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EE Podcast #51 EE Gypsies: Wandering Designers & Devs

Lea Alcantara: This is the ExpressionEngine Podcast Episode #51, our special, extra long, end of the summer episode where we just talk to various wandering ExpressionEngine designers and devs. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my co-host, Emily Lewis. This episode is sponsored by EECI 2011. EECI is up for its 5th season, and this time it's returning to the United States of America the most significant conference where ExpressionEngine developers, designers and users will run from October 19th to the 21st at the Invincible Dog in Brooklyn, New York. A few tickets are still available, so check out EECIConf.com for more details.

Emily Lewis: The ExpressionEngine Podcast would also like to thank Pixel & Tonic for being our major sponsor of the year.

Lea Alcantara: One of our guests for today hardly needs an introduction. I think most of the people in the community already know him very well. But for those who don't, we have Mike Boyink. Hello Mike.

Mike Boyink: Hey, how are you doing?

Lea Alcantara: We are very good, thanks.

Emily Lewis: Hey Mike, in case there is someone who doesn't know you, can you give a little brief introduction about yourself?

Mike Boyink: Oh, sure. Oh boy, where to start. As far as ExpressionEngine terms, I'm probably one of the old-timers in the crew. I launched Boyink Interactive almost ten years ago now, and I was using pMachine Pro.

Lea Alcantara: Wow.

Mike Boyink: Yeah, I know it. It's the predecessor to ExpressionEngine for client work, and then when ExpressionEngine came out, I shifted it over to it and we started Train-ee along in there somewhere when there became a need for ExpressionEngine training with kind of the book and screencast and classroom training stuff. So yeah, I'm currently doing client-based web development work we got there at Boyink Interactive and then Train-ee is our remaining ExpressionEngine training source, but we are still providing that service as well.

Emily Lewis: And you are doing all of this right now from the road?

Mike Boyink: Yeah, exactly. We left our home in West Michigan just about 11 months ago now.

Lea Alcantara: Wow, almost a year.

Mike Boyink: Yeah, it's almost a year, and we set out for a year, but we recently decided that a year just wasn't going to be enough.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, cool.



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Emily Lewis: So I'm actually looking at the Flickr photo you sent us to see where you are today. You are in Washington State?

Mike Boyink: Yeah, Northern Washington along a body of water. I probably wouldn't have recognized the name eight weeks ago, the Straits of Juan de Fuca. We have that visible out at our kitchen window, and then if I look up the other direction, I've got the Olympic Mountains in the background.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, it's so cool.

Emily Lewis: Wow, that's just incredible. The view looks incredible from the picture. So what kind of started you on this journey on the road and doing your job from the road as well?

Lea Alcantara: Especially with the family?

Mike Boyink: Yeah, yes, so for those who don't know, I've got a 14-year-old boy and now a 13-year-old girl, so we literally compressed puberty into a 30-foot RV.

Lea Alcantara: Nice.

Mike Boyink: Which is about as pretty as it sounds. Well, we've always home schooled and that's been one key factor, and then between home schooling and self-employment, it occurred to us at some point why are we sitting here in this house. There is nothing holding us here other than this house that we've got, and so we called it our pipe dream. Actually, my wife and I talked about it for a couple of years just as a way of having conversations. I grew up taking vacations in RVs, so that the whole RV scene was pretty familiar to us.

Then my son turned 13 and we realized we have a teenager now. If we don't do this soon, it's probably not going to happen. That window of opportunity is closing and we realized that we had never really seriously looked into it. We talked a lot about it, "Hey, wouldn't it be cool," but we hadn't analyzed the finances, what it would take to do this, could we stay connected down the road, could we keep our businesses going, if we have to sell the house, rent the house, just all those hassles you have to work through.

So we started doing that research and really didn't come up with any good reasons not to do it. Financially, it looked possible. It looked possible while keeping the house because that was kind of the bigger decision that we wanted to make 11 months ago. So in light of no good reason not to do it, we decided, "Hey, we are going to do this."

Lea Alcantara: So you kept the house? You still have the house.

Mike Boyink: Yeah, we have the house. We have a friend living there. We did not rent it because in order to make it a rental house, we would have to actually remortgage it and change the insurance policy all year around. So there were some bigger puzzles there in order to change it to a rental that we are wont to do. So it's a friend of wife is living there,



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and she's paying utilities living in the house, but she's also sorting and forwarding our mail to us. So she's actually kind of providing us a really valuable service as far as the...

Lea Alcantara: Wow, that's very convenient.

Mike Boyink: Yeah, it has worked out really well.

Emily Lewis: Well, you mentioned that your son turning 13 was what sort of spurred this pipe dream into reality, so obviously your relationship with your family was a huge factor. How has that relationship evolve since you've been on the road?

Mike Boyink: Oh, it's like any family life, it has had high points and low points. Again, I got a son and a daughter with different personality types. My son is very kind of outgoing and talkative and is always enthusiastic about the trip and engaged from day one. My daughter is not so much. We left with her not knowing if this was really something she wanted to do. She's more introverted. She's our creative writer and very sentimental. She likes her room and her friends and kind of life as she knew it.

It took a while for her to kind of get on board, which made for some tense moments. Yeah, you are spending hours together in this little room called "the truck" going down the road, and we look at it in retrospect and it really kind of forced us to deal with some issues that we may not have had to deal within the house because you've got more room to kind of separate yourself and it's easier to overlook or not deal with problems, but being in that close proximity you just have to deal with.

Lea Alcantara: So in terms of...

Mike Boyink: And the key turning point for...

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, no, continue.

Mike Boyink: I said that the turning point for her, for my daughter, was we got in a truck accident going home for the holidays, and we got knocked off the road by a girl who we suspect was texting, and so we had that really scary episode, so it was that, but also we were actually off the road for five weeks while we waited for the truck to get repaired, spending part of that time with my in-law's house and part of it in a condo that somebody really graciously let us stay in for a while. And then right from that we like literally picked the truck up, got back on the road and drove right to Atlanta, Georgia right before that big ice storm through this winter.

Emily Lewis: Wow.

Mike Boyink: Because we actually had a training class there and the ice storm changed our stay in Atlanta from four nights or five nights in a hotel to ten nights, and at the end of all this, my daughter said, "I just want to go home." And we looked at her and said, "Well, what do you mean? The house back in Holland or the trailer?" "I don't care. I want to be home."



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Emily Lewis: Oh.

Mike Boyink: Well, for the most part, she has been engaged in the trip quite well.

Emily Lewis: Well, it probably redefines that definition of home to really mean the family center.

Mike Boyink: Oh, absolutely. It's funny how this little trailer became after that ice storm because we had left the trailer in a little town in Georgia. So we got through the ice storm, drove back, got the trailer and went right through a state park. We were the only one in the whole park, and it was just awesome being back in the trailer because it truly is our home. I mean, it's not much to look at and there is not much space, but it's where you sleep, it's where you eat, it's where you interact as a family and where you work. And it doesn't matter if it's on wheels or not, it is our home.

Lea Alcantara: So my question regarding that is, how has that affected your work life balance considering you shifted from a house where there is a little bit more separation of life there, but now that you are in a trailer, there is hardly any of that and I would suspect that part of the reason why you decide to work and travel is so you can experience life a little bit more. So how has that affected the work life balance?

Mike Boyink: Oh, in some ways not at all.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Mike Boyink: I mean, back in the house, my office was in the basement so work was only just a few steps away anyway. So in that sense, work or my office, so to speak, is 20 feet closer than it used to be. In others, there are times where you are sitting outside of your sanity and you wanted to go see it, but you've got work to do. So there are those puzzles of can I escape and get away for a day and go sightseeing or do I have to kind of heads down and get some client work done in order to fund this whole thing. So it is an ongoing puzzle. In the midst of that, the work of freelancers you know that the work kind of comes in and goes. And there would be times where you are putting in 12 or 14 hours a day and then there are days where you just kind of go to keep up with the email and that's it. It was just trying to time those lighter email-only days with the excursions I am allowed to see the sites that were around.

Emily Lewis: Now, you mentioned that you went up to Atlanta and you had a Train-ee class. So have you incorporated your travels with expanded training?

Mike Boyink: Yeah, I think we've done a few more of the classroom events. So certainly we've tried to align those two worlds as much as possible, both just to get classes in new locations but also just from a financial point of view, the more we can justify our mileage for business reasons, the more affordable these whole trips could be.

Emily Lewis: Oh right.

Mike Boyink: So anytime we can do a class, we can claim the mileage between that last business engagement and that class as a business expense. Yeah, it should be an interesting tax year. I know we are trying to keep detailed records, but we told our tax guy, "Get ready for us next year because it's going to be a fun one."



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Emily Lewis: Have there been any things that you've done with regard that's different than what you would normally do if you were stationary at home with saving receipts or keeping track of things other than what you just mentioned with like mileage to different cities?

Mike Boyink: Well, it's really pretty much the same. I think we are just again just trying to keep track of as much stuff as possible and trying to keep track of what stuffs are business stuffs and which stuffs are not.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting. Well, did you find out like when you were doing research before you started to work and travel if there were any restrictions about working on the road, because I know, for example internationally as a Canadian, if I decided to travel to San Francisco, I'm not allowed to sit there and work for a few weeks without tax consequences.

Mike Boyink: Yeah, I am trying to think when that came up. It might have been just kind of an insurance puzzle. It was the main thing with trying to find insurance. It's a bit of a grey area that you are doing business out of an RV, so the finding an insurance company, I think, was the biggest puzzle. Otherwise, our billing address is still back in Michigan I think as far as kind of the administration of doing business at all. It's just flowing as it normally it did.

Emily Lewis: What about technology? Obviously, I'm guessing you have a laptop or a computer that you are using on the RV, but what about Wi-Fi and internet on the road?

Mike Boyink: Oh, that has been a puzzle. A lot of our reparks advertise Wi-Fi. Again, if you think a target audience for most of our reparks is retired folks and they all wanted to stay connected with their grandkids these days. So with me, it looks to me like maybe five or six years ago some companies went through and kind of sold most of their reparks on these packaged Wi-Fi deals. In actuality, our experience has been they work enough to actually do your work on maybe a fourth of the time. We've kind of view them as a nice bonus. If the park Wi-Fi works and it's fast, that's cool.

But I certainly don't depend on it because it's just not reliable enough yet, so that the backbone of our infrastructure is an AirCard. We have a Verizon-based AirCard that plugs into a router. The great thing with this technology, they are all relatively affordable. It works pretty well. So the AirCard plugs into a router. The router has extra slots. If I wanted to buy like a Sprint AirCard or the AT&T AirCard, I could do all of that and plug it into the same router and then we connect it. We have a couple of laptops that we connect to the router just to be able to share the AirCard with. So between those two things and then an iPhone, it pretty covers us pretty well technology-wise.

Lea Alcantara: Do you ever miss the speed of, say, a dedicated line, especially when you are sharing an AirCard with several computers?

Mike Boyink: Oh, absolutely. We've kind of learned the meter of the bandwidth. I definitely don't have a problem kicking family members off of the other laptop if I need the bandwidth. It's like, "Sorry, this takes precedence." But yeah, I certainly do miss the speed of a wired connection. It's the upload speeds that kill me more than anything. But as far as the tradeoff goes, it's been a great tradeoff with what we've been able to experience.



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Lea Alcantara: Well, since you are traveling, do you ever work outside of the trailer? Like if you are in a city and you decide, "Let's just work at a café for today."

Mike Boyink: Oh, absolutely. Actually, libraries have been the places to go because they don't have any extra taste that you are going to buy to someone or to sit there.

Lea Alcantara: Yes.

Mike Boyink: And usually, overall the library has been pretty reliable and decent speeds as far as their Wi-Fi connections go. It's been a pretty nice bonus that way. But with the coffee shop, café, or even the odd cool working spot here and there definitely works out.

Emily Lewis: And what about your clients? Are they aware that you are traveling and do you have to coordinate with them in terms of time zone availabilities? Or even if you happen to be in their city, like do you make a point of visiting a client?

Mike Boyink: Oh, absolutely, if I would be able to visit clients. Like one of my oldest clients, in fact, I had never met him in person, but we were able to meet up with him in the Phoenix area. Yeah, and time zones has been the biggest puzzle. It is funny I'm always very careful to tell, especially with new clients, "Just to make sure that you understand how I'm living, I'm not in a set spot kind of waiting for your call, we are on the move and I may have cell coverage or I may not have cell coverage, but you just need to be aware of this."

But for the vast majority of them, it's the source of delight for them when they call or email, "Where are you now? What are you doing? What out in your window now?"

Lea Alcantara: Nice.

Emily Lewis: I bet everyone is envious.

Mike Boyink: Yeah, it's funny. When I look at everything I've done in this world from getting married to having kids to buying a house to starting a business, to restoring cars, to writing a book, nothing I've ever done has gotten this much expression of envy. It's like they are envious that I'm living in a trailer.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Mike Boyink: But it's true.

Emily Lewis: I think it's having a sense of freedom.

Mike Boyink: Yeah, it really is, and I've tweeted a number with this, but I don't think from our experience, the great American dream is no longer you owning a house and two cars. The great American dream that is we've experienced to just travel because we meet so many people who say, "Yeah, we would love to do what you are doing. Or we are planning to do what you are doing after we retire." But it's just this common thread that we've heard so often is this desire for travel.



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Emily Lewis: Well, that seems like a good point to wrap up on. I did want to throw one last question out to you. What is the strangest thing that has happened to you since you've been on the road so far?

Mike Boyink: Strangest thing, well, a couple of things. We were visiting a park here just like last week or so and there was a girl using our truck mirrors and the tinted windows in our truck to transform herself from sort of an everyday woman into an Indian princess. She was just putting on her headdress and the clogs around or they have kind of shakers around her ankles. And it turned out they were an Indian spiritual dance tribe that travels around the Olympic peninsula by giving performances, and there were there to just do a little photo shoot by some waterfalls, and so that was kind of cool. And then at the other end of the scale is sitting in a grocery store parking lot and realizing that the guy across the parking lot is behind his door relieving himself, and a ton of kids going, "Oh." But yeah, this is the learning moment. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to teach in this learning moment.

Lea Alcantara: A learning moment, that's an interesting way to think about this.

Mike Boyink: I'm sure there is something to be said here.

Lea Alcantara: Yes. Well, thank you Mike.

Emily Lewis: Of what not to do.

Lea Alcantara: So I just wanted to say thanks Mike for joining us. That's all about the time we have for him.

Emily Lewis: Thank you so much Mike. It was great talking to you.

Mike Boyink: Absolutely, thanks guys.

Emily Lewis: Oh, before we go. So that people can stay up to date on what you are doing, can you let them know where you are on Twitter and where they can read about your road trip adventures?

Mike Boyink: Yeah, so with our trip, we have a specific road trip account. It's just [@BoyinkRoadTrip](#), and then the blog that we are keeping is [Boynks4Adventure.com](#).

Emily Lewis: And that's a numeral 4, correct?

Mike Boyink: Numeral 4, but I also have the variant with a redirect.

Emily Lewis: Oh, great. It's very cool.

Lea Alcantara: Thanks Mike.

Mike Boyink: Thank you.

Emily Lewis: Bye.

Mike Boyink: Bye.

Emily Lewis: Today, we are also talking to Ruthie Bendor, a nomadic web designer and developer who spent this past summer bicycling across America. Welcome Ruthie, thanks for joining us.



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Ruthie Bendor: Thanks for having me.

Lea Alcantara: So Ruthie, why don't you tell our listeners a little bit about yourself and what got you started on this travel/working/crazy biking across America journey?

Ruthie Bendor: Crazy is the right word. I've had some people call me a little bit insane. So I'm a web designer and developer. I live in Boston and I started the Boston ExpressionEngine meetup group about a year and a half ago. Obviously, I'm on a bit of hiatus this summer as I've been biking across the country. I started in Boston and I'm coming to you right now from Salt Lake City.

Emily Lewis: I've heard it.

Ruthie Bendor: So I'm very cool. It's pretty far.

Emily Lewis: Wow, I'm in awe.

Lea Alcantara: So continue...

Ruthie Bendor: And...

Lea Alcantara: Sorry.

Ruthie Bendor: I was just going to say, the truth is it's not that hard. It's only 50 miles a day, but you just have to sort of keep doing it.

Emily Lewis: Oh, only, of course, of course.

Lea Alcantara: I'm curious though because it's definitely much different from traveling with a car or a trailer and everything like that, so it's a lot more time consuming to get from Point A to Point B to get down to working. So how do you figure out when you decide to stop and decide to work or do you just decide, "I'm going to keep biking until I reach those miles and then stop." What? How is the plan going there?

Ruthie Bendor: Well, I have a rough itinerary, so I knew more or less how far I expected to be each day and I tried to leave myself enough time. When I stop for lunch or at the end of the day or in the morning before I hit the road, to sit down for an hour or two and check email, get a little bit of work done, and then in terms of getting substantial productive work done, I'm more or less have to wait for my days' off, because again, to that zone where you are just sitting there for two or three hours and actually clanking stuff out. It's really difficult to do that. Well, it's difficult to pedal and type at the same time.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, I can imagine.

Ruthie Bendor: Also, at the end of the day when you are really, really tired because you've been biking all day, you probably don't want me touching your production code at that point.

Emily Lewis: For sure. So do you schedule those days of work specifically, or do they come up based on project needs?



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Ruthie Bendor: Well, the truth is I've been really, really fortunate this summer. I've been working with a friend of mine, Marc Amos. He runs the Boston Web Studio. It's his own shop and it's been really, really great to have a partner this summer who has been able to work with me so that essentially when I can take time off to get actual work done, I have actual work to do. But if I need to bike for a few days and then I have no internet service because I'm biking through the Rocky Mountains, Marc steps up. So I would say that the importance of having a fantastic and supportive business partner is incredible.

Emily Lewis: And I'm looking at you on Twitter. You run [The Cycling Coder profile](#), and it says that one of the things that you've been doing biking is talking to people in government about how they use the internet. How has that process been?

Ruthie Bendor: That has actually been really, really interesting and a really great way to meet folks. So I mentioned I live in Boston. I'm going to be moving to San Francisco at the end of the year because next year I'll be working with an organization called Code For America that helps city governments use Web technology better, and I've worked in the private sector, I've worked for non-profits, but I've never worked in the public sector before. So I figured this summer would be a really great opportunity to meet people working at that intersection of government and technology, and basically just ask them as many dumb questions as I could think of to learn about the space and how things work or they could work better.

Lea Alcantara: So which came first? Is that new job in San Francisco, or did you just think, "Okay, I want to travel across America and here is a good excuse?" Like what? And like basically I'm just trying to figure out, well, what made you decide to bike across America instead of just flying to San Francisco.

Ruthie Bendor: Well, now we come back to that insanity thing. The truth is this has been a dream of mine for many years. I think I was 15 or something like that when I first found – there is a website called [CrazyGuyOnABike.com](#).

Lea Alcantara: Cool.

Ruthie Bendor: Well, it is actually a really cool site, and it's where people post journals of their long bike tours, and so that's where I was first discovered that people actually do this. I mean, I thought to myself, "I really want to do this someday." And this year, the timing just worked out. I sort of made the decision that I was going to do it back in January and spent all spring training and planning and just kind of lining everything up and I left Boston on June 15th.

Emily Lewis: Wow.

Lea Alcantara: Wow. Wow.

Emily Lewis: So you've mentioned that you've been able to meet a lot of people along your journey. Have you met other web developers, or have just been other professionals that are working as they are cycling?

Ruthie Bendor: Oh, I should say that I have barely met any other cyclists. I meet the occasional cyclists here and there, but the truth is I've met very, very few long-distance cycle tours. I think because the route that I'm taking is one that I picked myself.

Emily Lewis: Sure.



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Ruthie Bendor: There are a couple of well-known routes and I just happen to not be taking any of them. So in terms of like to answer your question of meeting people, I've been very fortunate. I sort of leaned on my network of professional contacts to put me in touch with folks who are working, either they are web developers or they are working with web developers, and through that I've been able to have some really, really good conversations. I got to tour a 911 call center in Buffalo, New York. I met with a number of folks working in government technology for the City of Chicago, including John Tolva, who is the CTO of the City of Chicago. Who else? I met with the CTO for the Secretary of State's Office in Denver.

Emily Lewis: And then so you are meeting a lot of these probably influential and interesting people, do they think you are crazy when you tell them what you are doing?

Ruthie Bendor: If they do, they hide it very well. Most people's response has been something between, "Wait, you are doing what," and, "That's totally awesome." So it's been really great.

Emily Lewis: That's probably a good icebreaker to get conversations going.

Ruthie Bendor: Absolutely, and do you know, but I'll say this, it makes it a lot easier to get interviews because when you can tell people, "Look, buddy, I biked here from Boston, the least you can do is sit down with me for 15 minutes." But the truth, everyone has been incredibly gracious, so it's been really great.

Lea Alcantara: So let's talk some practicality here because the reality is it's just you, your bike and perhaps a backpack. I wouldn't expect much more. So what are you carrying from place to place that has enabled you to continue working?

Ruthie Bendor: Sure. Well, the first thing is generally when you are biking, you don't carry a backpack.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Ruthie Bendor: It's very uncomfortable to ride with a backpack all day long because you are sort of hunched over.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Ruthie Bendor: Instead I carry saddle bags. So I've got two big ones in the back to smaller ones in the front and then sort of my kit goes on top of the rear rack. What I'm carrying for work is a 13" MacBook Air, which is the best computer I've ever owned, and I have a little mobile broadband's Dongle. Dongle is a very unfortunate word, but it gives me internet service in most places. It's been very helpful. To record these interviews with folks, I've been carrying a couple of really small mikes, just like lapel mikes and spare batteries. I'm sure I'm forgetting something but my entire electronics kit fits in my laptop bag. Oh, sorry, and my iPhone. My iPhone has been indispensable. It's communication. It's sort of a back-up internet connection if the mobile broadband thing isn't working, and it's my GPS.

Emily Lewis: I was just curious. This is a little bit of an indelicate question, and it's not really related to technology, but I really have to ask. So did you have to invest in some good bicycling pants that are padded?

Ruthie Bendor: Oh...

Emily Lewis: Because I have been on long bike ride and I know it's not comfortable.



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Ruthie Bendor: No, this is something that I gave a lot of thought to, and you see cyclists out there in Spandex and they look pretty silly. Well, there is a reason that cyclists look pretty silly because you really need to be wearing – well, I don't know. I should say here is what worked for me. I alternate between two pairs of cycling shorts that have the padding in them, and my saddle, so the actual bike seat, is leather. And generally if you are going to be on a bike day in and day out, you want to have a seat that is either leather or is hard. You don't want it to have a lot of padding because if there is a lot of padding, the padding starts to break down. You sink down into it and that's where you run into unpleasant things like chafing and saddle sores.

Emily Lewis: Oh wow.

Ruthie Bendor: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: So I think that's about the time we have left, but before we go, I have one last question. Is there one piece of advice you would give to someone who is considering doing something similar, maybe not necessarily biking across America, but someone who is thinking about traveling and working at the same time?

Ruthie Bendor: I would say not to underestimate the amount of time that you will need to spend each day sort of figuring out the basic logistics of your day like where you are going to eat, where you are going to sleep, what your day schedule looks like.

Emily Lewis: Did you have a resource that you use to figure out things like that?

Ruthie Bendor: Well, I have.

Emily Lewis: Or keep track of it?

Ruthie Bendor: Sure. I have what I refer to lovingly as “the spreadsheet of doom.” That's actually the file name, and as I've been doing research in terms of where to stay and whatnot, I've sort of been adding to that. But there isn't really one central place where you can find information like that. And of course, when you are on a bike tour, it's going to vary based on how far you can get each day. So you sort of have to get very good at being flexible.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, it sounds like it. Well, Ruthie, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. Really, I'm fascinated by this whole thing. I'm going to spend the rest of my day catching up on your Twitter feed.

Ruthie Bendor: It sounds good, and I'll spend the rest of my day updating my blog, which I think says that I'm still in Cleveland which is clearly wrong.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, speaking of that, before we let you go, can you tell our listeners where they can find you online and stay updated?

Ruthie Bendor: Absolutely, I've been blogging and tweeting. My website is CyclingCoder.com. My Twitter handle is @CyclingCoder. I would say the Twitter feed is where to get the up to the minute updates, and I'm also on Flickr. I have all my tour photos posted on Flickr under my handle on most places online as Unruthless.

Lea Alcantara: Perfect.



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Emily Lewis: Thanks Ruthie.

Ruthie Bendor: Thank you so much.

Lea Alcantara: We have Travis and Rachel Gertz, a husband and wife couple who more or less gave up their entire life in Calgary, Alberta, Canada to spend six months working and traveling across America in their trailer named Walter. Thanks for coming by, Travis and Rachel.

Travis Gertz: Thanks for having us.

Rachel Gertz: Yeah, thanks guys.

Emily Lewis: Welcome to the show, you guys. Could you give our listeners a little introduction to yourselves and how you got involved working with the ExpressionEngine?

Rachel Gertz: Well, it's kind of an unusual story. Travis has been in the design world for years and years, and me I actually graduated as a high school teacher. I got out. I decided I didn't want to do it and Travis said, "Hey, why don't you join me on an endless adventure and your son on wheels?" And so we started that, and we kept going.

Travis Gertz: Yeah, I guess to answer your EE question, I had been doing it for I guess about six years just for client work with freelance mostly again.

Lea Alcantara: So when you guys decided to, "Okay, let's go onto this grand adventure, how did you guys start preparing for that, and how far? Like at what point did you decide, "I'm really going to push this to the next level, and like I'll sell my condo, sell everything," all that kind of stuff? Like what prompted you to get to that point?

Travis Gertz: Well, at that time we were actually trying to sell our condo and move up to a bigger place. We are in this tiny place, 450 square feet.

Lea Alcantara: Wow.

Travis Gertz: And we were trying to look for a house and we are having a lot of trouble finding something we like and actually selling our place. But we always sort of joked around about maybe it would be easier just to live in a van down by the river and travel the country, and eventually we were kind of both tired of our jobs and decided, "Well, why not? We got nothing else to really stick around for." So we ended up stopping the search on a new place while continuing to sell the old condo, and that's really what forced us into it. And so from there, we took a few months and tried to find some freelance work and sold our cars and our condo. We've started setting up services and researching things like what we do with our snail mail and our phone numbers and all that kind of thing. So it was a long process. It was probably more work than our wedding was.

Lea Alcantara: Wow.

Emily Lewis: Wow.

Lea Alcantara: So you are saying it is a long process, so how long did that take? And you mentioned snail mail and all these other services, what were those services?



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Rachel Gertz: So it probably took about three or four months from start to finish, from the inception of idea to let's get on the road, and we needed to do several tests in order to make sure we knew what we were getting into.

Emily Lewis: What kind of tests? Like mini road trips?

Rachel Gertz: Yeah, we actually wanted to see if we could bring our cat because he's sort of like a pretty son that we don't really like that much. We had just gotten the RV, and we named him Walter and we took a little trip to Kananaskis just to start it out in October, and I think the cat – actually he ran out in the middle of the night into the forest. We are pretty sure that he was eaten by bears, but Travis actually tracked him down with a flashlight if you can believe it.

Emily Lewis: Wow.

Rachel Gertz: So that was one of our mini tests. We also wanted to make sure that the engine worked, and we also had to just kind of test to see what the laptops were doing and then how the wireless was set up. Also, when you don't have a hub from there, you need to look into different services. We ended up going with... what was the name of that one?

Travis Gertz: Oh, Earth Class Mail for our mailings. They have like a centralized series of I guess B Central type series of mailboxes around North America, so it's like a PO Box and so you just forward all your mail there and then they scan it for you. It sort of like having an email box, but full of PDFs.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Emily Lewis: Oh, that's cool.

Rachel Gertz: It's really well, but I think there are a lot of other services available now that do something very similar like even with Shoe Box is one that we use for it, and I don't know if you guys have used it, but it's so easy and they will scan anything now so \$10 a month is pretty awesome.

Emily Lewis: Oh yeah, I use them for my receipts. I love them.

Rachel Gertz: Nice.

Emily Lewis: So you figured out how the laptops have worked, how did you get consistent Wi-Fi?

Travis Gertz: This we lucked out huge on. Well, just before we left, we were kind of paying attention to another couple that was doing a similar thing across the states in their RV, and they are from the States, so they had Sprint cards or whatever for their laptop, but they are one of the last kind of groups of people that go unlimited internet on those. So we contacted them and they actually offered us their cards because they still had a year left and were ending their trip.

Lea Alcantara: Oh wow.

Travis Gertz: So yeah, we got hugely lucky. So we got two accounts on there with unlimited and we have used the heck out of them. We used them everywhere. It's like you can get Wi-Fi in most RV parks, but it's a little slow. Sometimes it doesn't work with that kind of thing, but this was reliable. Yeah, I think we went through it like 50 Gigs or something a month sometimes.

Emily Lewis: Oh my God.



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Travis Gertz: It was ridiculous.

Rachel Gertz: One or two concerns with some of that. Just not to feel completely guilty, we would pull up to – and we found Staples have really excellent free Wi-Fi and McDonald's.

Lea Alcantara: Staples has excellent Wi-Fi.

Rachel Gertz: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Rachel Gertz: Sometimes you have to really watch for these. What was that app called Travis that would kind of pick up where your free Wi-Fi signals are?

Travis Gertz: Oh, I don't think they sell any in the store anymore anyway.

Rachel Gertz: Anyway, it was really awesome. And yeah, we just drove her out until we picked up a signal and then we would park ourselves until someone chased us out of there or they sent dogs in or the police, so it's great.

Lea Alcantara: So kind of taking a little bit of a left turn here kind of backing up. How did this affect your relationships with your families and friends like when you told them, "Okay, I'm leaving Calgary and now I'll go traveling and working." What did they say?

Rachel Gertz: Actually, that's kind of funny because we thought, "Oh, no one's going to react really well to this. This is going to be one of those horrible things where they've given up on us and they are like, 'You guys are just losers. You are never going to make a thing out of yourself.'" But we took the news to Travis' parents first of all, and calmly sat them down and told them, and they actually really were like, "Oh, okay. See you guys." And then my parents were fighting. I mean, it was weird. I think that in their own way, they realized that we are weird to begin with. So it wasn't like a big shock to them that we went in and did something that was a little unusual. With friends, we stayed in touch with Skype, which we love. So that was really great.

Emily Lewis: And have you been able to kind of meet a lot of people along the way, build new relationships and make new friends? Or has it been kind of just the two of you guys?

Travis Gertz: We actually have really used our Twitter connections and everything like that. Just with people that we've met at conferences and stuff where we've kind of met in a certain setting once before or something, these people really came out and helped us out along the way, so a lot of driveways we got to sleep in for periods of time. But yeah, it was a combination, mostly with people that we didn't get to see very often we to visit, and so Twitter helped a lot with that seeing people in nearly every city we went to, and then just going on their recommendations for a friend's name. That was the biggest.

Rachel Gertz: And now, what was really awesome about it was that we are actually pretty damn shy. We are really shy people and it really did take something to sort of open up, but I think when you are on the road, I mean we just encountered so many people who were like, "You know what, come and stay with us. Let's go out for dinner." And I always was just so impressed with how people were so welcoming and so supportive and it really helped us open up as – I



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don't know – just as people and be liked, not just because you don't know someone in your inner circle of friends or in your circle of trusts, it doesn't mean you can't let go a little and try it.

Lea Alcantara: So has that affected your career trajectory actually with all this working and traveling.

Travis Gertz: Yeah, definitely. I think even though right now we settled off with traveling a bit. We've adopted a lot of the philosophies and even the work that we have now working with Engine works, I don't know that it would have happened if weren't on the road traveling. It's same with a lot of our clients that we get just with freelancing as well. I think a big part of it was being able to visit these people, learn, and two, you are forced to sort of keep in contact with these people that you normally wouldn't talk to necessarily like you are not a big communicators with each other already. So it was really interesting in that way, and I think that has continued now, and even with our own behavior on how we get new work too we are, I guess, less reserved with going out and meeting people.

Lea Alcantara: I find that interesting because as a teleworker, we all have clients from essentially around the world, but I've noticed when I travel to a conference out of town or whatever, it inevitably strengthens ties. Even if you've been working with someone for several years, you've been chatting with someone for several years and you think you know them, the moment you actually meet them, something shifts.

Travis Gertz: Definitely.

Rachel Gertz: Yeah, I agree.

Emily Lewis: In terms of when you guys were working, did you keep like a regular schedule, Monday through Friday at 9 to 5, or did you just work when you could get Wi-Fi and work done?

Travis Gertz: We actually kind of created our own schedule that we tried to even keep now, but we find that it changes with the place. So typically we try to get in between 20 and 30 billable hours a week, and where that billable hours comes from really depends on the location we are at that time or what's going on this season even. But yeah, on the road, we would really try and get up early and get everything done kind of by early to mid-afternoon and then explore because, on one hand, we had to work everywhere like we didn't really take any time off. But at the same time we didn't want to just drive through everywhere and just work and just miss everything that we are seeing. It's just a huge opportunity. So we learned to really disappoint ourselves in our work and just really focus hard in short bursts, and I think we continued that today, or we try to anyway. And so even with our own personal life now, like we've been in Calgary for four months and we are moving to Vancouver actually in two days for a year.

Lea Alcantara: Wow.

Travis Gertz: But still those work practices kind of remain the same, and so a lot of our work is remote anyway that allows that flexibility and our clients like it, Engine works is really supportive with that kind of lifestyle too. Most of the team is moving towards that as well, so it's kind of neat.



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Lea Alcantara: So with that, the bursts and things like that, I mean that's great to get like work done, but how do you communicate that with your team members and your clients, so it coordinates with them understanding that they will get some type of progress report or a design or something at a certain point in time, like how do you coordinate that?

Rachel Gertz: Well, we learned a lot while we were on the road and the first thing and biggest thing I think we learned is that you have to be as upfront and straightforward as possible with your expectations. I know that at first we were concerned with how our clients respond if suddenly we go into a dead zone for two days. And let me tell you, Montana is a dead zone, so we had to watch that. But yeah, we found that by communicating upfront, and like for example, we do a Monday update. Every single Monday with all of our clients, we do an update to give them an idea of the hours we have put in, where those hours have gone, and if they have any concerns or questions with kind of our schedule for the week. And it's actually amazing because as soon as you set those standards, it streamlines your communication and it freeze up the time that you would probably normally spend with admin, and it just focuses it down to the core essence of what you need to get done and how.

Emily Lewis: And so I have one question regarding, it's not necessarily your working styles, but Travis was mentioning you would take time to explore, so what's been the best thing you've seen so far? And I do want to mention, I think Lea told me that you guys travel through the United States. Is that correct?

Travis Gertz: Yeah.

Rachel Gertz: Ontario.

Emily Lewis: So I'm curious why you picked the United States over Canada, and then what was the best thing you saw along the way?

Travis Gertz: Well, we actually did do both, US and Canada. But the US primarily because there are just more cities. There are a lot more stops along the way, so less driving. With Canada, we've seen a lot of before as well, but I don't know, there is something a little bit different. It really is a different culture when you go down there, even though Canada is so heavily influenced by the United States.

Rachel Gertz: And Travis has to be a little more honest. It was October. We knew that there were eight months of winter ahead. We did not want to spend that in Canada. No offense, Canada.

Travis Gertz: Also true.

Emily Lewis: Fair enough.

Lea Alcantara: We totally understand that.

Travis Gertz: Yeah, yeah.

Emily Lewis: So what was your favorite spot, or what was the coolest thing you saw or did you see like the largest ball of yarn.



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Rachel Gertz: I kind of wish we had actually. There are so many things. People ask us a lot, and I tell them it is beautiful.

Travis Gertz: I think the big thing, like after a while you start to realize kind of a lot of the tourist spots like the big landmarks and everything kind of end up being the same a lot. So it's kind of we would go to the cities and try to just live and experience the city as someone who had lived there rather than a tourist. So we did get to see a lot of tours and things like that. But the things that really stood out were like living in New Orleans for a little while and experiencing the true culture of the city, and not just sticking to Bourbon Street, but seeing what the other areas of the city were like and what it was like to live there possibly through disasters like Katrina and things like that. That was really interesting stuff, and even living in cities like Austin, New York and Boston, all these places where you see this, but it seems like there wouldn't be many differences between these cities, but they are like different countries in some ways. It's really cool.

Rachel Gertz: And I am sorry. I know I don't want to take up too much time, but the coolest thing was that when you have your laptop instead of headphones and you sat in a coffee shop in New York, Boston, and Chicago, wherever you were, you blended in. Nobody knew you you're a tourist. I mean, Travis had his six-foot lens on, but most don't pick it up, and it was so cool because you got to just be a part of the city instead of like, "Oh hey, I'm here to gawk at you and take pictures." It was amazing.

Emily Lewis: It sounds like fantastic.

Travis Gertz: It was.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, it sounds amazing actually. So thanks for taking the time out to tell us your travel tales. It's great talking to you both.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Rachel Gertz: Thank you.

Emily Lewis: And before you two jet off, where can our listeners find out more about you and keep tabs on your adventures as you are moving to Vancouver?

Travis Gertz: The best is probably our blog, QuestionEverything.ca.

Emily Lewis: Great.

Lea Alcantara: Perfect. Well, thanks Travis and Rachel.

Emily Lewis: Thanks, you guys.

Travis Gertz: Thank you.

Rachel Gertz: Thank you.

Lea Alcantara: Now, we would like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, EECI 2011 and Pixel & Tonic.

Emily Lewis: We would also like to thank our partners, EllisLab, EngineHosting and Devot:ee.



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Lea Alcantara: And thanks to our listeners for tuning in. If you want to know more about the podcast, make sure you follow us on Twitter at [@eepodcast](#) or visit our website at ee-podcast.com. This is Lea Alcantara.

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis.

Lea Alcantara: We are signing off for the ExpressionEngine Podcast. See you next time.

Emily Lewis: Cheers.