

# Girl Camper

Going places. Doing things.

WINTER 2022

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Kim Button working remotely

# TRAVEL TWISTS AND TURNS

By Kim Foley MacKinnon

By definition, travel writers are explorers and adventurers, but what happens when travel practically grinds to a halt for all intents and purposes? The pandemic has obviously impacted everyone in different ways, sometimes pushing people in new and unexpected directions, including travel writers. I talked to three about their journeys over the last couple of years, all of whom hit the road in RVs in order to keep exploring.

## KIMBERLY BUTTON

RVing has helped me reinvent my life twice in different ways. A few years ago, my husband and I bought our first RV, a Forest River Salem 27REIS, gave up our rental house, put everything into storage and traveled the country trying to figure out what our next step was, where we wanted to live and what was important to us.



We sold the RV when we settled down in 2019. Then when the pandemic came, we started dreaming about being able to travel again. I knew I didn't want to stay in hotels and our first love is always National Parks, state parks and nature-based travel. And we just really needed to travel for our soul and mental health.

After having a huge travel trailer the first time, we knew we didn't need that much space or stuff to enjoy the outdoors. So we bought a smaller trailer to give us freedom to travel while not getting tied down with a big rig. It's surprising how much RVing improved our emotional health. We were able to meet people and talk with them in outdoor settings, something that was really lacking in the early days of the pandemic. It was weird to be socializing again, but it was something that we didn't realize we needed so much.

RVers are generally really great people who will stop to talk to you at your campsite and invite you into their homes-on-wheels without a second thought. We loved sitting around a campfire with new friends or talking with fellow campers while walking around campgrounds. Seeing new sights made us remember how big and wonderful the world really is. That was something that was easy to forget being quarantined in our homes.



Lesli's Montana

I've heard a lot about the healing benefits of "nature therapy," especially for mental health, and I have to agree with it after our travels.

### LESLI PETERSON

Fall 2020: The world was in an upheaval. My husband Dan and I were getting the itch to shake things up a bit after 20-plus years in Atlanta. And finally, our two oldest kids were both finished with college. Inspired by family friends (Crazy Family Adventure) who'd been RVing the country for over seven years, we decided almost on a whim that selling everything and hitting the road for at least a year was the exact "shake" that our family needed. Within three weeks of making the decision we had purchased a 40-foot fifth wheel 2021 Keystone Montana High Country.

My work life would transition easiest of all. My husband and I together own two businesses in the travel space --- an 11-year-old travel blog and an email tech company for tour operators. They already allowed us to operate from anywhere. And our youngest kids have been homeschooled their

whole lives. While it was an adventure to be sure, I never entered the experience with an intention of "reinventing" myself. I was anxious to see new places, gather new material for my travel writing and just get out of the routine of the last 20 years.

Little did I know. Nearly a year later, I am not at all the same person I was when we launched. Enjoying and appreciating this adventure requires being focused on "The Now." That focus has made the very act of living sizably more enjoyable, more meaningful, more fulfilling and more beautiful. I'm not saying I've reached "Enlightenment" -- far from it. But the impact of living in the moment, even if for only micro-moments more than before our adventure began, has reframed my life, my marriage, my relationship with my kids and even my friendships. And whether we continue on the road or find our way to another bricks-and-sticks home, a new Lesli has been born.

### KIT BERNARDI

I started wandering outdoors by myself at age 7 in a midwest blizzard when the school bus lumbered out of the parking lot without me onboard. I had a choice -- to wait or wander?



Lesli and her family





Kit and her traveling office

Striking out on my own, I carved a zigzag path home catching chunky snowflakes on my tongue. Oh, the tingly, sweet, first taste of solo travel! Ever since, I've forged my own career path and lifestyle designed around wandering. After a successful career in travel marketing, I became a travel journalist and photographer. Today, I crisscross America in my Airstream Caravel gathering stories about people whose customs and personal histories are rooted in the land that sustains them.

I'd been a girl camper and outdoors woman who'd toyed with buying an RV to replace my tents long before the pandemic made exploring the outdoors an even more popular travel experience. A younger me was a Girl Scout, Explorer Scout and summer camp counselor living under canvas in Wisconsin's Northwoods. As a parent, I was a volunteer Cub Scout den leader for 10 years and scoutmaster for 90 families. I'm a proud mom of an Eagle Scout. Looking back in life's rearview mirror, RVing for me was simply inevitable.

Although in 2019 I had decided to invest two years of my income and some family personal funds into purchasing my branded Airstream

and F-150 pick-up truck, the pandemic rerouted my career travel plans to focus more on domestic storytelling. COVID presented me with a choice not that different from when I was a first-grader alone in a snowstorm -- wait to travel, or find a different way to work and wander? My Airstream was the answer. In the past two years, RVing has helped chart a new chapter in my career. I look forward to the winding road ahead full of riveting travel.



## ABOUT THE WRITERS

**Kimberly Button** is the editor of CouchPotatoCamping.com and the companion YouTube channel, which are both resources for beginner campers. She owns a 19-foot Intech Sol Horizon. Button has been a travel writer for 22 years, writing for publications such as National Geographic Traveler, AAA publications, American Airlines and more.

**Lesli Peterson**, owner of 365 Atlanta Traveler, made her way to Atlanta more than 20 years ago after living abroad. She's exploring the West Coast in an RV with her family and sharing this adventure from a Southerner's perspective. She is traveling with her two kids, Cooper and Elliot, and her soulmate, husband and business partner, Dan.

**Kit Bernardi** covers cultural and adventure travel worldwide. Her writing and photography appear in Rachael Ray In Season, Reveal, USA TODAY Go Escape, Veterans Affairs, DailyPaws.com, South China Morning Post and many other print, online and broadcast outlets. She's traveled to 57 countries and six continents, but her Airstream always calls her home to road trip across America. Find her at KitTravels.com.