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On The Road with the VanLife Community: The Art of Storytelling in the Age of Instagram

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Claremont McKenna College

**On the Road With the VanLife Community: Travel Storytelling in the Age of
Instagram**

SUBMITTED TO

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AND

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BY

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the countercultural community known as VanLife. Foster Huntington coined the term VanLife in 2011, when he decided to leave his comfortable job at Ralph Lauren and detach from society. Foster and many other individuals have moved into their vans to gain more freedom and live simply. For this thesis I studied the stories about life on the road, written by VanLife participants. I examined their blogs, photographs, and Instagram accounts. I did a literary analysis of Kerouac's famous Beat novel, *On The Road*, as well as Steinbeck's travel memoir, *Travels with Charley*.

I wanted to understand the common threads between the people who engage in this unique way of life known as VanLife. Also, I wanted find the motivation and inspiration for the community as a whole. Finally, I was fascinated in the role of social media, and how it could be problematic for a group that was determined to detach from mainstream society. I learned that the desire to connect with nature, explore unseen places, detach from societal pressures, and tell stories, are all important values to people in the VanLife community. Story telling is at the heart of their experiences, and it appears in many forms: photography, blogs, and websites. Social media can present problems for the group, but overall it is a tool that is positively utilized to connect with other like-minded individuals. The growth of VanLife illustrates the increasing desire for individuals to detach from the pressures of society and regain connection to simpler times and activities.

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Introduction

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" – Henry David Thoreau

The act of traveling is broad and unlimited; trips can last for a day or a month, they can cost a fortune or almost nothing. As people travel and return home, it often creates a great desire to share stories about escaping the rigors and monotonous routines of daily life. For the majority of people their travel tales consist of quick anecdotes about their respective trips, often accompanied by photos of them lounging on a beach or of a historic building in Europe. These experiences can be extremely meaningful and last a lifetime, but in the end people return to the lives they briefly fled.

This thesis examines another type of traveler who actually calls life on the road home and for whom story telling is an important feature of their journeys. Story telling can consist of different methods. Pod casts, photoblogs, and magazine articles are all ways that experiences can be shared to the general public and to individuals interested in specific content. Until recently, novels were the primary mode for distributing tales, but with the development of the Internet and photography, this has changed. This thesis will analyze three fascinating figures; Jack Kerouac, John Steinbeck, and Foster Huntington are all influential storytellers who have spent time living on the road, traveling by car, exploring the United States

of America. The urge to share stories is a natural instinct for all travelers, but to Kerouac, Huntington, and Steinbeck it is a way of life. Foster and many other VanLife members are storytellers, finding inspiration from authors such as Jack Kerouac and John Steinbeck, but the medium for sharing their tales has evolved. To these three figures, as well as to their companions who will be introduced later, traveling is a way of life. At the center of their experiences and interactions is the art of sharing stories and motivation to document their travels. This connection is significant and will be the focus of this thesis.

Kerouac, the famous Beat member and author of *On The Road*, spent years living in New York City as an Undergraduate at Columbia University and for a brief time after he dropped out. Kerouac quickly became tired by the constant pressures of society and decided to hit the road in 1947, attracted to the spontaneity and adventure that the alternative lifestyle offered. Kerouac did not have expensive tastes and believed that life on the periphery of society seemed more interesting. He felt closer to hobos than to people working nine to five jobs, and knew he would be unhappy with a life of conformity.ⁱ

Jack Kerouac always had the desire to escape from the expectations of society and see this great nation. His hesitation to fall into a monotonous life of constant production was greater than most; the people who truly appealed to Kerouac were the ones living on the periphery of society. As an aspiring author Kerouac decided that he did not want to fall into the comfortable path that other writers followed. Instead, he believed in “creating art that is real”, and to do this he had to be authentic and live with the “mad ones”.ⁱⁱ Kerouac experienced immense

growth while living in New York City, but as seen in numerous people, it can take leaving this metropolitan center to connect with what a person truly finds meaningful. This is the case not only for Kerouac, but also for John Steinbeck and Foster Huntington. Of the three individuals, Steinbeck spent the least amount of time in New York; however, the city was still a source of inspiration, but at the same time a place where he experienced great sorrow. Steinbeck lived in New York City for a brief time in his mid-20's, working odd-jobs and trying to become a writer. He eventually moved back to his native California after struggling to have any of his work published. After a long and extremely successful career, Steinbeck returned to New York where he ultimately died in 1968.ⁱⁱⁱ

Foster Huntington is in many ways a modern-day Kerouac. He is the creator of a present day cultural movement known as VanLife and similar to Kerouac and Steinbeck he spent time in New York City before deciding to hit the road. His transformation was drastic, but completely in tune with his interests and overall disposition. In 2011 Foster was the owner of a Manhattan apartment and had a comfortable position, working in design at Ralph Lauren, but he felt there was a lack of purpose in his life. Foster realized he wanted to have more unique experiences, and explains in an interview with Vice, "I shouldn't be inside an office building working 70 hours a week in my early 20s for some big-ass corporation".^{iv} After four years of living on the road Foster has established a counter cultural community known as VanLife. He coined the term VanLife and has inspired many to accept the alternative lifestyle and simplification that it embodies. Foster took pieces from Kerouac and Steinbeck as sources of great inspiration, referencing their significance

numerous times. The strong desire to have unique experiences and adventures is a significant similarity between Jack Kerouac and Foster Huntington. In addition, both men capture their travels, albeit in different forms, in order to share and inspire others. Foster can always be found with a camera and while at Colby College in Maine he started a photoblog that has since become very successful and will be examined later in this thesis.^v He also writes short stories about his outdoor adventures and has published two photo books. Both the creator of VanLife and the face of the Beat generation have inspired numerous people to alter their lifestyles and detach from societies expectations. These two figures are connected in many ways, and this thesis will examine their relationship and the roles they play in their respective communities.

However, John Steinbeck also influenced Foster Huntington and other members of the VanLife movement. Interestingly, Kerouac, as the ultimate counter-cultural figure, once described Steinbeck as an author who he did not want to end up like, seeing him as a follower of societal conventions. Kerouac was more interested in being a bum; he did not want to ever have a secretary nor did he hope to give numerous lectures across the nation.^{vi} This assessment by Kerouac is not accurate, because about ten years after Kerouac traveled across the United States, Steinbeck immersed himself in life on the road during an epic three-month trip. Steinbeck's journey took place at a very different phase in his career than Kerouac's did. For instance, by the start of his travels Steinbeck was an established author, known for his critically acclaimed works such as *Of Mice and Men*, *East of Eden*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. He was already a literary giant, and unlike Kerouac,

Steinbeck's novel about his travels came at a time when the author had a comfortable life and financial security.^{vii}

Steinbeck was not opposed to life on the fringe, which is evident by examining his meandering path early in his career. Steinbeck was forced to work a variety of jobs to support himself while living in New York City; he attempted to have his work published while living in the city, but with little luck he returned to California. Steinbeck spent time working at a resort in Tahoe Lake as a caretaker and tour guide. Similar to Kerouac he was dedicated to becoming an author, no matter how long it took.^{viii} While Steinbeck did not loathe the conformity of mainstream society to the same degree as Kerouac, the two authors had some similar beliefs. As made clear in *Travels With Charley*, Steinbeck was greatly upset by the amount of urban development occurring across the United States. Steinbeck was disgusted by the destruction of forests and natural environments; he felt a strong connection to the great outdoors and saw the growth of cities as an immediate problem. His view towards simplicity and the environment align with the VanLife movement, as well as many themes present in *On The Road*. Also, Steinbeck was motivated to see how the average American viewed society and saw the rapid changes that were seemingly occurring all over the nation. This is not exactly the same goal of Kerouac's journey, but similarities exist. For instance, both authors were inspired to see, feel and hear America. In *On The Road* and in *Travels With Charley*, the two novels analyzed in this thesis, the authors repeatedly mention how they use multiple senses to understand a place or learn about a group of people. In conversations with citizens in different parts of the U.S., Steinbeck describes how

he always *hears* their intense desire to travel and be in another place. This theme is repeated throughout the novel and is a result of Steinbeck's dedication to employ all of his senses while traveling. Kerouac *feels* certain places as well, whether it is the clean rocky mountain air, or the despair in Los Angeles. Kerouac and Steinbeck are constantly observing people and paying attention to the details; they are storytellers at their core and are inspired greatly by the experiences created through traveling.

An integral reason why VanLife has grown so rapidly over a short period of time is simply due to the Internet and social media. This technological component has been monumental to VanLife in multiple ways. It has made it possible for the community to grow quickly, gain recognition from a wide variety of viewers, and it has helped VanLife members connect and develop relationships. Social media has been incredibly important in establishing the togetherness that is such an essential aspect of VanLife. The road is a place where isolation and loneliness are inevitable, but VanLife gives individuals a way to feel connected to others on the road, and in many instances long lasting relationships are developed. VanLife members, simply due to their awareness of other members within this small and unique community, have made deep and meaningful connections. It is evident in conversations with people living on the road that many relationships have begun by first connecting on social media. While individuals use photoblogs and Facebook, it is the recent application, Instagram that has been particularly vital to members of VanLife.

In addition to Instagram, photoblogs and websites have become easy and simple ways for people to share their stories and images. Numerous VanLife members have blogs and they are able to update readers on their adventures easily

from remote places, while living in the back of a van. Foster is a perfect example of this approach; he travels to distant places, is away from civilization for many days at time, but he is able to capture photos and share his story on a blog when he feels inclined to.

Kerouac and Steinbeck have inspired VanLife in numerous ways, but there are some vital aspects of the community that do not fully coincide with the two authors lifestyles on the road. One of the most important values in the VanLife community centers on outdoor adventures and exploring unseen environments. This of course relates to other principles including simplicity and detaching from society. Many of the Blogs and Instagram accounts document experiences in nature; some illustrate the ability to spontaneously drive to a national park, while others highlight snowboarding and surf trips that are made possible by living on the road. The interest and emphasis on connecting with nature is a common thread between people participating in VanLife, but it was not a priority for Kerouac. Kerouac was aware of the natural beauty of the West, he was inspired by the mountains and varied landscape, but he never prioritized getting outside and exploring. Kerouac was more interested in cities and people; he enjoyed drinking and socializing, but few of his friends had a desire to connect with nature. Logistically it was difficult for Kerouac to enjoy the same type of spontaneity that is possible in many VanLife members' lives. Kerouac relied on buses and often hitchhiked from town to town. Unlike Foster Huntington, Kerouac was never able to see friends in Denver one day, and drive to Yellowstone National Park the next. Later in life Kerouac made an effort to become more spiritual and this process coincided with a desire to spend

more time alone in nature. This period came many years after his adventures on the road and is described in his novel, *The Dharma Bums*. The ability to enjoy life on the fringe, detach from societal pressures and live authentically are all aspects of Kerouac's life that have greatly inspired heaps of people, including VanLife members.

Ultimately, VanLife is a community that has grown due to storytelling, and while the form has changed from the time of Kerouac and Steinbeck, it is still a focal point of their travels. VanLife continues Jack Kerouac and John Steinbeck's approach to travel and life on the road. The value of simplicity and detaching from society, as well as the emphasis on sharing stories, whether in the form of a novel or a photo book are significant threads between the two groups of travelers.

The first chapter of this thesis will analyze two travel novels and critically acclaimed works by Jack Kerouac and John Steinbeck. Steinbeck's, *Travels With Charley*, was published in 1962 and depicts the author's three-month journey around the United States with his poodle, Charley. Steinbeck decided that as an author who wrote about America it was important to see his nation on a personal level and explore unseen places. He converted a truck into a campervan and named it Rocinante, after Don Quixote's horse. Kerouac's, *On The Road*, was published in 1957, and consists of his adventures while traveling across the country in the late 1940's with friends. Kerouac was living on the fringe of society, traveling by bus and hitchhiking his way from city to city. The first chapter will illustrate the connection between the two authors and how storytelling was a central component to their travels. They went about their travels in different ways, but Kerouac and Steinbeck have inspired numerous people to hit the road and detach from society.

The second chapter will examine the countercultural community established by Foster Huntington, known as VanLife. Huntington coined the term after moving into his VW van and becoming obsessed with the alternative lifestyle. The second chapter focuses on the unique method of storytelling that is exhibited in the VanLife community; many individuals in VanLife use photography and websites to share their adventures with followers. Other figures that are significant to the VanLife community will be examined as well. Foster Huntington is the most important person in the community, but VanLife would not exist nor have experienced such a growth without the enthusiasm and promotion of other members. There is no hierarchy in VanLife and this is made clear in conversations with numerous individuals who are immersing themselves in the alternative lifestyle.

The third chapter examines the rise of the social media application, Instagram and how it has shaped the development of VanLife. Instagram has played an important role in storytelling for VanLife individuals. Also, it has been a useful tool for members to develop relationships with other VanLife participants. VanLife is a community that is committed to detaching from mainstream society and the engagement with a social media application can create challenges. The third chapter analyzes the complex relationship between using Instagram and maintaining simple values. Instagram has allowed VanLife to grow and reach a large amount of followers, and although there are challenges present, the application provides many benefits to the individuals and community as a whole.

Chapter 1: Kerouac and Steinbeck: Stories From Life On the Road

Jack Kerouac left the Queens Borough of New York City on his first cross-country road trip on June 26th, 1947. It was a three-month trip lasting until October, but in the end this first adventure that made up the first section of the essential beat novel, *On The Road*, wasn't introduced to the general public until the novel was published in 1957.^{ix} *On The Road* is one of the most famous and critically acclaimed novels of the 21st century, as it tells the tale of Kerouac's travels across America with friends and important literary figures. The novel is considered the fundamental text of the counterculture generation; it is set in a post-war period where drugs, jazz and poetry are at the center of the protagonists' lives. More significantly, the story highlights the trend to detach from society and reject ideas of mainstream success. Kerouac and the other Beats were extremely influential and inspired the counterculture movements of the 1960's and later. This chapter will analyze his Beat novel, *On The Road*, and more specifically look at Kerouac's motives for turning to a life on the fringe of society. In addition, John Steinbeck's *Travels With Charley* will be examined and compared to Kerouac's work. Although the two authors were different in many ways, the two texts contain common threads and have influenced numerous people.

Long before the road trips and voyages, Kerouac was a teenager realizing that he saw society a bit differently than his peers. Born in Lowell, Massachusetts to French Canadian parents, Kerouac showed great athletic skills, which eventually earned him a scholarship to play football at Columbia University. Following a series of injuries and arguments with the head coach, Kerouac quit the team and eventually dropped out of the university. He remained in New York City, and while living in the Upper West Side he met fellow beats, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady and William S. Burroughs. These were

formative years for Kerouac and led up to his first trip West, where he met up with other friends in Denver, Colorado.^x

Three years before his first departure West, Kerouac's relationship with art was troubled; he was discouraged by conceited authors whose "only purpose was to bolster what had become an impressive word count".^{xi} An impressive word count meant nothing to Jack Kerouac, but what mattered for true artists was to "transcend their own lives and give something back".^{xii} Jack Kerouac looked up to Mark Twain, Thomas Edison, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky because these men contributed things of interest. He made an early decision to dedicate himself to his art and wrote that man should "disport himself in this world by creating, inventing, dedicating, producing and presenting the world he lives in with the fruits of some personal contribution".^{xiii} The personal contribution was integral to the life that Kerouac wanted to live, but he understood that this choice might come with pain. Maher explains that Kerouac embraced the challenge of living as a true artist, one who cannot expect for things to be easy or to be praised constantly, but instead must be prepared for the severity of misfortunes that will be common throughout his life on the road.^{xiv}

The road became a natural place for Kerouac after he chose to depart from a life of conformity. The road is a place for wanderers, explorers, and even hoboes, all of whom Kerouac felt a connection. It is notable that Kerouac's rejection of societal norms and modernization came 15 years before the famous hippies of the 1960's. The late 40's was not a time for mass movement of social groups or young men traveling the United States on a budget. As Roger Bill highlights in an article examining Jack Kerouac as a traveler, "in the mid-1950's, hitchhikers could still draw the unwanted attention of small town sheriffs".^{xv} On numerous occasions Kerouac was forced to flee from authorities and change his plans due to law enforcement. He discussed these experiences in his novel, *The Dharma Bums*; Kerouac details his life after the *On The Road* adventures, and

highlights his time searching for peace and Zen, while mainly living in northern California. The novel highlights Kerouac's views on conformity and mainstream society, which developed as a young adult upon leaving Columbia University. In Bill Roger's article, "Traveler or Tourist?" Kerouac is quoted as writing,

The only alternative to sleeping out, hopping freights, and doing what I wanted, I saw in a vision would be to just sit with a hundred other patients in front of a nice television set in a Madhouse, where we could be 'supervised'^{ixvi}

To Kerouac, there was no middle ground or compromise; he wanted to rebel against the standards of society, live on the road, and pursue art that was true. There are numerous biographies and texts that discuss Kerouac and the other beats decision to travel the United States and live on the periphery of society, but a direct literary analysis of *On The Road* is the most valuable way to learn about the man and his motives for heading west. In *On The Road*, Kerouac's writing style and spontaneity parallels his approach to life and society. His fast paced style, which jumps from one subject to the next very quickly relates to his life on the road. Kerouac was never stable during his journey. He had brief stays at friend's houses, but never settled down. By examining the text it is possible to gain a sense of how Kerouac approached the act of traveling and learn about his true inspirations.

On The Road was written in a span of three weeks in April of 1951, while Jack Kerouac was living in Manhattan, New York. Kerouac revised this first draft numerous times, but it is clear from reading the novel that the spontaneous and fast-paced writing style remained intact. Kerouac is famous for his unique style and with help from all of his journals, as well as vigor, he was able to produce an incredible text full of energy. Kerouac sets up his novel with a description of a vague break-up and introduction of a

new friend. His new friend in the novel is named Dean Moriarty (based on Neal Cassady), and was actually born on the road. This chance meeting with Cassady and friendship that followed plays a huge roll in motivating Kerouac to travel. As they bond over poetry and writing, they also realize that at their cores they are very similar. Kerouac writes that, "we understood each other on other levels of madness...and furthermore we agreed to go out West sometime. That was the winter of 1947".^{xvii} This was about 4 months before Kerouac made his first trip West. Kerouac and Cassady not only had similar interests, but they also wanted to rebel against society and saw the world in a different way than most. This is not to say that Cassady is the only reason why Kerouac hit the road, but he gave him ever more reason. Kerouac makes it clear that the open road has always appealed to him. The freedom to explore new places, interact with fresh people, and detach from society inspired Kerouac to take action. These interests were greatly developed in New York City living with fellow Beats, but they were present during his childhood. In *On The Road*, Kerouac repeatedly uses the words "often" and "always" when referring to his desire to journey West, illustrating that life on the road has been on his mind for a long time, but he has never had the right opportunity. After meeting Cassady and other friends it began to materialize leading up to the summer of 1947.

Kerouac, Cassady and Allen Ginsberg, known as Carlo Marx in the novel, began their friendship in New York, but it would take them many places across the country. Both Ginsberg and Cassady moved to Denver, Colorado in the summer of 1947 and this gave Kerouac the perfect reason to finally leave the East Coast and hit the road. Before setting out to Denver, Kerouac wanted to learn as much as he could about the geography and history of the United States. In the same way as Steinbeck, Kerouac wanted to study America, which he believed would make him a better writer. As Maher explains, "at a small library in Manhattan, he sat at a table and browsed several books at once, taking

notes from each and recording his gleanings in a notebook”.^{xviii} Kerouac was not setting out for a vacation, but instead understood the importance of his trip. It would be an adventure and one that would result in many stories and an extraordinary piece of literature. Kerouac read about American history, past presidents, and about the different landscapes of the West. After Kerouac had finished, “poring over maps of the United States in Paterson for months”, he was ready to get on the road.^{xix}

Unlike other people who live on the road, Kerouac he traveled primarily by bus and through the act of hitchhiking. While this mode of transportation, led to many interesting encounters and stories, it placed limits on his journey; Kerouac was unable to make his own schedule, and take advantage of beautiful scenery. He could not get off the beaten path, but had to remain on highways in order to catch rides. Yet his model of travel also demonstrates that his journey was less about exploring different routes and road tripping, but centered on his desire to go against the grain and reject conformity. He saw many towns, cities, and natural wonders, but this was not the sole goal of his travel. Immersing himself in the culture of the Beats and living a “mad” life was more important to Kerouac than anything else. In a famous quote from the text Kerouac writes that,

“the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live,
mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the
ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn
like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars
and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes
‘Awww!’”.^{xx}

Kerouac was searching for excitement, spontaneity, and madness; a life on the road is a great way to achieve his goals; hitchhiking and surviving on very little money will increase the likelihood of having unique adventures. This way of travel made it difficult for Kerouac to even leave his state of New York. He wanted to take route 6 across the

entire country to Denver in a straight line, but realized this romantic plan would not be plausible, and resorted to taking a bus to Chicago after spending, “all day and into the night going up and down, north and south, like something that can’t get started”.^{xxi} After arriving in Chicago, a city that Kerouac “dug after a good day’s sleep”, his journey full of adventures and memorable encounters truly began. His first experience hitchhiking was with a trucker that proved uneventful, but later a middle-aged woman who wanted help driving to Iowa picked him up. Kerouac was enthused and even though he was not the best driver, he enjoyed being behind the wheel driving across the United States. This was a liberating moment for Kerouac and he truly felt at peace with his decision to set out on his journey. During this drive he also saw natural beauties of America. Kerouac writes, “for the first time in my life I saw my beloved Mississippi River, dry in the summer haze, low water, with its big rank smell that smells like the raw body of American itself because it washes up”.^{xxii} The imagery in this quotation brings to life the excitement that Kerouac felt while seeing the massive and famous American river. Kerouac refers to the Mississippi as “my river”, emphasizing the connection he felt to the natural world and the outdoors in general. In addition, Kerouac describes the smell of the river and how it embodies America. Kerouac repeats this idea of smelling America and how it can change depending on the region or environment is repeated throughout *On The Road*. In order to experience America in all of its greatness it is necessary to employ all of ones senses. Kerouac understood this and in part of his search for America he aimed to use all of his skills to gain knowledge about his country.

An important element of Kerouac’s travels was meeting up with friends in different parts of the country. It is less likely that Kerouac would have hit the road without the connections that he had in cities across America. Especially without a way to meet other people besides the occasional bar chat, Kerouac aimed to visit places where he knew at least a name or two. Specifically, traveling the West matched up perfectly with

his plan to reunite with Carlo and Dean in Denver. It became clear upon his arrival, however, that his plans would not work out accordingly. In Denver, Kerouac barely saw his friends, as Carlo was extremely introverted, working on poetry, while Dean was busy deceiving his two lovers, Marylou and Camille. He had hopes of going out on the town and staying up late at night talking with his buddies. There was one party that they all enjoyed, but besides that Kerouac felt as if he was in the middle of Dean's lady troubles and was soon "itching to get to San Francisco".^{xxiii} One of his highlights in Denver was heading to the mountains with neither Carlo nor Dean, but another group of friends that included Ray Rawlins, and Tim Gray. As Kerouac stated, it was his "first view of the interior Rockies".^{xxiv} Again, the connection to nature is one of the most fulfilling aspects of being on the road. Kerouac found cities eventually wearisome, but the ability to constantly move and see new landscapes and features never dulled him. Kerouac was unable to take full advantage of his natural surroundings since he did not own a car, but he enjoyed all of his time outside, becoming closer to nature. Kerouac wanted to keep moving and became restless after spending too much time in one place. This is evident as he writes, "I stretched out on the grass of an old church with a bunch of hobos, and their talk made me want to get back on the road".^{xxv} This is one of the many times when Kerouac identifies himself with hobos. In Kerouac's eyes there is a sense of romanticism seen in anything that goes against the norms of society. The theme of living on the fringe is explored through out *On The Road* and Kerouac aims to immerse himself in this lifestyle.

Living on the road is not an extremely social experience, but what is fascinating about Kerouac is that he thrives off of human contact and conversation. Kerouac is not unique in this department; friendships and relationships often drive people who decide to live on the road, but it is a difficult to manage the balance between isolation and time with companions. His time in Denver was a prime example of this exact difficulty; a

person living on the road may visit friends who have busy lives and struggle to balance the time. Kerouac felt this in Denver and the experience helped him come to the realization that he must get back on the road and search for madness. What is fascinating about Kerouac's travels is that his most valuable experiences connecting with people occurred spontaneously and usually with strangers. Numerous times he would be picked up by a group of people who happened to supply him with laughter, distraction, and friendship. One of the most significant spontaneous interactions that Kerouac experienced occurred not while hitchhiking, but at a bus station in Bakersfield, California. Kerouac writes, "all of a sudden I saw the cutest little Mexican girl in slacks come cutting across my sight".^{xxvi} Discouraged, Kerouac couldn't get the nerve to say anything, but lucky enough she happened to be on his same bus to L.A. Eventually Kerouac worked up the courage to approach her, and from there they hit it off- spending a "delicious" night together in a seedy L.A. motel.^{xxvii} Kerouac writes, "for the next fifteen days we were together for better or for worse".^{xxviii} In the end this relationship never led to a serious future, but it had a huge impact on the author and was an important aspect of his travels. The spontaneity is remarkable and unique to people living on the road; he had the ability to just set up with a girl he just met and see where it would go. This is obviously not something that everyone would do, but living on the fringe of society is compatible with Kerouac's spontaneous decisions.

The road proved very challenging for Kerouac and although there were rough times and periods of loneliness, he wouldn't have had it any other way. Kerouac was a wanderer at heart and his travels across the country filled a need deep inside of his soul. He was the original storyteller and traveler to live on the periphery of society, experiencing great hardships, but also great rewards.

Ten years after Jack Kerouac completed his cross-country trips that would comprise *On The Road*, John Steinbeck began his own journey across America, which

eventually led to a novel as well. Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, but before setting out on his national road trip he had not been to his home region in twenty years. The East Coast was home to Steinbeck and he realized that his life became more settled and dormant. He set off from New York at the age of 58 with the objective to search for America. Steinbeck was in a very different phase of his career than Kerouac was during his trip. Also, Steinbeck was a well-known author famous for his self-described epic, *East of Eden*. The author was familiar with a few major American cities, but he hadn't seen real and unique places or talked with locals. Steinbeck writes,

“Thus I discovered that I did not know my own country. I an American writer, writing about America, was working from memory, and the memory is at best a faulty, warpy reservoir. I had not heard the speech of America, smelled the grass and trees and sewage, seen its hills and water its color and quality of light. I knew the changes only from books and newspapers”.^{xxix}

Steinbeck had a clear purpose for his three-month long trip. He was not trying to find himself, though this may have occurred in the process, nor was he trying to reconnect with old roots. Instead, he wanted to immerse himself in America and observe the people and progress of this nation. The language in this passage, which occurs early on in the memoir, illustrates the significance of how his senses relate to nature and the environment. Similarly to Kerouac, Steinbeck wanted to smell the nation and listen to the sounds in small towns. Also, Steinbeck understood that there have been great changes to the United States he writes about, many of which he can only see from his living room couch or while sitting at the coffee table reading the morning paper. The repetition of “America” highlights the enormity of the great nation that Steinbeck

attempts to capture in his profession. Also, it emphasizes his identity as a citizen of the United States and that to know his nation he must explore it.

Steinbeck was committed to having real interactions with real people, which is why he decided to “leave my name and my identity at home”.^{xxx} He felt that if people knew him as an author he would be treated differently, and interestingly enough not one person recognized him during his travels. Steinbeck decided that traveling without another person would create the most authentic experience, but he wanted some company and chose to bring along his French poodle, Charley. The vehicle by which Steinbeck traveled was a specialized camper that used a three-quarter-ton pick-up truck as its base. He named it Rocinante, after Don Quixote’s horse. It is clear that Steinbeck’s planning was extensive and rather than hitchhiking and truly roughing it, he was going to live comfortably. Of course it would not be easy, but he was financially secure, felt safe and had a cozy place to call home. This is not to say that Steinbeck would only cross the country under ideal conditions. All of the people who journey across the nation and dream of wandering had a vision from an early age. Steinbeck explains this phenomenon on the first page of the novel as he writes, “when the urge to be someplace else was on me, I was assured by mature people that maturity would cure this itch”.^{xxxi} He then goes on to state that nothing has changed, no matter how mature he becomes, he still has the desire to explore someplace new. The sound of a boat and the sight of a van on a back road make him giddy for an adventure like a child. In all voyagers this sense of needing to be somewhere exists. Steinbeck, like Kerouac, compares himself to a hobo, “once a bum always a bum”.^{xxxii} The idea of living on the fringe and seeing the real side of America is present in Steinbeck even when he is a famous and wealthy 58-year-old author.

While on first glance it is easy to label Steinbeck as a member of the clean-cut society that Kerouac so greatly opposes, but this is not truly the case. In Mark Dunphy’s

article, “On the Road with John Steinbeck”, he rightfully points out that the two author’s approaches to environmentalism, capitalism, and urban development are similar. While Steinbeck lived a more traditional life than Kerouac, he shared many characteristics with the Beats. Dunphy writes, “Steinbeck has Beat-like preferences for the spontaneous over the rigid, the open over the close, and the organic over the predetermined”.^{xxxiii} These aspects drive the encounters that Kerouac has in *On The Road*, and they are also at the heart of *Travels with Charley*. Steinbeck loves to find himself in unique interactions and scenes; he is happy to strike up a conversation with anyone and is open about sharing his opinion and hearing the views of others. Sometimes this gets the author into trouble, but it creates memorable experiences, and helps him learn about the real America. Like Kerouac, Steinbeck rejected consumerism and the accumulation of useless objects. He writes, “American cities are like badger holes, ringed with trash-all of them-surrounded by piles of wrecked and rusting automobiles, and almost smothered with rubbish”.^{xxxiv} Steinbeck is disgusted by the amount of production and waste present throughout cities in the United States; while Kerouac aims to detach completely from society and the cycle that occurs in cities, Steinbeck is keener on observing the downfall and informing others on the changes and the negative consequences. Kerouac and Steinbeck have similar philosophies on the environment and urbanization, which may seem surprising and is easy to overlook upon first glance.

Steinbeck was highly motivated to see nature and different types of terrain and landscapes across the U.S. For the most part he wanted to stay away from large cities, hit back roads, and interact with small town locals. He succeeded in all departments, and it led to many great encounters and experiences. Steinbeck’s plan was to travel roughly around the borders of the United States: start up north in Maine, head west thru South Dakota and Montana, and then on to the Pacific Northwest. From there he would go to his birthplace of Salinas Valley, California and then head to Texas, crossing into the

Deep South and back up to New York. The trip was quite ambitious, but for the most part it went smoothly. From Maine to Chicago Steinbeck's travels were fairly uneventful. He saw Niagara Falls, but besides that Steinbeck mostly spent his time driving, relaxing with Charley and interacting with locals. This passage highlights how Steinbeck enjoyed his time on the road, ending his day with a scenic view surrounded by nature.

As I passed through or near the great hives of production-
Youngstown, Cleveland, Akron, Toledo, Flint, and Gary-my eyes and
mind were battered by the fantastic hugeness and energy of production, a
complication that resembles chaos and cannot be...What was so
wonderful was that I could come again to a quiet country road, tree-
bordered, with fenced fields and cows, could pull up Rocinante beside a
lake of clear, clean water and see high overhead the arrows of southing
ducks and geese.^{xxxv}

This quotation illustrates what Steinbeck was looking for during his journey. He wanted to see the changes to the United States, whether they were sometimes negative and "battered" his eyes and mind. The amount of production and development was worrisome; Steinbeck believed that American cities were changing for the worse and losing the charm and localism that once existed. That being said, Steinbeck was grateful that in the end he could still find a spot to call his own, where all in the world was quiet and beautiful. Connecting with nature is a constant theme throughout *Travels With Charley*, and it illustrates the negative aspects of urbanization and benefits of finding simplicity. What follows after Steinbeck finds his serene location is not ideal, but he makes the most of it and it lets him interact with another local. Apparently the land that Steinbeck was set up on was private property, and the caretaker came to kick him off. Steinbeck

asked nicely if he could stay and offered the man some coffee and a little conversation, which changed his disposition completely. Eventually the guardian let him stay for a while; the two men chatted, went fishing together, and shared a couple of drinks. These encounters are an important component of Steinbeck's adventure. During his journey Steinbeck did not attempt to meet up with old friends, or stop in cities where he had connections, but only interacted with unknown locals. This presents a difference between Steinbeck and Kerouac, but nonetheless he was able to learn a lot about America from this process; Steinbeck succeeded in smelling, tasting and feeling out different regions in the United States.

Steinbeck reached Chicago where he stayed in a nice hotel and met his wife for a quick visit. His time in the mid-western city greatly contrasts Kerouac's adventures with Neal Cassady in Chicago. The two friends went on the town multiple nights, listening to Jazz and trying to meet girls at bars. Kerouac never stayed in a fancy hotel, highlighting that his time on the road was more similar to that of a hobo, and more in tune with how people on the fringe of society lived. Steinbeck does not go into detail about his time in Chicago, and although he enjoyed his time there, the author writes, "Chicago broke my continuity...so I leave Chicago out, because it is off the line, out of drawing".^{xxxvi} Steinbeck was excited to get back on the road, but he also explains that, "after the comfort and the company of Chicago I had to learn to be alone again. It takes a little time".^{xxxvii} The road can be a lonely place, and this is a challenge to all people traveling by themselves, especially when they are forced to spend large chunks of time behind the wheel of an automobile. It is rare for people who live on the road to be introverted and avoid social interactions; it is usually the opposite. Steinbeck, like Kerouac, loves people and social events; each time he

leaves people or has a great discussion, it takes him a while to adjust to the loneliness that accompanies him on the road. A cure to this loneliness is often a surprising experience that Steinbeck did not plan for. Rather than spontaneous conversations with locals, which do occur, many of the times these unanticipated moments relate to nature. Steinbeck writes, “Someone must have told me about the Missouri River at Bismarck, North Dakota, or I must have read about it. In either case, I hadn’t paid attention. I came on it in amazement”.^{xxxviii} He goes on to explain that this should be the place where the map of the United States folds. “The two sides of the river might well be a thousand miles apart”.^{xxxix} Steinbeck explains how to the east the smell is unique and the grass is green, while on the other side, “it is pure west”.^{xl} The image of the pure west is striking and presents Steinbeck’s strong feelings to the landscape of this great nation. So much of Steinbeck’s journey revolves around interacting with the beauty of different landscapes. He describes the scenes, whether it is the Bad Lands in North Dakota, Yellowstone in Montana, or the Redwoods in Northern California, with such detail and imagery that you can feel the weight of these places.

If one were to categorize Steinbeck’s travels into three parts, they would be local people, nature, and reflection on the changes and development of the United States. Of course this is too simple and Steinbeck had many types of experiences while on the road, but these themes were constants throughout his novel. Steinbeck made an effort to be seen as an average person, rather than the famous author of *The Grapes of Wrath*, in order to hear the speech of the different regions from an up close and personal perspective. He knew that beautiful landscapes would emerge and often times this occurred when most unexpected. The connection to nature that Steinbeck felt is a theme that relates to his other strong feeling during the journey; he saw the rapid development of cities and

increased urbanization as a phenomenon that would present problems in the future. Steinbeck believed that the nation was directionless and on an uncertain path that involved many negative consequences, including environmental destruction and loss of regionalism. Both Kerouac and Steinbeck traveled the United States to search for the true America and see things that they have only read about, or never even heard about. In the end they both lived a life on the road and in their own ways, rejected societal norms and enjoyed a period of wandering. Jack Kerouac and John Steinbeck were the original storytellers to explore America by road, but into the 21st century a new type of storyteller emerged and with it developed a supportive community known as VanLife.

Chapter 2: Acceleration of VanLife

Foster Huntington is a unique figure, inspired by both Jack Kerouac and John Steinbeck, who made the bold decision to live life on the road after feeling unsatisfied with his lifestyle in New York City. The switch from one of the most hectic and urban cities in the world to living in a Van is quite extreme, but Foster knew he was doing the right thing. Foster had no idea that he would inspire thousands of people to follow in his footsteps, but through various creative projects and storytelling, he became the face of a social movement known as VanLife.

Foster created a photo book called, “Home Is Where You Park It”. The book is a collection of Foster’s photos of vans and campers over a few years. Once Foster began living out of his van he became obsessed with different types of vehicles and mobile homes. His photos are beautiful and more professional than many of the images on the Tumblr that he curates. Simplicity and beauty are the main themes throughout his photo book, and it is accessible to a wide audience. The book is meant to be on a coffee table, or viewed while sitting on a living room couch. It is of course about VanLife, but truly highlights the photography skills of Foster Huntington. One of the shots is of a modified camper that sits on a pick-up truck and the caption reads, “Ala Travels with Charlie on the PCH in Southern California”.^{xli} The photo is not of the most beautiful van, but it highlights the connection between Foster and previous storytellers. He is aware of both Kerouac and Steinbeck, and while their respective approaches to life on the road vary in certain ways, it is true that Foster and the community of VanLife is continuing the lifestyle previously established in both *On The Road* and *Travels with Charley*.

Huntington's initial intention was to travel around the West, spend more time outside, surf with friends, and take photographs and work on his blog. He had no set time frame, but wanted to re-connect with nature after living in New York City, and live life without a long-term plan. Foster began taking photos of Vans across the country, sharing them and promoting the lifestyle of living out of the simple spaces. Eventually he coined term "VanLife", and the community around it grew rapidly. Foster is both the creator and face of VanLife, but many other people are active in promoting the lifestyle and in encouraging others to join. There are hundreds of people engaging VanLife who could be examined and compared to Kerouac and Steinbeck, but this thesis will focus on only a few, and specifically ones who are the biggest promoters of the lifestyle and have gained a significant following. In order to study the community of VanLife it is necessary to look at blogs, social media, and also conduct interviews. There are very few secondary sources that study the counter-cultural group. This chapter will focus on the development of VanLife, the role of blogs and websites, and what has inspired this community. An analysis of Instagram and social media will occur in the following chapter.

The desire to live on the road, connect with nature, and detach from society and materialism are a few common threads between people engaging in VanLife. The one defining characteristic is that all of the participants spend part of their lives living out of a vehicle, whether it is a Volkswagen Westfalia or a modified Toyota Tacoma, and exploring parts of the United States. Some members live in their vans for years at a time, while others take weekend trips. The biggest proponents of the community are the ones who live full time on the road, but the community is very open and welcomes anyone with enthusiasm for adventure. Storytelling is an important aspect of many of the adventurer's time

on the road, and while the narrative is in a different form than that of Kerouac and Steinbeck, the act of sharing stories is integral to the VanLife process. The methods for circulating narratives include blogs, formal websites, Instagram and the occasional book. Also, photography plays a significant role in the community; many members share their adventures visually, showing the beautiful places they are able to reach with the help of their vans.

Foster Huntington is constantly referred to as the face of the VanLife community and he has gained a major following through photography, extreme adventures, and superb storytelling. He lives for inspiring others and showing people the benefits of alternative lifestyles. Foster started his blog, “A Restless Transplant”, in 2009, but at the time it consisted of photos and stories from his time at Colby College in Maine. As a bored undergrad he decided to go on more camping and surf trips, and picked up photography along the way. Since graduating, his blog has gained a lot of followers and has focused on his decision to live out of his van. In the “about me” section of his website, he explains, “I left my job in New York in the summer of 2011 and moved into a camper. Since then, I have driven 100,000 miles around the west, surfing and camping”.^{xlii} The act of living on the road out of his van is central to Foster’s creative project. This is the first aspect of his lifestyle that he explains and it is obviously noteworthy, making his blog more unique and relevant. His blog shares stories from his adventures and travels, but it is made clear that these experiences are only possible due to the freedom gained from his choice to live out of a camper.

Foster Huntington is a story teller; he has gained an audience by documenting and sharing his outdoor experiences that include surfing in Mexico, foraging for mushrooms in Northern California, and building a tree house in Oregon. The format for the blog mirrors his approach to life: keep it simple. His

focus is on gaining valuable experiences in nature, seeing new places, and roughing it with friends. While not every post is directly focused on VanLife, it is evident that at the center of these adventures is his camper van. Foster has the freedom to travel to the next destination, and is inspired to do so. A particularly fascinating post from Foster's blog, "A Restless Transplant", tells the story of "10 days spent chasing snow and hot springs during the last half of April".^{xliii} Foster embarked from his native home of the Columbia River Gorge with the plan of reaching Jackson, Wyoming, but wanted to involve exciting stops along the way. In the first passage of the post Foster explains that there are two routes that he could choose from, but decided to take the slower one as it would involve prettier scenery and less crowded highways. The destination is not the only thing driving Foster and other VanLife members; they understand that with the freedom their vans create, it is possible to take a back road, stop at an unexpected hot spring, or enjoy an extra day at a campsite. Foster's posts vary in length, with some including multiple passages of text reaching a total of 1,000 words, while some contain a short introduction followed by numerous photos with short captions. This specific post follows the latter format; the images range from shots of the interior of his friend's camper to a photo of rolling green hills in Eastern Oregon. Here is a photo from his post.



Figure 1: I’m Going To Jackson – Jackson, Wyoming (May 19, 2014)
Foster Huntington

Below the photo, Foster writes, “This marks the end of my third winter living in a camper, I’m ready to dry out and enjoy the longer days”.^{xliv}

Foster Huntington became the face of the VanLife community soon after moving into his vehicle with the creation of two simple, but powerful projects. “A Restless Transplant” is Foster’s first project and has led him in many fascinating directions, but it is not the most significant to VanLife. Foster created a Tumblr and Photobook, which are both dedicated to beauty and simplicity of vans. The tumblr, “Van-Life.net”, displays hundreds of photos of different types of vans and adventure vehicles. Foster curates the blog and while he took some of the photos most are submitted; there are images of vans in places ranging from California to Columbia. Here are two examples.



Figure 2: A Brat Saved My Ass In Baja – Baja, Mexico (January 26, 2015)
Foster Huntington



Figure 3: 1984 VW Westfalia Vanagon – High Sierras, California (2014).
Brendan Banks. vancrafted.us.

Foster has inspired many people to embrace the lifestyle and be proud of their vans and alternative lifestyles. Obviously he is not the first person to support the concept of living on the road, but he has promoted it to a great extent. Also, a lot of the submissions arrive from people who do not live out of their vans for long periods of time, but are still passionate about the culture and ability to travel and seek outdoor adventures. The beauty of the vans is a huge reason why the Tumblr and Photo book are successful; the vehicles bring to mind images of simplicity and tranquility. Also, the retro appearance of the vans is appealing to many viewers as it naturally separates the movement from the mainstream. People see a photo of an old VW van in an idyllic setting and imagine a life without the pressures of society and yearn for the ability to spend more time outside in nature. The Tumblr is an intelligent way to promote VanLife because

it allows for submissions, establishing an instant connection among the members. This connection is then translated to the real world when van drivers meet in national parks or at surf spots in California. The sense of togetherness is reinforced; when traveling, it makes people more likely to reach out and compliment a person on their vehicle or ask about their van.

Similar to Kerouac, Foster's tales are made possible through his spontaneous nature, facilitated by living on the road. Both men have the freedom to pick up their things and head down an open road whenever they feel like it. Kerouac spent a lot more time in Los Angeles than he originally anticipated, but he met a Mexican girl who caught his eye and things developed quickly. This type of experience was only possible for Kerouac due to his enthusiasm for life without ties to mainstream society. Foster Huntington has the same enthusiasm for life on the road, but instead of completely roughing it in Kerouac manner, his approach resembles John Steinbeck's in many ways. The first and most obvious similarity involves the vehicles used by both storytellers.



Figure 4: Rocinante – National Steinbeck Center, Salinas, California



Figure 5: My Toyota Camper – Oregon (February 11, 2014)
Foster Huntington

John Steinbeck's converted truck is shown in the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas, California. The similarity between the two vehicles is clear; both camper vans use a pick-up truck as the original base, with a living space on top of the truck-bed. Foster drove a VW Syncro for his first year on the road, but as beautiful as it was he eventually became frustrated with breakdowns and expensive parts. The Toyota upgrade also comes with more space and increased

comfort. In a blogpost about his Toyota Camper Foster writes, “compared to my Syncro, the Four Wheel Camper feels like a Four Seasons. It has an electric fridge, a two burner stove, a furnace and gallons of freshwater”.^{xlv} Obviously there is still not a ton of space for a permanent living situation, but it is a huge upgrade from the VW. Foster’s vehicle is very similar to Steinbeck’s and used in many of the same ways: getting off road to scenic viewpoints and remote campsites. Steinbeck’s three-month journey primarily evolved around nature and the exploration of unseen areas of the United States. He visited cities, but the main purpose was to connect with the great outdoors and see a more authentic side of America. While Steinbeck lived on the road for a period of time, he was never truly on the fringe of society. Unlike Kerouac, Steinbeck did not feel the need to detach from materialism and mainstream trends. He lived a very comfortable life, but believed that as an author who writes about the United States he should have a better understanding about his material. Steinbeck’s journey gave him a new insight into the life of the average American; he also saw trends that gave him large amounts of concern. For instance, the extreme growth of cities and urbanization shocked the author. Steinbeck did not realize how much development and production of material items was occurring all over the nation. He believed that this rapid growth would come at a cost, and likely be unsustainable. This theme is a common thread between Kerouac, Steinbeck and members of the VanLife community. The unnecessary development will come at a cost, and likely harm the environment. Kerouac was less concerned with the environment and connecting with nature, but he gained a new appreciation of the outdoors while living on the road. As seen through everyone examined, there is a tie between detaching from societal expectations and spending time outside.

Nature presents a simpler lifestyle and removes the pressures that come with mainstream society.

Foster Huntington is central to the VanLife community, but the phenomenon would not have seen such an expansion or sense of togetherness without other excited contributors, as well as followers.

James Campbell and Rachel Goldfarb have been on the road for five years, but only recently have begun to document their adventures on the Internet. They run the blog, “Idle Theory Bus”, which will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter. I spoke with them through E-mail and they were very receptive and interested in discussing VanLife. The couple’s approach to life is very similar to how Kerouac felt before embarking on his cross-country trip. James and Rachel are committed to simplifying their lives, and having authentic experiences, and connecting with nature. Interestingly the couple was unaware of the VanLife community before setting out on their journey, but was more inspired by the likes of Kerouac and Steinbeck. Rachel describes herself as a “sort of Beat junkie”, as she has read all of his work and attempts to have similar adventures.^{xlvi}

Specifically the rejection of society that Kerouac immerses himself in is akin to Rachel and James’ perspective and an inspiration for moving into their van. The couple’s experience with VanLife will be studied at more length in the following chapter, as they have fascinating perspectives on Instagram and the role that storytelling should play in their lives.

Another couple that has joined VanLife, albeit more recently, is Jessica and Jorge Gonzalez. They run the site, “Live. Work. Wander”, are exceptional storytellers and have been living on the road full time since June 2014. I was able

to reach them by email and ask about their inspirations, challenges, and hopes for future adventures while on the road. Similar to Steinbeck and Kerouac, the married couple has “always talked about getting an RV and living on the road”.^{xlvi} Before finally committing to the lifestyle, Jessica and Jorge took many extended trips and explored their steady desire to be somewhere else. As freelance designers they have the ability to work on the road and travel to different cities if they need to be on location for a certain job. Jorge explains, “why have a home when all of our work is done on a remote basis anyway? We can just as well handle the work in Jackson Hole as in Austin as in Durango as in Appalachia”.^{xlvi} The desire to travel in Jessica and Jorge matches up perfectly with their professions. They are able to work on their projects either from the van or local coffee shops, and their free time is spent exploring back roads, finding unique camping spots, and experimenting with photography. Also, both cities and the outdoors appeal to the couple; they don’t feel tied to urban life, but instead what a healthy balance between working in metropolitan areas and getting lost in nature.

Their website has a different format than Foster’s, but is clean and also focuses on sharing stories that revolve around travel and life on the road. The couple’s posts range from short reads that are two minutes, to longer pieces that take about 20 minutes. Each post has the approximate time that it should take to read, which is a unique touch. Photography is an aspect of their website, but the text is definitely the centerpiece. A particularly interesting post is titled “Van Life Advice”, which includes a long list questions from a reader and responses from Jessica and Jorge. This post provides a lot of good information about the challenges as well as advantages to living in a van. It is striking how the process of living on the road is a constant live and learn experience. Numerous times Jorge and Jessica explain that they continually have to change equipment, or

adjust their plans based on unforeseen problems. Also, a lot of the post is focused on logistical issues that inevitably arise when living in close quarters, on the road, without everyday amenities. Jessica's main advice is, "try to keep things simple". She elaborates, "Pick one good heavy jacket, one good light jacket, a rain jacket...at elevation even down in New Mexico it could rain or snow or hail at any time of the year. Keep shoes to a minimum, one of each type".^{xlix} The post covers a lot of information that people do not instantly think of when considering to move into a van. There are many tedious concerns and logistical issues that need to be addressed before embarking on life on the road. But as Jessica explains, simplicity is key. Also, many sections of the post are valuable because they show that while many people see living in a van as a life of ocean views and beautiful hikes, this is not the case. It is hard work and requires a lot of adjusting, tinkering and planning. Jorge, and other VanLife members explain however, that the chaos and troubles are well worth the freedom to explore this great nation on their own terms. They face small challenges almost everyday, but they are not tied down to a certain city and don't feel pressure to fit into societies expectations.

Jessica and Jorge were aware of the VanLife community before moving into their vehicle full time, but they had no idea how meaningful the relationships would turn out to be. Jorge explains that the Volkswagen Van is one of the best conversation starters, and this extends to other adventure vehicles as well. Jorge and Jessica, unlike most other VanLife members, describe themselves as more reserved and less social personalities. This is interesting because most people who live on the road are partly driven by social interactions, but the "Live. Work. Wander" creators are more introverted; interestingly they have still enjoyed the process of meeting new people. Jorge explains, "we aren't particularly social creatures so the community we have gained access to through traveling has been

life changing for us'.¹ Jessica and Jorge have made meaningful connections with a wide variety of people from different cities; they are able to interact with like-minded people and not feel pressure to go out of their way to please friends or conduct small talk. While living and working in Austin, Jorge and Jessica had less of a support group than they currently have on the road. This would come as a surprise to many people. It is expected that the stability of living in a city, interacting with co-workers, and having set routines would facilitate long lasting relationships, but this is not always the case. By living on the road, VanLife members have the freedom to make their own routines and interact with people on their own terms. This is a significant contrast from living a traditional life. The VanLife community is not a friend group or social club, but the common values and desires create an instant connection and togetherness, and in many cases this leads to lifelong relationships.

Chapter 3: Instagram Interactions and Storytelling

I have always been interested in travel narratives and adventure photography, but did not learn about VanLife until a friend mentioned the name Foster Huntington, and told me to look into some of his work. Interestingly my introduction to his work did not consist of viewing his blog, Tumblr or photo book, but instead a recently created application. This social media application is called Instagram and I, like many of my fellow college students was new to the platform. I quickly became enthralled with Foster's work, and it led me down a path towards VanLife. It seemed as if I discovered a new VanLife member every week and I still look forward to seeing their new posts, consisting of outdoor adventures and sublime images of vans. Social media has had a tremendous impact on VanLife, and Instagram is at the heart of this unexpected interaction between living minimally and using technology.

Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and launched in October 2010 with little initial success. Systrom and Krieger were motivated to design a product that made progress in terms of digital images. They saw a lack of innovation in digital photos in the years leading up to the creation of Instagram and believed that sharing images could be a lot easier. The idea of developing a community was integral to the creators' vision for growth and to the success of the application. The creators explained that, "We made it super-simple to share photos, not only with your followers in the Instagram community, but with Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr".^{li} The ability to upload, share, and view images

with ease quickly elevated the popularity of the application. It became a tool in which users could update people on their lives, but also personalize photos with the help of Instagram's filters. The capability to enhance and edit photos made every Instagram user an artist, and one who could share his or her photos with the world.

In less than two years Instagram gained 100 million users who shared four billion photos; celebrities and brands jumped on board in order to reach upwards of 50 million followers.^{lii} Starbucks, MTV and Nike are just a few of the major companies that are on Instagram. The company's most significant partnership was with National Geographic, which changed the way in which professional photographers used the application. The company began to sponsor artist "take over's", where photographers on assignment for National Geographic would post photos and updates about their travels and photo shoots under the company's account. This became successful for the National Geographic, rapidly gained followers, and the photographers realized that they could create their own accounts in order to reach a greater amount of photography enthusiasts.

Serious photography has become an essential component of Instagram and photographers are learning the importance of establishing a devoted audience. In Olivier Laurent's article, "The New Economics of Photojournalism: The rise of Instagram", he speaks to numerous photographers about the impact of Instagram and the ways it can be effectively utilized.^{liii} Laurent states that, "speaking with these photographers, it quickly becomes apparent that Instagram, more than any other social network in past years, has allowed them to form a deeper connection

with the general public”^{.liv} Photographers are able to gain exposure to new audiences through the takeovers, which eventually lead to more followers on their private accounts. Engaging with followers is key and the application has evolved into a way for serious professionals and companies to share photos, rather than just a place for celebrities to update fans on their most recent vacation. Luceo is a visual agency that specializes in photography and they use Instagram, primarily for its interactive features. Matt Slaby a photography that worked with Luceo states, “Not only does it offer immediate and interactive ways for our fans to be a part of the work as it happens, it also allows us to engage with other visual professionals and receive real-time feedback on work as it is being produced”^{.lv} This assessment from Slaby highlights the reasons why more photographers and bloggers are starting to use Instagram. Instagram is a large community where interaction occurs quickly and conveniently. Photographers can engage with their colleagues and see what new trends are developing, but also keep track of their viewers. In many ways the application is more relevant than blogs since users have the flexibility to post photos from anywhere and can see what content the viewers are most interested in. The convenience of the application is important to VanLife members, as they are often on the road or in areas without a stable work place. It may be difficult to write a long blog post with numerous photos and updates from their travels, but a quick Instagram post takes a few minutes and can reach thousands of followers.

The financial benefits that result from using Instagram are significant and clearly a main reason why so many photographers are using the application. This

aspect is not relevant to the majority of VanLife members, but it is for the few, including Foster Huntington, who attempt to make their blogs profitable. There is no way for bloggers to directly make money off of a single Instagram post, but as *The New York Times* photographer, James Estrin, explains “you can have interactions that are, in the long term, beneficial to you economically without monetizing each interaction”.^{lvi} Social Media is so valuable because of the interactions that occur with viewers or readers in a multitude of ways. For instance, an Instagram user who follows *The New York Times* sees different posts throughout the week and is reminded of the reasons why they associate with the brand. Estrin makes it clear that for *The New York Times*,

“to be successful economically, doesn’t need to monetize every single interaction with these people. What they need is to have these people think of themselves as being *New York Times* people. They need to feel part of a community of like-minded people, interacting with the newspaper via a variety of platforms”.^{lvii}

The idea of creating a community made up of people who identify with specific values and interests is essential to *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, but also to VanLife. Foster Huntington, the founder of VanLife, has done a superb job of interacting with a certain type of person and promoting his lifestyle through use of his Instagram account, which eventually leads people to his blog and other projects. Foster is not living the VanLife to become a rich man, but instead his motives are purer and simpler. He is happy to live on the fringe of society and reject materialism, especially if it leads to a balanced lifestyle that includes traveling, photography, and spending time in the great

outdoors. Foster once said in an interview with *You, Me, & Charlie*, “I became tired of being in a culture where people defined themselves by the expensive things they owned”.^{lviii} Clearly Foster is not someone who is motivated by financial success or fancy things, but instead uses the income from projects such as his photo book, *Home Is Where You Park It*, to continue creating and exploring. His Instagram is extremely successful and a great way to connect with people who are interested in VanLife, while also promoting other projects. For Foster it is a dream come true that he can support himself through such a unique way of life. His stream of income is not steady, but through a variety of projects, including his Instagram, Foster can sustain his travels.

Foster Huntington has nearly one million followers on Instagram, which is significantly more than any other account related to VanLife. Although Foster was never formally trained, he has always experimented with photography. He began working primarily with digital photos, but has recently used more film. Famous photographers have applauded Foster’s images and his work has been featured in Quicksilver and Patagonia. His photos are gorgeous and they illustrate his freedom to explore at will, surfing in Baja one weekend and camping with friends in northern California the next. While Foster’s blog focuses on longer trips and more complete stories, his Instagram account is a way for people to follow his travels more closely. His Instagram account does not include as many shots of his van as the blog does, but it is clear that all of Foster’s experiences are possible thanks to his adventure vehicle.

The values that are presented in his Instagram are very consistent and relate to the VanLife interests and lifestyle. For instance, there are no photos of

Foster partying or playing sports and no themes are represented that do not align with his blog and other projects. The photos always involve some aspect of nature or simple living. It is very rare that a photo will not be taken outside, but when this occurs it is still consistent with the ideals that are important to him. The main themes of his Instagram are landscapes, minimalism, creative architecture, adventure and of course VanLife. The photos range from shots of him making coffee in his tree house kitchen to a photo of friends taking a swim in a hot spring. The point of Foster's Instagram account is to establish a relationship with followers and present his lifestyle and values in a clear and consistent way.

Foster's use of Instagram is different than most VanLife members, mainly due to the large amount of followers he has as well as his financial motives. Again, he is not a member of the community to make a profit, but it is a way to support his way of life. Unlike other VanLife members, Foster is not able to coordinate via Instagram with fellow travelers due to his extraordinary long thread of comments; instead, he uses it as a tool to promote his lifestyle and support the community of VanLife.

Foster Huntington is the face of VanLife, but is a unique example to study, especially in relationship to social media use. As the creator of VanLife and the face of the community he has a lot more followers and is actually supporting himself financially through his travels and adventures. This is not the case for the majority of members, but there is a wide variety; some people are making very small sums of money, while others are on their way to becoming financially stable, and finally, others never plan to use VanLife as a source of income. James

Campbell and Rachel Goldfarb run the blog, “Idle Theory Bus”, which chronicles their travels around the United States in their yellow VW bus named Sunshine. James and Rachel have been on the road since June of 2010, but only more recently have started to use Instagram and connect with followers on social media. They hope to soon gain more financial security by means of VanLife and through their blog, but for now they work odd jobs and live off very little. Rachel does not find value in trying to constantly obtain more money, but instead wrote to me saying, “the less you need, the more you reduce your reliance on money...we are reverting back to some of the more uncomfortable, but more fulfilling ways of a more primitive life”.^{lix} Again, simplicity is the most important inspiration for the couple; they want to cut ties with societies expectations to consume and produce. The couple hopes to one day make money off of their blog or other related VanLife projects, but if it does not work out they will be happy to continue down their current path. Their recent entry into the world of social media has given them a lot of opportunities, but they also understand the difficulties in living simply that can develop through a connection with technology.

James Campbell and Rachel Goldfarb explain that there are many benefits that result from engaging in social media, but challenges occur, especially when people are hoping to gain a greater connection to nature and detach from society. The use of Instagram is particularly troubling for the VanLife community at times, because it is such a mainstream phenomenon. While James and Rachel’s account does not have a presence like Foster’s, they still are known in the VanLife community. Their account currently has more than 10,000 followers and they

have posted 750 photos. James and Rachel were turned on to the application after they, “met Foster Huntington of A Restless Transplant while living in San Diego and were amazed by how many people were ‘following’ him on Instagram”.

Rachel continues, “Foster is a central figure of our community. We signed up and found dozens of others documenting their travels online”.^{lx} James and Rachel have actually been living in their van for a longer period of time than Foster has, but they were inspired by his social media presence and how he established the community of VanLife. James and Rachel have met many people through the use of Instagram, and are open to meeting with anyone who expresses interest in their blog. Rachel writes, “the role of social media in our lives has been the most surprising aspect of living nomadically...we have met some of our dearest friends”.^{lxi} The creators of Instagram envisioned a social media application that would facilitate the development of communities and connect individuals with similar passions. People who are devoted to VanLife make long lasting relationships all while living on the road, a place which is not usually conducive to maintaining connections.

The “Idle Theory Bus” creators did not move into their vans to start a website or have a social media presence, but instead wanted to, “search for something real. Something meaningful. In our fragmented and shallow society, we want something deep and visceral”.^{lxii} Similar to other VanLife members, life on the fringe of society is the only option for James and Rachel; they believe that conforming to societal norms is unfulfilling and are dissatisfied with mainstream modern America.

Once they began to live on the road the couple learned just how expansive the community was, and Instagram added greatly to this sense of togetherness. Also, in their first year on the road the term “VanLife” had not been created by Foster Huntington and Instagram did not exist. James and Rachel did not own Smartphones and definitely did not attempt to use the Internet to make connections with people who lived out of their vans. The strength of the community came as a surprise to the couple, but soon they embraced it as well as the use of social media to share their stories and interact with others. James and Rachel have struggled with finding the right balance of storytelling, and are hesitant to let it dominate their travels and experience on the road. Over time they have put more emphasis on sharing stories, specifically because the couple has, “found joy and happiness and believe in sharing stories that leads other to the same”.^{lxiii} There is a mutual benefit in story telling that James and Rachel want to promote. They have been inspired by the stories of others and feel a duty to share what they have experienced and learned through living on the road. Interestingly, the couple believes that not all adventures should be shared over the Internet and that there is value in keeping some only in memory. Rachel writes, “You can’t capture every experience on film or paper; the memories that exist only in our minds are the most revered and holy”.^{lxiv} Rachel understands the challenges that engaging on social media presents; experiences become less meaningful when they are constantly shared to the world. Rachel believes it is important to maintain some separation from Instagram and not let it rule one’s life, but it helps to also appreciate the benefits of the application. Many believe that a social

media application such as Instagram would establish an unbreakable tie to mainstream society, and contradict the goal for a group trying to detach, but this is not the case. Of course the relationship is complex and there are challenges, but overall it is a useful tool when managed correctly.

Numerous celebrities and young people engage in Instagram for the same reasons that they use Facebook. In many cases people attempt to share every fun activity with the world, and make it appear as if they are hip and enjoy bragging about their lifestyle. This clearly has no positive outcomes in terms of togetherness and social closeness. Instead, VanLife members use their accounts to promote a specific way of life and a culture that rejects societies expectations. This is the primary goal and this theme is repeated throughout frequent conversations with people who have opted for life on the road. I interviewed VanLife participant Dylan Phillip Bellingan by email and he raved about the opportunities that Instagram creates for him. Dylan has been on the road since January of 2014 and runs a Tumblr, but Instagram is where he documents most of his adventures, which primarily consist of surfing and hiking. He writes, “I couldn’t imagine doing this without social media...I have met countless friends through Instagram”.^{lxv} For Dylan, Instagram is not about making money or promoting a profitable blog, but it is about connecting with other like-minded people and establishing relationships. Dylan and Foster’s differing the reasons why they use social media illustrates the diversity of VanLife. There is no hierarchy in VanLife, but each member uses as much or as little technology and social media as they see fit. Dylan most likely could live on the road and have

worthwhile adventures without using Instagram, but the overall experience would be completely different. He explains that Instagram has let him truly feel the presence of the VanLife community; “It’s like a family, people share, people love, people take care of each other. It’s pretty amazing to see and feel”.^{lxvi} The caring community is one of the biggest benefits of living on the road and without Instagram it would be much more difficult to create meaningful relationships and share stories. Social media is solely a tool to use and a small aspect of the daily lives of these wanderers, but when utilized properly it can translate to unforgettable experiences and encounters.

VanLife members who are not dedicated to living full time out of their vehicle, but love to follow other people’s adventures, meet up on occasion, and support the community also rely heavily on Instagram. The account, “Poseidonsbeard”, run by Ryan Sellmeyer is a good example of a part-time VanLife member who’s Instagram has gained a large following without the intention to make money or become prominent. I exchanged emails with Ryan and while he didn’t feel strongly either way about Instagram he did say, “if you aren’t on it or documenting something in some way you are just considered homeless”.^{lxvii} This statement is telling and again relates to the importance of storytelling in the VanLife community. He almost has a duty to share his unique experiences and passion about his VW van. It is fascinating that sharing stories makes an adventure or lifestyle legitimate; the actual substance and activities would be the same, with the only difference being how they are documented. This insight highlights the importance of social media not just to VanLife, but in

our contemporary culture more broadly. There is constant pressure to connect and use technology; Rachel and James's view that some experiences should be left untold is a rare one. Ryan's statement is a common belief and illustrates the challenges associated with social media, specifically in the VanLife community. A group that is so motivated to detach from mainstream society should not feel pressure to feel legitimate. Jack Kerouac was not concerned with legitimacy, but instead focused on authenticity. He felt more attracted to life on the periphery of society, and making art that was true; writing a novel was not an act motivated by the desire to be accepted. It is important to understand this complexity within the community and while it is a challenge to maintain a healthy relationship between social media and real experiences, the use of Instagram does not devalue the authenticity of VanLife. The community has a strong presence and therefore as someone who shares the same values and has unique stories, Ryan is compelled to contribute. Also, storytelling and photography add purpose to their lifestyles; they are enjoyable activities and people are passionate about merging photography and outdoor voyages. Ryan has a family and only lives out of his Van for about half of the year, but has gained almost 9,000 followers on the social media application. He has relationships with many other VanLife participants and supports the lifestyle completely, writing, "if I was a single man with no intention of settling down I could not see any other way of living!"^{lxviii} Ryan is as much of a member of the VanLife community as Foster Huntington is and while social media presents a challenging relationship, Ryan's values align with the community.

Everyone who responded to my attempts at discussing VanLife was very enthusiastic and spoke highly of the community and of the people involved, but unsurprisingly I was not able to find each persons contact information.

“Vanagonlife” is an Instagram account run by unknown people, who were impossible to get in touch with. The account however has over 11,000 followers and is a great way to learn about VanLife and about the culture it supports.

Almost all of the photos feature vans and highlights the relationship between VW’s and nature. Most of the shots display retro vans in breathtaking places, whether on the Oregon coast or Zion National Park. Below is a recent photo from the Instagram account.



Figure 6: Vanagonlife – Redwoods, California (February 3, 2015)
Vanagonlife Instagram Account

The photo has 1,400 likes and in the caption, the Vanagonlife account shares that this shot is from The Redwoods and a short description of their adventures and weather encountered follows. The VW van appears at home in nature, whether it is under huge trees or beside crashing waves. The Vanagonlife Instagram account emphasizes this relationship and reaches a fairly large audience of people who are interested in the community and the values that are important to VanLife.

At first glance it appears contradictory that a group of people who want to detach from society and spend more time outside would be so active on social media. Relying on technology and having social interactions on applications such as Instagram is conforming to mainstream trends, not resisting. This argument is valid, but after further examination of the people in the VanLife community it is evident that social media is a small aspect of their lives and overall purpose. In addition, it is necessary to study the reasons that individuals are involved with technology and applications such as Instagram. For the VanLife community this reason always centers on the act of story telling. Foster Huntington is a storyteller, and similar to Kerouac his narrative develops around his adventures that arise while living on the fringe of society. Instead of writing a novel, Foster shares his stories through a variety of channels. His blog, photobooks, and Instagram are all ways for Foster to reach his audience. While access to technology is important to his ability to share stories it does not mean that Foster relies on it. Foster would most likely be doing the same thing whether or not he could support himself financially. It is a challenge to manage the relationship with technology and time spent on social media, but Foster is a person who is often off the grid, with no cell service, in the midst of real adventures. He spends minimal time on Instagram, but his purpose is to share these adventures to the VanLife community and like-minded individuals.

The majority of VanLife members use social media as a way to connect and meet similar people while living on the road. The inclusivity is a distinct feature of the group and this openness extends from the “face of VanLife” to a college kid who has been living on the road for a month. Each member plays a

role in promoting the lifestyle whether it is through word of mouth or by running a blog. Also, lengthy conversations do not occur on the Internet, but instead ties are initiated, in order to later meet up in person and have face-to-face interactions. Instead of creating a social divide between people, Instagram actually brings individuals closer together. This is a huge reason why the VanLife community has grown. Without the development of Instagram there would likely be no such thing as VanLife. People would still connect on the road and develop friendships, but the expansive network and togetherness would not exist. Also, as a result of Foster's work, but also due to the presence of VanLife on Instagram, more people are exposed to a different way of life. Many people have the itch for traveling and exploring, but do not see it as a sustainable life have been inspired by Foster and by the community as a whole. Without social media this phenomenon would not occur. Foster is the creator of VanLife, but without an active presence on Instagram the community would be a fraction of what it is today. As VanLife continues to grow, the role of social media will continue to be an effective tool and add value.

Epilogue

The VanLife community has continued Kerouac's approach to life during his time as a member of the Beats as well as Steinbeck's short stint on the road. Foster, as the creator and face of the community has the most direct similarities to the two authors, but the group as a whole represents many of the values that were so important to both Kerouac and Steinbeck. Kerouac represented the value in detaching from society and living on one's own terms; materialism and expectations to constantly produce are hindrances to living life fully. Kerouac, similar to Foster, had no desire to live an inauthentic life and judge his own success based on the opinions of others. Kerouac dropped out of Columbia University, one of nations top colleges, and decided to pursue writing. Kerouac worked many jobs to support himself because it was a very long time until he recieved a paycheck for writing novels. He experienced many highs and lows during his twenties, but Kerouac was committed to becoming a novelist and adding value to society through his work. Kerouac was not inspired by money or fame, but instead looked up to figures that were passionate about their craft and created works that are important. James Joyce, Thomas Edison, Mozart were all people who Kerouac greatly respected and he aimed to follow in their footsteps, by being authentic and producing true art. His urge to be on the road and explore new cities and landscapes was not developed by a desire to become a celebrated author. Instead, it was an inherent part of his personality; he always wanted to travel and explore new places, but as he matured in his twenties and became inspired by fellow intellectuals, Kerouac gained the courage to pursue a life on the fringe of society.

Kerouac viewed Steinbeck as a straight-edged, conformist who wrote texts that lacked emotion and creativity. Kerouac also believed that the famous author was producing work because it was expected of him, and he lacked the nerve to pursue what was real. This assessment of Steinbeck is not entirely accurate, which is evident by examining his travel memoir, *Travels With Charley*, and studying his early life. It is true that for the majority of his life, Steinbeck lived comfortably without any financial concerns and was one of the most famous authors of the 20th century. His views and approach to life were not indicative of a conformist, but instead he shared many of the same values with Kerouac and the entire VanLife community. Steinbeck yearned for the open road and always wanted to explore the varied landscapes of the United States. He was motivated to travel by car, independently, in order to immerse himself in the localism of the different towns. Steinbeck and Kerouac were motivated by many of the same reasons to travel, but it took Steinbeck longer to set out on his journey. Kerouac's voyage was vital to his development as not only an author, but as a person, while Steinbeck solely wanted to explore and connect with nature. Both authors' created exceptional pieces of work, sharing their unique and spontaneous interactions that occurred while living on the road.

At the core of Kerouac and Steinbeck's trips is the aspect of storytelling. Both figures kept judicious notes and journals, understanding that their experiences were of great value. This element is a clear connection between their travels and those of the people in the VanLife community. Foster Huntington takes photos as a way to document his adventures, but he also takes notes, which are then used to tell a narrative in combination with his images. Followers of his blog and Instagram only see the photos that Foster selects, but he takes a copious amount of images, which, even though they are unseen, is an important part of his

storytelling process. The method of story telling has evolved, but we are living in an age where information can be accessed rapidly with the click of the button; the individuals in VanLife understand the benefits of connecting with viewers through the Internet and social media. When Steinbeck and Kerouac were traveling the United States there was no way for them to constantly connect with readers, or share their stories after each experience. Instead, producing a novel was the understandable outcome, and an effective way to capture their distinctive lifestyles.

The members of the VanLife community are aware of the changes that have occurred during their generation, and how they relate to their decision to live on the road. The rise of social media, increased urbanization, and intense societal expectations are significant to VanLife. Social media has allowed VanLife members to develop meaningful relationships, promote alternative lifestyles, and inspire others to detach from the pressure of society. As the nation continues to become more urbanized, developed, and polluted, the VanLife community is a group of individuals who are intent on gaining a greater connection to nature. Kerouac and Steinbeck had strong opinions about these issues, but the stakes are even higher now. The constant cycle of producing and consuming has become a convention of our culture, but VanLife attempts to break the trend. Simplicity, authenticity and establishing a greater awareness of and improved connection to nature are the most significant elements of VanLife, and have inspired numerous people.

Kerouac and Steinbeck would likely be members of the VanLife community and promote the values that are represented today. The VanLife community has been inspired greatly by the likes of Kerouac and Steinbeck, and

through the use of social media and the Internet, Foster Huntington and other members have emerged as true modern day storytellers.

ⁱ Ann Charters, *Kerouac; A Biography*. (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1973), 42-44.

ⁱⁱ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking, 1997), 7

ⁱⁱⁱ "John Steinbeck Biography," National Steinbeck Center, last modified 2015, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.steinbeck.org/pages/john-steinbeck-biography>

^{iv} "Foster Huntington Stopped Working for the Man and Started Living in a Van," Vice, last modified October 11, 2013, accessed March 6, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/talking-surfing-and-vans-with-Foster-huntington>.

^v Vice. "Foster Huntington Stopped Working for the Man and Started Living in a Van."

^{vi} Mark Dunphy, "On the Road with John Steinbeck: The Beat of the Beat Goes on in "Travels with Charley: In Search of America"" *The Steinbeck Review*, no. 2.2 (2005): 110, accessed February 27, 2015,

^{vii} John Steinbeck Center. "John Steinbeck Biography."

^{viii} "John Steinbeck," America National Biography Online, last modified 2000, accessed March 18, 2015.

^{ix} Charters, *Kerouac: A Biography*, 50-55.

^x Charters, *Kerouac: A Biography*, 43-48.

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- ^{xi} Paul Maher. *Jack Kerouac's American Journey: The Real-life Odyssey of On the Road*. (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2007), 34.
- ^{xii} Jack Kerouac and Douglas Brinkley. *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac, 1947-1954*. (New York: Viking, 2004), 118.
- ^{xiii} Kerouac and Brinkley, *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac, 1947-1954*, 118.
- ^{xiv} Maher, *Jack Kerouac's American Journey: The Real-life Odyssey of On the Road*, 34.
- ^{xv} Bill Roger. *Traveler or Tourist? Jack Kerouac and the Commodification of Culture*. *Dialectical Anthropology* 34, no. 3 (2010), 399.
- ^{xvi} Roger, *Traveler or Tourist? Jack Kerouac and the Commodification of Culture*, 399.
- ^{xvii} Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*. (New York: Viking, 1997), 6.
- ^{xviii} Maher, *Jack Kerouac's American Journey: The Real-life Odyssey of On the Road*, 34.
- ^{xix} Kerouac, *On The Road*, 11.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*, 7.
- ^{xxi} *Ibid.*, 12.
- ^{xxii} *Ibid.*, 13.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, 50.
- ^{xxiv} *Ibid.*, 45.
- ^{xxv} *Ibid.*, 51.
- ^{xxvi} *Ibid.*, 73.
- ^{xxvii} *Ibid.*, 76.
- ^{xxviii} *Ibid.*, 77.
- ^{xxix} John Steinbeck. *Travels with Charley and Later Novels, 1947-1962*. (New York: Library of America, 2007), 768.
- ^{xxx} *Ibid.*, 768.
- ^{xxxi} *Ibid.*, 767.
- ^{xxxii} *Ibid.*, 767.
- ^{xxxiii} Dunphy, *On the Road with John Steinbeck: The Beat of the Beat Goes on in "Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, 114.
- ^{xxxiv} Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley and Later Novels, 1947-1962*, 782.
- ^{xxxv} *Ibid.*, 839.
- ^{xxxvi} *Ibid.*, 849.
- ^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*, 857.
- ^{xxxviii} *Ibid.*, 869.
- ^{xxxix} *Ibid.*, 869.
- ^{xl} *Ibid.*, 869.
- ^{xli} Foster Huntington, *Home Is Where You Park It*. (New York, N.Y.: Victory, 2014).
- ^{lii} Foster Huntington, *My Toyota Camper*. (February, 2014. Oregon).
- ^{liii} Foster Huntington, *I'm Going To Jackson*. (May, 2014. Jackson, Wyoming).
- ^{liv} *Ibid.*
- ^{lv} Huntington, *My Toyota Camper*.
- ^{lvi} Rachel Goldfarb, "VanLife." E-mail interview by author. February 3, 2015.
- ^{lvii} Jorge Gonzalez, "VanLife." E-mail interview by author. February 13, 2015
- ^{lviii} *Ibid.*

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- ^{xlix} Jessica Gonzalez *"Van Life Advice - Episode 1 - Live Work Wander."* Live Work Wander. December 15, 2014.
- ⁱ Gonzalez, E-mail.
- ^{li} Olivier Laurent, *"The New Economics of Photojournalism: The Rise of Instagram."* British Journal of Photography. September 3, 2012.
- ^{lii} Ibid.
- ^{liii} Ibid.
- ^{liv} Ibid.
- ^{lv} Ibid.
- ^{lvi} Ibid.
- ^{lvii} Ibid.
- ^{lviii} *"Interview: Foster Huntington."* / Blog / Need Supply Co. April 28, 2013.
- ^{lix} Goldfarb, E-mail.
- ^{lx} Ibid.
- ^{lxi} Ibid.
- ^{lxii} Ibid.
- ^{lxiii} Ibid.
- ^{lxiv} Ibid.
- ^{lxv} Dylan Bellingan. *"VanLife."* E-mail interview by author. February 4, 2015.
- ^{lxvi} Ibid.
- ^{lxvii} Ryan Sellmeyer. *"VanLife."* E-mail interview by author. February 10, 2015.
- ^{lxviii} Ibid.

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