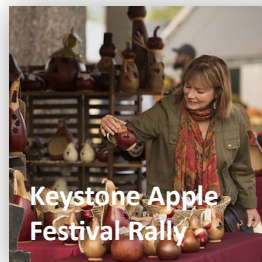
September 27-29 2024

Installation of new officers. Hosts, Mulligan and Dietz
Please reach out to Jane at the campground to see if there are spots still available. (215.804.8346)
Hope to see you there!
[Tohickon Family Campground](#)
8308 Covered Bridge Rd
Quakertown, PA 18951



October 5-10 2024

Airstream Club International Rally
[Airstream Club International Rally website](#)



October 11-13 2024

Keystone PA Apple Festival Rally at South Mountain Fairgrounds
A festival with several large barns of craft booths, great food choices, country music bands, steam engines, and all things APPLE.

[National Apple Harvest Festival](#)



November 10-16 2024

Gunna Need Campfires Rally. Hosts, Jody and Sue Dietz. One of the best times of the year to camp. Fredericksburg is a beautiful town steeped in history. Additional details are in the Event Spotlights below.
[Click here for additional details](#)
Washington DC South KOA
7400 Brookside Ln
Fredericksburg, VA 22408

2024 Event Schedule cont.



December 7 2024

Holiday Luncheon
Plumsteadville Inn
5902 Easton Rd., Pipersville, PA 18947

Coordinator: Barb and Jerry Hillegass
(gaugeguy2@gmail.com)

2024 Event Spotlights

Keystone Raceweek Rally July 21 – 28 by Rick Pitts

Keystoners Jody and Sue Dietz, Don and Phyllis Harrington, Rick Pitts, and Pat and Kathleen Quinn started the raceweek caravan at Pinch Pond Family Campground in Manheim, PA. Located in scenic Lancaster County the venue offered easy access to Amish markets and bike trails. Jody and Sue set off to ride the 20-mile Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail on Monday while the rest of us enjoyed the campground and driving around the pretty farms in the area.



Tuesday we all headed to nearby Root’s Country Market. Five buildings are crammed with fresh and cooked food, gorgeous vegetables and lots and lots of “stuff” to buy, and even more outdoor vendors with veggies, clothes and pork or pit-beef sandwiches. We stopped at the Zook’s Meat stall to grab an assortment of good-looking burgers (jalapeno, mushroom, brisket, bacon cheese) for a potluck on Thursday.



Wednesday we packed up to head to BAPS Motor Speedway for our first World of Outlaws race. The Outlaws are a national series that travels around the States, here challenging the local “PA Posse” drivers for the win. With the high temps, the Harrington’s and Quinn’s headed to Pinchot Park and full hook-ups. The Dietz’s and I headed right to the track for dry camping (and were joined that afternoon by my



brother Doug). Heat wasn’t too bad, and the track dry camp provided convenient access and parking for the race. We all joined up for the race activities. It was the “Bricker’s Bash” so of course we had to have Bricker’s Fries (and they were excellent)! We saw some great sprint car racing on the track with Australian native James McFadden of the Outlaws prevailing at the finish.



Thursday was a jump day, moving a short 15-mile jaunt across the Susquehanna to Walmar Manor Campground in Dillsburg. As promised, Jody cooked up some great burgers for the potluck that evening.



Friday morning we went to the nearby Eastern Museum of Motor Racing (EMMR) that highlights the history of dirt track sprint car racing in central PA (and more). It is simply amazing (and if you have even the slightest interest in open-wheel dirt track racing you gotta go!). We were greeted for a guided tour by none other than one of Central PA’s most famous drivers in the 60’s,

70’s and 80’s, Lynn Paxton (over 250 wins and 13 track championships)! The exhibits feature so many of the local drivers and include cars, memorabilia and pics from the likes of A.J. Foyt, Mario Andretti, Bill Elliott, Andy Granatelli, and of course Williams Grove Speedway, our next stop on the caravan.

2024 Event Spotlights cont.

Keystone Raceweek Rally cont.

July 21 – 28

by Rick Pitts



Friday night we pooled to Williams Grove Speedway for the first of a two night challenge between the PA Posse and the Outlaws. The weather was perfect for racing (although the dry air did result in “just a bit” of red clay dust that covered EVERYTHING). Our own favorite, Austin Bishop, was there in the #35 car. After qualifications and “heat” races we were treated to a thrilling 25-lap feature where, to the cheers of the locals, PA Posse driver T.J. Stutts (#11) edged out Outlaw favorite David Gravel (#2) for the win. Austin battled with a new engine, race set-up and flat rear tire to move from a 26th starting position to 22nd for the finish. We applaud (but are sure he’s not satisfied with that!).

Saturday after resting up from the prior night, we again pooled to Williams Grove for the Summer Nationals finale. The weather was even better than on Friday - and so was the sprint car action. In the end, the Outlaws prevailed as series point leader David Gravel (#2) edged out series champ Donny Schatz (#15) for the win. On a gorgeous evening the track offered a nice fireworks show to end the day and rally. What fun we have in these silver pods!

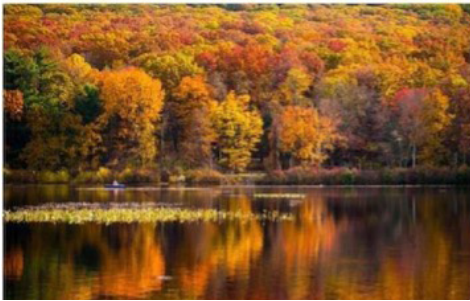


2024 Event Spotlights cont.



Keystone PA Apple Festival Rally
Adams County, PA
October 11-13, 2024

Located in the heart of Pennsylvania apple country, The National Apple Harvest Festival celebrates the fall season with beautiful hand made crafts, delicious food and live entertainment. The festival has something for everyone; steam engine displays, live music, antique cars, orchard tours, pony rides, tastings and much more!



We will be camping at Charcoal Hearth Campground at Pine Grove Furnace State Park, Gardners, PA. Make your camping reservations now as sites (especially pet sites) will fill quickly for this weekend. The rate is \$27/night. The park brochure has a map of the campground. Stay Friday through Sunday if you can so that you may enjoy either one or both days of the festival. Sites are electric only, so fill your water tank before arrival. There are dump stations onsite.

Friday evening we'll provide a burger bar and on Saturday you can enjoy great food at the festival! With clear skies we will have campfires and BYO snacks Friday and Saturday. Coffee service will be provided on Saturday and Sunday morning. There is no rally fee. The festival in nearby Biglerville will be open Saturday 8-6 and Sunday 8-5 rain or shine. You can purchase tickets online in advance (\$10) or get them at the festival grounds. Fire police will direct you to parking fields and shuttle bus service is provided to festival grounds (included in admission). Pets are **NOT** permitted at the festival. More about the festival here ([National Apple Harvest Festival](#))

If you have any questions, please contact Rick or Andy Pitts, your Keystone hosts. (Keystone Host site #11 Mule Team Lane). r_pitts@verizon.net or 610-793-9262

2024 Event Spotlights cont.



Gunna Need Campfires Rally Nov. 10-16

We all know it's been hot and most likely going to get hotter before we really NEED a campfire but it's time to move those thoughts to the front burner. (Pun intended.)

The official dates of the rally are Sunday to Sunday, arriving November 10 and departure the 17th. Location, Washington DC south KOA, Fredericksburg, VA.

If you cannot make the entire week, come when you can. Fredericksburg is steeped in history and a cool town at that. You'll find bicycle trails, parks, and the nation's capital nearby along with great places to eat with cool evenings to grill your own grub and sip your coffee by the campfire.

To make a reservation call directly to the WDC KOA # 540-898-7252 after August 1. Tell them you are with the Keystone PA Airstream Club. We have at least 6 FHU sites held for us. At this time site fees are unknown. It is off season so 2024 rates will not apply.

Fredericksburg/ Washington DC KOA called to say reservations for the rally are now being accepted. Here are the facts.

You may reserve as many of those days as you wish. We are staying all week. We have a block of 9 FHU sites being held until August 16th. After that no guarantees. Reservation may only be made by calling 540-898-7252. You must indicate you are with the "Keystone Airstream Group". Reference my name, Jody Dietz. July 18th was the 1st day you may reserve, August 16th is the last.

Information on what to do is forthcoming.

Hope to see you there!!!



2025 Event Summary

We've been busy working on the 2025 Rally and luncheon schedule and would love your input. Here are some highlights of what has been suggested and scheduled. I welcome your feedback. If you've got a dream rally you'd like to plan, please let me know.

February 15 Valentine's Luncheon

March 15 St. Patrick's Luncheon

April TBD Joint Maintenance Rally (with Delmarva) | Queen Annes County 4-H Park Centreville, MD

Late April or Late May TBD Seashells and Seafood | Jersey Shore Haven

May 2-4 Season Opener with Central Penn | Lum's Pond State Park
BOOK NOW THEY ARE ALREADY NEARLY FULL [Click here for details](#)

May 14-18 Gettysburg Bluegrass Festival | Granite Hill Camping Resort
LOOK FOR BOOKING INSTRUCTIONS ON MAY 20

June TBD Blues & BBQ Festival | French Creek State Park

July 11-13 Explore the Upper Delaware (fishing, tubing/paddling or river watching) | Soaring Eagle Campground, Equinunk, PA

August 23-28 International Rally "Let's Make History" | York Fairgrounds, York, PA

September 19-21 Bald Cypress and Eagles | Trapp Pond State Park (boat rental closes Oct. 17th)


October 17-20 & 20-21 Dark Skies & Canyons Mini Caravan to Grand Canyon of PA |Twin Streams Campground
New Moon at Cherry Springs Dark Sky Park | Ole Bull State Park

November 8 Installation Luncheon and Meeting | Good & Plenty, Lancaster Country Acres Campground

December 6 Christmas Luncheon (Noon) at Plumsteadville Inn

We're looking for volunteers to help coordinate and host all of these events. All feedback is welcome (love it or hate it) and if you are willing to host or co-host, please let me know at jeggers@leadershiftinsights.com

2025 Event Schedule




February 15 2025

Details TBD




March 15 2025

Details TBD




April (TBD) 2025

Maintenance Rally (joint with Delmarva) - looking for a coordinator from Keystone. At Queen Annes County 4-H Park Centreville, MD




Late April early May 2025

Seashells and Seafood at Jersey Shore Haven



May 2-4 2025

Join us for a great spring event at this joint rally with the Central Penn unit. Lums State Park is a beautiful location perfect for kayaking, hiking, and biking. We add some campfires and Airstream fellowship for a perfect start to the camping season.
[Lums Pond State Park](#)
 1068 Howell School Rd
 Bear, DE 19701



May 14-18 2025

Join us for a great music festival right at the campground. You can even listen to the bands from the pool if you want.
[Granite Hill Campground](#)
 3340 Fairfield Rd
 Gettysburg, PA 17325

2025 Event Schedule cont.



June (TBD) 2025

Blues & BBQ Festival at French Creek State Park



July 11-13 2025

Explore the Upper Delaware (fishing, tubing/paddling or river watching)
Details TBD



August 23-28 2025

Airstream Club International Rally "Let's Make History"
York Expo Center
334 Carlisle Ave
York, PA 17404
[Airstream Club International Rally website](#)



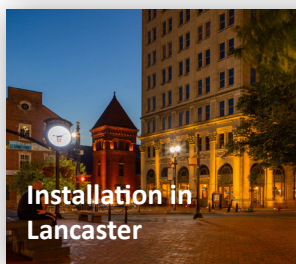
September 19-21 2025

Bald Cypress and Eagles at Trapp Pond State Park (boat rental closes Oct. 17th)



October 17-20 & 20-21 2025

Dark Skies & Canyons Mini Caravan to Grand Canyon of PA and Cherry Springs for New Moon
Details TBD



November 8 2025

Installation luncheon and meeting.
Good & Plenty, Lancaster Country Acres Campground

2025 Event Schedule cont.



December 6 2025

Holiday Luncheon at Noon
Plumsteadville Inn
5902 Easton Rd., Pipersville, PA 18947

News & Items of Interest

Courtesy Parking Moving to Harvest Hosts

Coming in late summer 2024: The Airstream Club International courtesy parking powered by Harvest Hosts. [Click here](#) for all of the details.

If you would like to be a Courtesy Parking Host and haven't yet filled out our survey to get listed in the Summer of 2024 database, please [click here](#) to get started! (ACI member login required)

Escapees RV Club Moving to Harvest Hosts

There's a lot of information associated with this move. [Click Harvest Hosts Transition](#) for details.

On the Road

The Keys in My Life by Matthew Keiner **BRN 19997**

Growing up in the hum of a bustling city like Philadelphia, the tropics always seemed to be a world away, places that were on television, but not really places where a city boy would go. When I met my wife, who was intimately familiar with the Caribbean, she whisked me down to the Leeward islands as soon as she could. She promised turquoise, warm, clear waters, and that the flora and fauna would be strikingly different from what I was used to up north on the mainland. The Caribbean islands did not disappoint. We made return trips to various islands throughout the years, loving every experience and the tropics' warm embrace. But there was one rub, we had to endure the airport, board a plane and fly to these places.



Then the Florida Keys came into focus. I had heard about the Keys in the past – a chain of little islands linked together by over-water bridges, where the tropical Bohemian lifestyle was always on full display. Margaritaville. The Bar at the End of the World. We already had a cross country trip under our belt, but had previously ventured only to the tip of South Carolina's Edisto Island. So, for this trip, we set our sights on the Keys. We packed up our Caravel, The Mo, and hit the road.

The journey South took us to Weldon, NC, for an overnight stop at Weldon Mills Distillery and the best bourbon in the country. Next, it was on to a Cracker Barrel in Santee, SC, Stagecoach RV Park in northern Florida, and a KOA in southern Florida. On our third day in Florida, a day of reminders about Vitamin C, orange juice, and counting the number of flip flop outlets that we passed, we finally reached our destination, Big Pine RV Resort, not too far past the end of the Seven Mile Bridge. One of the great joys from these journeys is watching the trees, plants, flowers, and animals change as we venture southward. But I was not prepared as the environment morphed from distinctly mainland plants and animals to tropical versions of the same. Deciduous trees and evergreen pines were replaced by palm trees and tropical pines as far as you could see past the sea grapes and mangroves. Instead of squirrels swirling around trees we saw lizards of all sizes, from tiny, almost insect-sized geckos darting about the bushes, to large, striking iguanas sunning themselves on a log.

"I just drove to the Caribbean." This realization was magical to me. Until now, the tropics were always an adventure that required a flight, something that I would prefer to avoid. Yet, to my amazement, I was with my wife and my dogs in a place that felt so distinctly tropical, so far away and remote, and The Mo made it possible. This was why we bought this trailer. This was bucket list stuff.

We knew it was going to be warmer in Florida. We felt the heat rising as we descended through the eastern seaboard, climaxing near Miami with its infamous heat and humidity. However, once we hit the Keys, the heat tempered, but only a bit. We were not prepared for an abnormally hot May, even for the Keys. Sure, it felt warm to us, but the locals seemed almost obliged to tell us that this intense heat was exceptional for the Keys in May. If that wasn't enough, you could certainly take cues from the dogs, whose atypical sluggishness was yet another sign that we were in a whole different world of heat and sun. Intense, unrelenting, tropical sunshine. And, unlike the dogs, we humans were loving it. The Mo was an oasis in a savagely beautiful paradise.



The Keys, and Key West, in all its particular glory, is a beacon of human persistence at the end of the world. What a feeling to stand tall and see and feel ocean all around you. It elicits a wholly unique sense of total freedom with the mainland gone off in the distance. And we drove here.

The Keys have so many stunning aspects to them, more than I can list here for sure, but I'm compelled to share a few highlights. I was absolutely mesmerized by the fisherman. The preparations in the morning. Sailing out with the rising sun, a fleet of sport boats, hopeful and energized by the prospect of catching the big one. The view from the trailer never got old. If not headed out on boats, folks were fishing off of bridges, small piers, and casting lines at the beach. Fishing is simply everywhere and anywhere, done by people of all kinds, a great unifier. In the evening, as they returned to the docks, some were smiling, some were defeated, and all of them were deeply tanned where they were not covered by clothing or zinc oxide. This daily rhythm, opening the day and closing the day, seemed so quintessentially Keys, a vital part of the Conch DNA. Conch? A local, transplant or native – anyone that makes the Keys their permanent or semi-permanent home.

On the Road cont.

The Keys in My Life by Matthew Keiner BRN 19997 cont.

It was easy to feel at home this far from home. And just like home, nothing is quite like that easy stroll back to your beach shack of choice, ours being Mo. The ocean has this most interesting ability to energize while engaged with it, but upon departure from its warm embrace, the beach leaves you with a wonderful sense of fatigue, a fatigue that is only achieved by basking in the sun's glory and swimming in warm waters, swaddled by the sea, and flopping on the sand to dry. Bahia Honda State Park gave us this opportunity. The beaches at this state park are some of the best in the Keys. We found that getting there early in the morning seemed to be a best practice.



As relentless and unforgiving as the environment is in the Keys, this harsh nature could not stand in stronger contrast to the gentle and serene nature of the Key deer. Unlike the deer I was used to up in Pennsylvania, these small deer, no larger than a medium-sized dog, were curious and unafraid, clearly an indication of the respectful and protective way in which they are treated by residents of the Keys. Back at the RV park, they weaved through the campsites, poking their heads into trucks, campers, and coolers. The live-and-let-live attitude of the Keys allows for these unique creatures to coexist with modern life, helped by the protections put in place by the local government regarding strict speed limits through Key deer habitats, and that these zones are heavily patrolled and ticketed, a fact that I was extremely happy to see.

A few days into our stay at Big Pine RV, we were pleasantly surprised by a Westfalia rally. We awoke that morning to a couple of brightly painted Westfalias setting up camp across from us. I had noted them when we went for one of our walks with our disappointed, hot, dogs. That afternoon, post mandatory siesta, I was surprised by the sight of at least a dozen Westfalias, growing to more than twenty before nightfall. It was an official rally, and to see all the various paint jobs, modifications, and models of Westfalia was both interesting and exciting. I was reminded of how awesome our own Airstream rallies are, and what a spectacle it is to see so many Airstreams assembling in one place, coming together to swap stories and share experiences.

As a native of Philadelphia, with our own regional cuisine, I am constantly on the hunt for regional and local fare and being in the Keys was no different. We had no doubt we'd be able to find some great fish options at the bars and eateries. The grouper sandwiches are something to be had, and the tuna nachos will cause mercury poisoning if you eat them as often as you crave them. Maybe not surprisingly, we located some barbeque. The joint was called Pop's. Run out of a truck, you'd better order early, because they do run out of some options. That screams delicious to me. We ordered an obscene amount, enough to have leftovers the next day, a precious commodity as we all know how valuable good leftovers are on the road. Moreover, this style of barbeque this far south, well, you simply can't get more southern. Pop's combination of brisket, ribs, chicken, baked beans, slaw, and cornbread was absolutely delectable. When in Big Pine, go to Pop's.



In preparation for the trip, I set my sights on reading some Hemingway. I started with "A Farewell to Arms," written while Papa was living in the Keys. The Keys during Hemingway's time would have been a bit wilder, more of a rugged frontier than it is now, even though it still has that same spirit today. I wanted to see if I could feel the environment through the pages, and I can sincerely say, I did. I went on to read, "To Have and To Have Not." Based in the Keys, this book comes with the strongest recommendation I can offer. If you're a lover of history, and visiting the Keys is on your list, you're guaranteed to feel the brutality that was the ocean and shore culture at the end of the world in the early 1900s.

On the Road cont.

The Keys in My Life by Matthew Keiner BRN 1997 cont.

No doubt the best way to feel the freedom that the Keys are known for is to immerse yourself in the melting pot that is Key West. The artistic, chill vibe encourages people to enjoy experiences that make them feel liberated and unencumbered by the world. Maybe we're all looking for that ultimate feeling of being away from the modern American world. To be free at the end of the world, sipping a mojito in my Panama hat, envisioning Hemingway strolling along the same streets, perhaps headed back to his house to work on "A Farewell to Arms," no doubt having imbibed a bit at his favorite bar around the corner...unspeakably amazing.

We strolled down Duval Street until we reached the ocean. The end of the world. Not big fans of a queue, we found ourselves at the southernmost point, obvious by the line of about 30 people waiting to take a photo. But rather than wait in line, we opted for the no line backside option with the southernmost buoy, plus we got to talk to a local that was tucking into a can of beer in a brown paper bag. He had some stories.

Duval Street was stimulating on many levels, from the people watching, to the variety of shops and restaurants. We found ourselves in front of Willie T's, where a solo musician was putting on a great show, so we grabbed a table on the patio. We sampled a mojito and a rum punch. The rum punch was very similar to the ones we'd enjoyed in Anguilla. We ordered a burger and a grouper sandwich. Both were delicious, and the server was attentive, but in a laid back fashion, allowing us to eat and drink and actually enjoy the space and the music. I highly recommend this joint.

Key West did not disappoint. It has beautiful and intriguing architecture. The tropical climate allows for fantastic gardens that you simply cannot find outside of the tropics. The front porch bars and cafes are reminiscent of Havana. You feel as if you are walking through history, and yet at the same time it is thoroughly alive with the current fashions and people. It is certainly quite a cocktail of humanity and culture, and it is intoxicating for sure.

As always, with the exception of one trip, our dogs were along for the journey. Although the Keys are dog friendly in terms of allowing dogs at some bars and beaches, my two guys were not too keen on the lack of green spaces. This, in combination with the unseasonable heat, proved to be quite a drag on them. Walks with them were all drooped heads and wagging tongues. However, our boys love the ocean, and the access to it proved to be a saving grace, giving them ample opportunities to take a dip and cool off.

Soon it was time to make our trip north, back home to Philadelphia. The Keys left an indelible mark on us. The flora and fauna, the sunrises and sunsets, the rhythm of the fishing lifestyle, the serenity of the Key deer, and feeling the embodiment of freedom at the tip of civilization. As we trekked home, our deep tans were just the physical proof of the most wonderful realization, the tropics are just a drive away.

