

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
**WIN Columnist**

A man gets to do some pretty serious thinking when he logs 2,500 miles of interstate driving in a week.

Or, if you're like me, it's more like mindless wanderings and wonderings inspired by not Burma Shave or South of the Border (if you've driven to Florida, you'll know what I'm talking about), but places like the Bourbon, Missouri, Family Center or Turnback Creek.

For example, there's a bridge in Missouri on which the weight limit is 65 tons. What, in the name of twenty-four hour truck stops is rolling around on our highways that actually weighs 130,000 pounds?

Oklahoma makes me a little nervous, in a Big Brother kind of way. Its road signs say, "Watching your speed? We are."

I could imagine some wimpy, spineless Pioneer pushing west when he came to a waterway half the width of the Black Rock canal, and two times less intimidating. "Well, lookie here, pahdner. Reckon we'll have to turn back." Of course, I always looked forward to crossing the Great Pee Dee River on our yearly trips to Florida. When you're seven, it's a funny name.

I didn't actually take the time to stop at the Bourbon Family Center, but the only three things it advertised on its lone billboard were beer, liquor and hard ice cream. It was almost enough to get me to pull over to see exactly what kind of frozen confection it was they were scooping out.

Jesus is very big in the Southern plains.

I can understand why say Nike, or Calvin Klein or Corning might find a need for some kind of factory direct, super warehouse outlet store. But, is it really necessary for Russell Stover candy?

You'd be amazed -- and it's why the fight over royalties on music can get so intense -- how many times I've heard Bruce Springsteen's "Hungry Heart" in seven days.

As a reasonably large sports fan, I felt compelled to stop at Jim Thorpe's birthplace. Many would argue he is America's all-time greatest athlete. If true, we have a pretty funny way of paying homage to that fact. His birthplace and museum is an unassuming, virtually unmarked, off-the-true-beaten-path structure tucked off a two-lane road about an hour west of Tulsa. In an ironic twist, it's a good javelin's throw away from the world's largest McDonalds. There was plenty of signage for that.

How did Branson, Missouri, come to be exactly?

I had been looking forward to a trip the Truman Presidential Library and Museum for months. To me, it really doesn't matter if you liked him or not. On a day when a big decision for most Buffalonians is ketchup or mustard on a Ted's hot dog, stop and think, really think, for just a moment about not just the person but singularly and alone having to make one of the all time toughest decisions in the history of mankind: actually using the atomic bomb  
Wow.

I think in Ohio I passed some place honoring Calvin Coolidge. Wow was not the first word that crossed my mind. I didn't stop.

If I had a few hundred thousand dollars hanging around, I'd bring Waffle House and Quizino's Subs to Western New York. I look forward to both every time I leave the area.

However, if you make it to Stillwater, Oklahoma -- where they're in the process of churning out one heck of a horse vet -- forgo those and all

others for a meal at Shortcakes Diner, number of locations: one. It was so popular that when we drove by the first time, we thought it was a used car lot. I need to go back to see if they serve grits as good as the Waffle House makes 'em.

And, by the way, it might not have been enough to make it a full fledged tax write off, this little jaunt, but I went by not one but two Pro Bass fishing stores. You'll be impressed. Please, Buffalo, get this one right.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at [www.wnynewspapers.com](http://www.wnynewspapers.com). Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)*