

## Musing: Marry someone who will backpack with you

by Jack Knudson

I'm not much of a user or fan of facebook. However, Carroll and I have become good friends with someone who constantly uses this social medium. She is Prunella and is the wife in a \*couch surfing family of five who we hosted in January 2016. They are Prunella, Graham and their three sons, Lucas, Reuben, and Felix aged 15, 13 and 11. By the way, Pru and Graham have just celebrated their 21st wedding anniversary.

The family lives in Perth. They often travel: backpacking, camping, and couch surfing, sometimes overseas, as often as their budget permits. Pru is originally from Myanmar (Burma) and is into all sorts of intellectually stimulating things. The boys are keen readers and into many healthy indoor and outdoor activities, mental and physical.

Everyday Pru posts photos of family, friends, outings, events, and many thought provoking considerations, etc. on facebook. Reluctantly I joined her 'circle' of facebook viewers a few years ago and was frequently rewarded with her entries. One of her facebook postings had this title, "**Marry someone who will backpack with you**". The words, accompanied by a fitting image, weren't hers, but I thought, "This is wise counsel indeed." I knew this because I was living proof of it.

Although passing this marriage advice on to U3A members is far too late, unless you are widowed, I think we should occasionally ponder concepts and ideas that are new to us. You may have never contemplated life from a backpacker viewpoint before, so now, during the COVID-19 isolation restrictions, you have the time --- to think about the 'other side of the coin' so to speak.

I'd never thought much about this travel aspect of Carroll's and my marriage, but how fortunate I have been to have done just that -- marry someone who **doesn't have to** stay in resorts, hotels or even ask to go on a cruise. Carroll and I had experienced travel life without all the comforts and securities quite a few times since 1970 before we started a family five years later. However, we once again backpacked in 2005 when we spent a month in Vietnam, I was 66 and she 67. And in September 2017 we did it once more, going to the state of Kerala near the southwestern tip India for more than three weeks. I borrowed our daughter's much newer backpack (my 60s version didn't cut it anymore) and Carroll hoisted a small and very lightweight nylon one as well as an over the shoulder travel bag.

We hadn't considered backpacking since 2005 because we'd largely travelled in Australia, flown east (to attend classical music festivals) and rented a car to get around. We stayed with couch surfing hosts where possible and Airbnbs when not. Nevertheless, we returned to public transport in 2017, as renting a car to drive oneself is virtually impossible in India. We weren't about to hitchhike either, though we did hire the odd tour guide, as we did in Vietnam riding as passengers behind our motorcycle guides for five days covering hundreds of kilometres.

Backpacking at nearly 80? Why not! Foolhardy at our age? Only marginally so. Adventurous? Certainly! Excited by it then? Without doubt! Was it worth doing? You betcha!

But I digress. What is it about travelling together for weeks at a time that makes for a strong marriage? Our first experience of continuous togetherness didn't develop into a predictable 'living happily ever after' scenario, but it did set the parameters of what it took to do so.

In the early summer of 1970 I had reached Europe using various forms of transport including hitchhiking, journeying west from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey in my 'round the world backpacking trip. Exchanging letters, I arranged to meet with Carroll when she flew into Frankfurt on June 23. Together in a VW Kombi, purchased in Germany, we mainly toured Switzerland, Spain and Portugal before she caught her flight back to the USA from Brussels on August 27.

**June 27th Frutigen, Switzerland: Carroll prepares a dinner meal from the van, watched by a friendly dog.**



For about eight weeks, we experienced a new episode in our lives, that of being together 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This after we had been living independent lives since becoming adults. Was it too much to think that we quickly meshed into a harmonious relationship? Absolutely. Life isn't like that, except in Hollywood movies, but we didn't know any better at the time. So we didn't part ways that summer like 'turtle doves'. Fortunately, we then had months away from each other to think about our European joint venture. After I returned to California in

December 1970, Carroll accepted my invitation to travel together again the following year. We went on a summer camping trip in another VW, a Beetle, all the way to British Columbia and back to Sacramento.

This time we knew what to expect from each other and **compromising** is the best word to help explain our renewed relationship and, in all likelihood, everyone's partner compatibility for that matter. Our partnership had blossomed. Marriage followed in October 1971.



Summer 1970: Carroll's Spanish collage inside our van dotted with printed materials from our Iberian travels. A black and red blanket on the bed bought in Spain lasted for many years in our household.

Whether you like it or not, you and your partner (if you have one) are being tested during this COVID-19 isolation period. It's not all that different from travelling together as backpackers, except that now you've only the virtual reality sights on the TV to distract you, books to read, puzzles to solve, cakes to bake, etc. You're effectively in 'each other's pockets' 24/7. Are you bearing up under the strain of the current situation?

Had you ever backpacked with your partner? No matter if you have or haven't because you've probably been together long enough to form a permanent bond anyway.

But, have I given you much to think about?

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\*Click on [CouchSurfing - Wikipedia](#) if you've not heard of it before and are unaware of its concept.