

Tour Diary

2003 Southern Exposure Tour

Carey's diary from her 3-week tour with hubby Granger Helvey and two of their four kids. It even has the obligatory trip pictures!

June 16 @ 11:20 pm

We left our house this morning at 11:45 for the fabulous Southern Exposure tour. We were going to leave on Sunday (Father's Day), but we were both so tired that we decided to delay our start. It meant missing the open mic at The Bluebird in Nashville, but that was okay with us. We'd rather start on our adventures fresh and eager than tired and cranky, especially with the kids along. We got the critters situated, with our dog Jasper going with my oldest daughter, Summer, and her father, Mark, and our cat Tigger staying in her kitty condo at the boarding house. All was set and we were off!

The kids popped in a video to pass the time as we drove while Granger and I played the license plate game - we got 42 in one day, and it's just the first day of the trip! Wonder if we'll find Alaska or Hawaii?

We hit a great deal of rain throughout Virginia, so much so that I was looking for animals to start going in twos on their way to an ark. We stopped in Roanoke for lunch at our favorite restaurant, Jimmy V's. Wonderful pizza! I think I ate too much. On the way out of Roanoke, we saw the funniest thing - a truck with its back window out, with a stuffed Barney hanging from a noose. Quite a giggle - the kids loved it! (I guess they got over liking Barney.) Once we hit the state line to Tennessee, the rain literally stopped completely. We had planned to stop in Bristol, but decided to press on and stop on the other side of Knoxville or farther if we felt up to it. We decided to stop in Knoxville, and here we are at the Motel 6. We've had our late-night Arby's snack and the kids are all tucked in. I'm next! We have a wakeup call for 9:00 a.m. so we can hit the road with time to spare. Arnie Reed, our host in Nashville, has been so very cool, sending us maps, sightseeing suggestions, and opening his home to us. We so appreciate it. We're looking forward to jamming with him while we're there!

I'm tired, so off to bed. I did manage to catch up on e-mail, so that was a good thing. I think buying this laptop was a wise move on my part - so far, so good!

June 18 @ 11:50 a.m.

We left Knoxville around 11:ish, I think - got to the Nashville city limits at 1:00, and went to Kroger's and stocked up on some food and then went on to Arnie's. His house is so peaceful and calm, and we rested before getting ready for the Broken Spoke. We left his house around 4:30 and found the Spoke with no problem. Showtime was 6:00 sharp, and Debi, our hostess, was very nice. One thing she didn't tell me was that it was an in-the-round kind of show, so we played ITR with two guys. The show went very well, except for me dropping my pick on the start of the first song! I just grabbed another one and jumped back in. One thing I noticed was that I was the only performer who actually stood up. It was very Nashville, country songs sung with a twang, cowboy boots galore, and meaningful ballads. There I was in my bare feet, standing up, and not following the Nashville pattern - I must just be a little rebel!

The Broken Spoke, Nashville, TN - 06/17/03

Photos by Arnie Reed & Susannah Barrow



Pre-show



After the show



With our dear friend, Arnie Reed

After the Spoke, Arnie suggested that we take the kids to Chuck E. Cheese. Arnie had never been to one before, so we broke him in easy. We had a great time catching up while the kids ran around, and then I joined the kids and ended up winning 118 tickets - wheee! I split them between the kids, and they got their goodies. We came back to Arnie's and stayed up until midnight or later talking some more. I miss Arnie's wife, Nancy; I sense her presence so strongly. It's only been about six weeks since she died of leukemia. We watched the memorial video they put together before she died, and it was one of the most moving things I've ever seen. It made me smile, too, which I'm sure is what she wanted.

I spent this morning sleeping in, and then having a cup of tea on Arnie's porch, conversing with the birds. It's so peaceful and green here, and I don't want to leave. The kids are fussy today, but we don't need to go anywhere or do anything since there's no show tonight. We had considered finding an open mic or something akin to that, but decided we'd have more fun jamming with Arnie in his basement. Tomorrow we head out to Little Rock and my friend Becks, which we're really looking forward to. More then!

June 19 @ 1:17 CST

We had a very quiet day today, got up when we wanted to after a good night's sleep, then took a nap when we were watching cartoons with the kids. Very nice. After we woke up, we went to the River Gate Mall and got Hank some swim trunks, Granger a haircut, and me a shirt with sleeves since I didn't bring any, thinking it would be 90+ degrees. Silly me - it's only summertime, what was I thinking?! I don't think it's gotten above 75 the entire trip so far. After the mall, we went to a restaurant named Cooker, and called Arnie to come join us when he got home from work. It was great food, very delicious. We went back to Arnie's house, hung out for a bit while he packed for a trip, and then went downstairs and jammed with him. What fun! We had debated whether or not to go to an open mic tonight to try to do something else while in Nashville, but decided it would be infinitely more fun to play with Arnie in his basement than go sit in a noisy bar and hope to play something. Speaking of hoping to play, believe it or not I finally heard from The Bluebird Cafe today - seems they had misplaced the press kit I sent a few months ago, just found it, and want me to come do a Writer's Night. Well, the timing wasn't great on that one, but having done a lot of booking acts myself, I know that sometimes things slip through the cracks. So, we're planning on coming back this way to do The Bluebird, and maybe some other stuff while we're here.

June 21 @ 4:05 pm

I'm sitting on Diane Litke's deck in Richardson, TX right now, enjoying the sunshine and warm breeze. Her house is gorgeous, and the ambiance is so wonderful. It's amazing how you can tell that a house and its owner are meant for each other.

We left Nashville a little late, and I simply **had** to stop at Loretta Lynn's Kitchen in Hurricane Mills, TN to buy my dad (who's a big Loretta fan) a postcard and

some goodies from the gift shop. The woman at the gift shop said she'd heard of me, and wanted to know why I wasn't at the songwriters' showcase up at the ranch. Hmm, something to do next year! (Strange that she'd heard of me!)

We made it to Little Rock around 8:00 Thursday night, and to Becky and Keith's for the most delicious dinner at about 8:30. She made a casserole of chicken and spaghetti that was so good I had to have seconds, and the recipe. We got to meet their son, Chris, and he was such a cool guy. We hung out at Becky and Keith's for awhile, and agreed that since they were pretty far out from Little Rock, it would be better for us to get a hotel near the radio station for the 8:00 a.m. show the next morning. So, we stayed at the Presidential Holiday Inn (can you say, "Bill Clinton"?) across from the new Clinton library, about two miles from the station (near President Clinton Boulevard - sense a theme going here?!). We left a wakeup call at the desk for 6:30 am, and headed to bed. The next morning, my cell phone rang, and I answered it, all groggy and sleepy. It was Becky and Keith, there to meet us and lead us to The Buzz. Only problem was, it was 7:15, and we were to be there at 7:30! AGH! Thank God Becky called, because the hotel never did - so, we frantically washed up, got dressed, and hauled you-know-what to the station, making it there at about 7:45 am. We had about 10 minutes to warm up before the show started, thank God. Unfortunately, there was no plug-in for Granger's bass, so he ended up just doing backing vocals. We had a great time with Chris Brown, Stanley Knox, and Jeff Allen from **103.7 The Buzz**, and Jim Harris from The Arkansas Times, who had tried to get us a show in Little Rock the night before. They were all a bunch of great folks who made us feel right at home, and the show lasted longer than we expected, we were all having such a good time. They played a cut from The Distance Wall and a track from Trickle, and we played live 10K Arrows and The Distance Wall. Wanda, my bud from Wisconsin, called the show, too - that was the coolest thing! Becky was such fun - she was right in there with us, having a great time. She really came through for us - they all did. After the show, we (Granger and I, the kids, and Becky) went back to the hotel and had breakfast, chilled out, and then Becky left with Keith and we packed up to head out to Dallas.

KABZ 103.7 FM - The Buzz, Little Rock, AR - 6/20/03

*First three photos by Becky Cheney
All other photos courtesy of The BuzzCam, captured by Franco Pietoso (Thanks, Franco!)*



Getting ready to go on



Live!



Captured by the BuzzCam with Becky Cheney

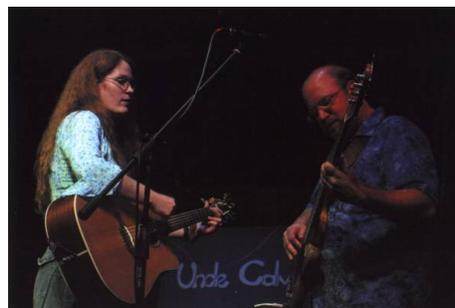


Captured by the BuzzCam

Ah, the trip to Dallas! Let's see, we got diverted on I-30 because of the jack-knifed tractor-trailer, then there was the accident on I-30 trying to get to I-75 - by this time, our sound check at Uncle Calvin's had passed, and we hit every red light there was trying to get to the show! ARGH! We got there at 7:15 (doors open at 7:30), ran in, did our sound check, threw our merch at the sales people, and went to the green room to change out of our traveling clothes. They ask for the credit card slips to get the merch set up, and Granger went out to the car to get our lockbox with the credit card slips, cash, etc. Only, it wasn't there. It's in a hotel in Knoxville, TN. I'm not a very happy girl at this point, and we have ten minutes before we go on. So, we decided to put that aside and concentrate on the show and having a good time. I have really looked forward to this show and to meeting Michael and Chris, friends I've known for years but haven't met in person until tonight. We went out there, played well, and had a kick-ass set. We got an encore, and came back and did Thin Line. We enlisted the audience to help with the "oohs", and they were great! We hung around after the show to hear Jean Sydoninos's sets, and thoroughly enjoyed her. Then, we piled in the car and came to Diane's house, where we're staying for the weekend and doing a house concert. She and Susan are so hospitable and welcoming, it's wonderful

Uncle Calvin's Coffeehouse, Dallas, TX - 6/20/03

Photos by Diane Litke





We're off with Diane to go pick up the new Harry Potter book, and then go out for pizza. More as things happen.

June 22 @ 11:15 pm CST

It's the end of the day, and we've packed up the car with most of our stuff. Speaking of stuff, boy, did we bring too much of it! So, we weeded out our baggage and are mailing two boxes of "stuff" home tomorrow on the way out to Lake Charles. One thing I've noticed about Texas - big blue skies - nothing is small here!

It has been so much fun staying here with Diane and Susan. We piled in our cars last night and went to get the new Harry Potter book at Borders, only to find they were sold out. So, we went to Target, and found several copies. We were very happy that Borders was sold out, as their price was \$30 and the Target price was \$16. Diane got a copy, and I got two, one for me and one for Hank. Then we went and had some damned good pizza at Diane and Susan's favorite pizza joint. All in all it was a nice, restful evening with good company.

Diane is an amazing photographer, and her work is all over their house. I'm such a visual and tactile person that I've been reveling in all the photos. They're just amazing, especially her hand photo gallery - she takes pictures of performers' hands, and she has some really beautiful shots, full of character and grace.

We did our concert, and had a nice crowd. I was so happy to see my friend Chris there, she and I have been friends for years, but have never met in person. (I think I mentioned this earlier.) Anyway, it was great to be able to sit and talk with each other in person. She's an ice skater, and one of the dearest people I've met. In addition to her we met some really nice people, including a gentleman named Mike with whom I had a long chat, and Kelly, who was so vibrant and funny.

Diane took a bunch of pictures of the show, and presented us with pictures of our hands afterwards, signed and dated. They're awesome! She's incredibly talented.

Right now it's off to bed for me as we have an early start in the morning in order to get to the next show on time, and I want to read some more of the new Harry Potter book!

Bonedoc's, Richardson, TX - 6/22/03

Photos by Diane Litke





With Diane Litke, host and photographer (and bonedoc!) extraordinaire!

June 25 @ 1:15 CST

Here we are in New Orleans, watching the rain batter the French Quarter. Yep, we're ready to go out sightseeing, and it's pouring! That won't stop us, though - we brought umbrellas!

We got to Lake Charles right on time, checked into the hotel, and went for a dip in the pool before heading over to Raymond's for the house concert. We had such a good time there; Raymond and Julie were the perfect hosts and the audience was so much fun. This was a very laid back concert; Granger and I sat the whole time in the most comfortable bar stools, which we usually don't do. It was a nice change for us. Raymond had made some kind of Louisiana treat, and I can't for the life of me remember what they're called - the closest I can come is "pooballs"! There were a bunch of kids there, which was great for our kids. I know they were glad to be out of the car and with their peers, that's for sure. Raymond's show was one of the best so far - SO much fun!

Steiner House Concert Series, Lake Charles, LA - 6/22/03

Photos by Ray Steiner





With our incredible and gracious hosts, the Steiners

We left for New Orleans yesterday, allowing four hours in case of construction on the road. We've been running into a lot of that lately. We got here in three, and are staying in the Plaza Suite right next to the French Quarter, and midway between both shows. We played O'Flaherty's last night, and played very well. Unfortunately, we didn't have much of an audience as the club was tucked way back in the back of several nightclubs in the same complex, and the posters I'd sent were never put up. We had fun anyway, and went to eat at a restaurant on the corner afterwards. We had delicious gulf shrimp and salads and I saw the "go cups" at the end of the bar by the door. I remember well the go cups from my youth; every restaurant/bar in New Orleans (and in Fort Walton Beach, FL) had plastic cups so you could pour your drink in one and take it with you to the next bar. There was a gift shop next door to the restaurant (of course, you can't walk two feet without finding a gift shop!) and we picked up some Mardi Gras masks and beads for the kids. Tonight is the show at Neutral Ground, and I've just discovered a time discrepancy in my notes - looks like we're on at 8:00, not 8:30, and Richard at O'Flaherty's said last night that we play for an hour. Guess I'll find out tonight!

We're off to play in the Quarter in the rain.

O'Flaherty's, New Orleans, LA - 9/24/03

Photos by Carey and Susannah Barrow



July 4th, 9:57 am

Well, we got home last night (yay!) and I'd had no opportunity to catch up on the tour diary during the rest of the trip. So, let's see how much I can remember! Well, I left off right before we played Neutral Ground in New Orleans. After one aborted attempt, we finally found the coffeehouse, which is tucked into the back of one of the older sections of New Orleans. It turns out that it's a membership-type of place with lots of college-aged kids. It has a nice ambiance with games, books, couches, and comfy chairs. The kids settled into a table and chair arrangement and hung out reading, drawing, and playing with their stuff. The bathroom (yes, only one!) had been painted in gorgeous colors, and even had elvish runes - naturally, being the Tolkienite that I am, I took pictures of it. It was someone named Bryan's birthday, so our original scheduled time (8:30) was correct, due to the ongoing celebration. We had a really good set, stayed for part of Gina Forsyth's set at 10:00, and went back to the hotel.

Neutral Ground Coffeehouse, New Orleans, LA - 06/25/03

Photos by Carey and Susannah Barrow



Our host, Gina Forsyth

Runes!

A note on our hotel - we stayed at the Plaza Suite Hotel right off the French Quarter, and it was probably the best hotel stay of the entire trip. It's an old firehouse, and when you check in, you drive your car right into the lobby to unload. The room we stayed in was actually two; a living area with a foldout couch, and a separate bedroom. Two of the nicest aspects of this hotel were honest-to-God soft and fluffy towels, and a kitchenette. We had stayed at Motel 6 and Holiday Inn and as everyone knows, most hotel towels are pretty much like giant pieces of sandpaper, so The Plaza's towels felt REALLY good!

The Plaza Suite, New Orleans, LA

Photo by Carey



To pass time before our show at Neutral Ground, we went to the Aquarium of the Americas and saw frogs, seahorses (I saw a pregnant daddy!), jellyfish, sharks, piranha, and even a white alligator. We also petted baby sharks in a tank, and found that they're actually really very soft. The kids had a great time there, and we'd definitely like to go back.

The White Alligator

Photo by Carey



We left New Orleans on Thursday morning and made our way to our friend Doc's house in Hattiesburg, MS. As usual, we found all the construction on the Interstates! It was raining as we left, but nothing serious - just the intermittent bursts of southern thunderstorms amid the sunshine. We made great time and got to Doc's in time to throw in a load of laundry (thank heavens for washing machines!), shower, and relax a bit before the Pony Espresso show in Columbia. I spent much of my time that afternoon on the phone, talking to Motel 6 guest relations in an attempt to find out who stole the lockbox out of our room in

Knoxville the first night of our trip. Not surprisingly, the mystery wasn't solved, although we have a very good idea of who took it. We spent the rest of the trip unable to take credit card charges, as the slips were in the lockbox.

The Pony Espresso is about 30 minutes from Doc's house, so he got home from his long commute and we followed him out of his subdivision (I believe he termed the roads as "boiled spaghetti," and he was right!) to head down 98 to Columbia. I had really been looking forward to this show as Claire von Gahlen and I had hit it off very well during my booking inquiries, and her place sounded so cool. I was right, it was without a doubt one of the best places we played during the trip, and we had such a good time. Her store is half coffee/goody shop and half toy store. We played outside in front of the store on a nice stage under a tree. It was our only outdoor show on the tour, and we loved it! The audience was so receptive and appreciative, and we had such a good time with them. Doc took pictures, too. (I have six instant cameras here at my elbow, waiting to be developed!) After the show, we indulged in a Peach Freeze and a Lime Freeze - heaven! If you're ever near Columbia, MS, you should definitely stop in for a rest and a treat. Tell them we said hi! Claire is one of the coolest people, and we're so glad we met her. She gifted me with a tiny yellow toy turtle, which became our tour mascot and perched on the dashboard for the rest of the trip.

The Tiny Yellow Turtle, Riding On The Dash

Photo by Carey



The Pony Espresso, Columbia, MS - 6/26/03

Most photos by Doc Dunn



Our dear friend Doc Dunn

Our fabulous hosts!

We crashed back at Doc's house after the show, but didn't have nearly enough time to hang out with Doc as he was up and out at 6:45 the next morning. We had intended to spend two days with him, but with the rain in Louisiana we decided to go ahead and stay one extra day so we'd have somewhere to go in the

afternoon before the Neutral Ground show instead of wandering New Orleans in the rain for six or seven hours.

We left Doc's Friday morning for our 2:00 pm gig at **WUWF 88.1 FM** in Pensacola. We got there right at 1:45, and had a wonderful time. John Macdonell is the host of Acoustic Interlude, and we found during our conversations that he and I had lived in Fort Walton Beach, FL at the same time! Yep, it is indeed a small world. John is a very gracious, fun, and friendly man, and we had a blast doing the show with him.

Acoustic Interlude, WUWF 88.1 FM, Pensacola, FL - 6/27/03

Photos by Susannah Barrow



Preparing to go live



Live!



With our fantastic host, John Macdonell

After that, we drove to our friend Leslie's (that's her and her family in the picture at right) house on Perdido Key, which is about as west as you can get in Florida, since it borders Alabama. Now, having lived in Fort Walton, which is about 45 minutes or so away from Pensacola, I was familiar with Perdido Key and Pensacola. Of course, I only knew how to get to the Harley shop and the biker hangouts back then, so a lot of it was unexplored territory for me! I had been looking forward to seeing my old friend **Rusty McHugh**, who's a regular performer at the FloraBama. He invited me to come play with him there, and it had been about 25 years since we'd seen each other. I met Rusty and his partner, Mike Fincher, when they came to Fort Walton back in 1977. They'd come to town from LaGrange, GA, with ten dollars to their name, an old Volkswagen Thing, and a dog named Barney. I was the bartender the night they came into the Beer Gardens to audition. During that time frame, I was bartending, waitressing, and singing on my breaks. (I kept myself busy, didn't I?!) Mike and Rusty were a hoot, and we became friends. So, here I am years later, looking forward to our reunion. Unfortunately, Mike passed away in December of 2002, but Rusty is still going strong. We had a great reunion, and I had a ton of fun at the FloraBama. It was much like playing the Beer Gardens again, with bras and panties hanging from the ceiling, a rowdy crowd, and beer and liquor flying over the bar in record numbers. We ended up doing some of my more obscure tunes, such as *The Older That I Get The Worse Men Seem*, which was in keeping with Rusty's songs, such as *Daddy's Drunk And Naked On The Waterslide* and *Who's Your Poondaddy?*. It was definitely old home week! But, I missed Mike terribly.



The FloraBama, Perdido Key, FL - 6/28/03





Reunited with my dear friend Rusty McHugh

Here's some shots from when Rusty and I first met. Didn't we all look young?! (It's because we were!). That's Rusty and Mike on the left at The Beer Gardens, and Mike, Rusty, me, and Ray Tweed on the right the same night.



I ran into some old compatriots of mine, including Jimmy Louis, who knew all the people I used to know. Unfortunately, as happens with bikers, a lot of my old friends are dead now. However, we did catch up on who was still alive, who was doing what, and who was where.

After the FloraBama, Granger and I headed back to Leslie's house and grabbed the kids (no, they didn't come with us!) and headed for the beach. I sat on the white sand, humming "Beach Town" to myself, and watched the waves and the sky while the kids dashed about in the waves. Felt just like coming home again. I gathered (as I usually do) about a gazillion seashells, felt the salt spray on my face, got sunburned a little, added another few hundred freckles to the ones I already have, and thoroughly enjoyed myself.

Leslie treated us to dinner at her restaurant, The Oyster Bar, and the food was soooo good! One of my favorite things is hushpuppies and fried shrimp, and I felt like I'd died and gone to heaven. Scrumptious! We went back to Leslie's after that and sat on the deck overlooking the bay and talked for hours. There's nothing like spending time with friends - can't beat it.

We left (reluctantly) on Sunday for Atlanta, GA to see Granger's brothers, Don and Mike, and their wives, Mary and Brandi. The kids were glad to see family and cousins, and we had a blast. Mary makes a mean apple pie! We caught up with each other and did the family thang - it had been way too long since we'd seen each other, so we were really looking forward to this part of the trip.

On Monday night the kids stayed with the family while Granger and I drove about 100 miles (there and back again) to Decatur to play Eddie's Attic. We had a blast, got a recording of our set, had some good food and heard some really good music, and had a night out. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, and enjoyed seeing our friend Lea's name as coming in second at the open mic shootout! (Yay, Lea!) We meandered back to Don and Mary's house in the throes of tropical storm Bill, which was creeping up behind us as we left the Gulf.

Sorry - there are no photos of Eddie's Attic; we ran out of time and cameras! We do have a CD of our set though :).

The next day (Tuesday), we were off to Spartanburg, SC to do our gig at the Guitar Bar. We stopped for lunch in Carnesville, GA at a Petro travel plaza. Unfortunately, during our stop, someone stole my cell phone out of my purse and made off with it. Luckily, Granger's was still with him and we made the obligatory calls to the cell phone company, making sure service was turned off before whoever took it called Timbuktu and charged it to me. (A replacement cell phone was waiting for me when we got home - get those service plans, folks - they're definitely worth the cost!) We got to Spartanburg with no further problems, checked into our motel, and headed downtown to do the show. We were originally scheduled to play for 30 minutes, but ended up playing for two hours, even though the rain had kept the crowds away. Scott, our gracious host and co-owner of the Guitar Bar with his friend Marc, even got up and played drums with us! Scott, Rose (the bartender), and everyone there were so much fun and we look forward to our return there. I promised Rose I'd re-learn Angels Rejoiced for her, too - we both love that song!

The Guitar Bar, Spartanburg, SC - 7/1/03

Photos by Carey and Susannah Barrow



By Wednesday morning, we were starting to itch for home. We were on Week Three of the tour, and the car was starting to feel really small. But, we had one more gig and more friends to see before the last leg home. On the way to North Carolina, we took a picture of the giant peach on the highway - now that would make one heck of a peach pie! Our last show on the road was at a small coffee shop called Open Eye Cafe in Carrboro, NC, right outside of Chapel Hill. Our friends Donna and Kim Ramsey were going to drive over from their home in Nashville, NC to see us, and Kim was going to sit in with us on percussion, but due to T.S. Bill and tornado warnings, they (wisely) stayed home safe and snug. We got into town early, and since we were staying Kim and Donna after the show, we looked for ways to amuse ourselves until show time. We found a fabulous restaurant called Amante's, which has the absolute best pizza I've ever eaten (and I eat a LOT of pizza). We spent about an hour there, chowing down, and waiting for the rain to subside.

The Giant Peach, South Carolina

Photos by Carey



With rain coming in intermittent bursts, we headed over to Open Eye and played to a small but friendly crowd, including my long-time online friend, Jackie, and her husband, Greg. The kids, old hands at amusing themselves during our shows by now, hung out quietly while we played. They really proved to be quite the troopers during this tour. Jackie and I had fun catching up with each other after the show. After saying our goodbyes, we headed on to Casa Ramsey (Donna and Kim's), knowing we'd get there around midnight since they live about an hour and a half away from Carrboro. As always, they welcomed us with open arms, and we stayed up until about 3:00 a.m. catching up with each other. They are such cool people, and dear friends.

Open Eye Cafe, Carrboro, NC - 7/2/03

Photos by Susannah Barrow



The next day, we had planned to leave at about 10:00 to get home in time to pick up our cat from the boarding kennel and get to the grocery store. Well, after staying up so late, we woke up a little later than 10:00! We left the Ramseys and made our way home, determined not to stop for anything until we were in Virginia. We made our way up 95, looking forward to home and hearth, with the rains still intermittent and heavy. We'd already seen one car off the road thanks to T.S. Bill, and we were not going to be one of them! We knew we were close to home when about 10 miles outside of Fredericksburg, traffic became heavy and slow. After stopping and going and stopping and going and almost getting into a very bad accident due to idiots who were driving like there was no bad weather, we decided we'd really like to get home in one piece and we ditched I-95 for Route 17. MUCH better! It wasn't the interstate, but it was moving! We got home in time to snag our daughter Summer, our cat Tigger, and get to the grocery store to replenish those bare cabinets we'd left behind.

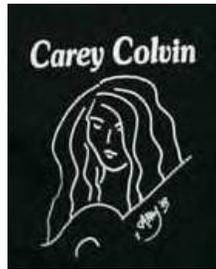
So, here we are, safe at home with great memories of places we went, people we met, silly souvenirs, a lot of dirty laundry, and smiles on our faces. We'll definitely be back on the road again next year (if not sooner)!

We'd like to say huge and heartfelt thank yous to the following people who so graciously opened their homes and hearts to us:

- Arnie Reed
- Becky and Keith Cheney
- Diane Litke (and Susan, too!)
- "Doc" Dean Dunn
- Leslie, Steve, Parker, and Max Cole

- The Helveys
- Donna and Kim Ramsey

We'd also like to give huge thanks to **Jayson Hait** for working so hard and quickly on the tour t-shirts. They sold out quickly! Here's an up-close shot of the front of a black and white one:



The back of the shirt has all the tour dates :).

And here's our **Best/Worst List:**

- Best Place We Ate:** Becky's house in White Hall, AR; The Oyster Bar in Perdido Key, FL; and Amante's Pizza in Carrboro, NC
- Worst Place We Ate:** Stuckey's (one without a DQ)
- Worst Hotel:** Motel 6 (*any of them!*)
- Best Hotel:** Plaza Suite in New Orleans, LA
- Best Video the Kids Watched in the Car:** *Osmosis Jones*
- CD We Listened to Most:** CPR (*all of them!*)
- Best Assortment of Yummy Goodies:** The Pony Espresso in Columbia, MS
- Best Gift Shop:** The Gator in New Orleans, LA
- Best Gas Price:** \$1.29 a gallon, Roswell, GA
- Worst Gas Price:** \$1.50, Stony Creek, VA
- Worst Traffic (besides DC):** Dallas, TX
- Granger's Favorite Bar With Bras On the Ceiling:** The FloraBama, Perdido Key, FL
- Funniest Town Name:** Bucksport, TN
- Most Ominous Town Name:** Fate, TX
- Best Key Lime Pie:** Neutral Ground Coffeehouse, New Orleans, LA

What a wonderful time we had!

P.S. We found 49 states in the license plate game, everything except Hawaii :).