

Road trip movies worth discovering

BY KEN DUSOLD
Assistant Editor

As Midterm Break approaches, students and faculty look forward to the yearly ritual of getting away from daily routines. For some members of the Truman State community, break provides an opportunity for a trip or brief vacation. If you can't get away, check out some underappreciated films about individuals taking a break from their lives for a life-changing road trip.

"About Schmidt" (2002):

Director Alexander Payne is better known for his 2004 road trip film "Sideways" and 2011's "The Descendants," but this is an incredibly touching and subtly humorous picture. The film stars Jack Nicholson in one of his most captivating performances, and it might be Payne's most interesting work. The story follows Omaha insurance salesman Warren Schmidt (Nicholson) as he faces retirement without his wife or anything to keep himself busy, and sets out on a journey to retrace his life and try to hold together his crumbling relationship with his daughter. While only a relatively small portion of the film's 120 minutes is expended on Schmidt's trip in an oversized RV, there almost is something transcendent about Nicholson's presence as he takes on mortality and personal crisis with sober vulnerability.

"Duel" (1971):

Steven Spielberg's directorial debut is one of those suspense-thrillers that leave viewers slightly rattled and hesitant to participate in an otherwise normal human activity — passing cars. In the case of "Duel," that normal activity is a business trip that has David Mann (Dennis Weaver) driving across desert-like southern California. Not long into his trip, he passes a slow-moving tanker truck ... and comes to regret it. For the next 80 minutes, Mann is stalked and almost murdered several times by the mysterious truck driver. An intense piece of film, "Duel" will have you thinking twice before passing anyone on the highway ever again.

"The Great Race" (1965):

In this unflinchingly bold comedy, director Blake Edwards presents the story of an around-the-world car race that quickly unravels into uproarious slapstick scenarios. Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis team up for the first time since "Some Like It Hot," though here they play rival risk-takers Professor Fate (Lemmon) and the Great Leslie (Curtis). At three hours, "The Great Race" is one of the longest comedies ever made, but also one of the funniest endeavors ever achieved for the big screen. Co-star Natalie Wood is miscast, but Peter Falk as Lemmon's doozy sidekick is at his comedic best.

"The Man Who Would Be King" (1975):

Technically, this adaptation of a Rudyard Kipling short story of the same name does not include a traditional road trip, but it is a terrific ode to a bygone era of classic movie adventures. The film, which the legendary John Huston directed, follows two adventurous British soldiers (played by Michael Caine and Sean Connery) in the late 19th century India as they set out on a journey through treacherous lands to find the kingdom of Kafirstan and bring home a treasure. This film is the epitome of childhood nostalgia with a tale of two nobodies experiencing a once-in-a-lifetime venture.

"The Straight Story" (1999):

Richard Farnsworth gives an endearing and Academy-Award nominated performance as Alvin Straight, the man who rode a lawn mower — because he could not acquire a driver's license — 240 miles across Iowa to visit his ailing brother (played by Harry Dean Stanton). During his trip, Straight encounters a variety of characters, each of whom listens to the elder traveler talk about the blessings and tribulations of a long and tested life. Simple and poetic, "The Straight Story" is an thoughtful picture that appropriately compliments an age characterized by people hurrying to get to where they're going and failing to appreciate the road they took to get there.

Students test their Disney knowledge



Rose Sparks/Index
Circle K, a co-ed service organization, hosts a Disney Trivia night Feb. 27 in the SUB Down Under. Teams attempted to answer questions about Disney movies to raise money for Circle K and the Special Olympics.

Finding bliss without a phone



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While playing my French horn during a fateful December afternoon, a traumatic event occurred that changed the way I thought about technology forever.

During the middle of rehearsal, a loud splat rang out in the performance hall. To my horror, I identified the source of the grotesque sound: my cell phone had fallen into a large, freshly emptied puddle of spit on the floor.

Needless to say, I was thoroughly disgusted and phoneless, as the water damage led to my phone's untimely death. However, I soon learned a valuable lesson: my phone falling into a puddle of my own spit was the best thing that could have happened to me.

In a society that thrives off the newest technology, an individual without a cellphone is viewed as an outcast. The thought of being disconnected from the world is enough to send chills down the spines of some. For others like myself, being without a cellphone is nothing short of a blessing.

I've never been very good at using my cellphone. I don't like to answer phone calls, and I am awful at remem-

bering to respond to text messages. This leads to my friends yelling at me and insisting that I need to improve my cellphone usage.

When the phone is taken out of the picture, problems such as responding to texts or answering phone calls simply disappear.

It's funny how much you begin to notice about life when you finally put down the cellphone. During those hours you are in class, you'll be shocked to learn that your professor talks nearly the entire class period, not just the couple of minutes between text messages that you pay attention.

It is a wonder how much a cellphone can lead to ignorance or antisocial behavior.

Having worked in retail, it is safe for me to say that one of the biggest pet peeves of all retail workers is a customer on a cellphone. It is only made worse when that same customer complains about poor customer service, having not realized that several employees have attempted to speak to them.

Maybe it isn't all the fault of the cellphone user. Perhaps we can't help it that we focus more on phone conversations than our in-person interactions. When we feel awkward, our cellphone is a crutch, as a friend is merely a text away. When we are bored, our cellphone is our entertainment.

While phones might have some benefits for entertainment and communication, it is important to realize there is life outside of the screen. You might realize you aren't the only driver on the highway or the only customer in the checkout aisle.

I don't suggest dropping your phone in a puddle of spit emptied from a brass instrument, but perhaps it's time for us to put down the phone for a while and appreciate everything around us.

Old sitcom offers simple comforts



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I'm not embarrassed to say I love coming home from the Index late at night and unwinding with a few or five episodes of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show."

If you're not familiar with it, "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" is one of those glorious 1970s sitcoms that used to air on Nick at Nite before George Lopez and that guy from "My Wife and Kids" ruined the meaning of Nick at Nite. Come on, those shows were made during the 2000s! And they are dumb.

But I suppose the show I love is kind of dumb too. The plot lines of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" are silly and kind of sexist (Mary's boss Mr. Grant hires a secretary because he likes her butt during one episode), but I know why I love it. It reminds me of my mom. Because my mom is a sexist dummy.

Just kidding, mom. My mom is awesome. The show reminds me of her because she loves it more than I do and because she looks and acts like Mary Tyler Moore. When I'm home, we watch our DVD collection together in her room and eat snacks.

Mary Richards, played by the tall but adorable Mary Tyler Moore, is a single woman making it on her own in the mean-

city of Minneapolis, working as an associate producer in an all-male newsroom. Her apartment is awesome, everyone always falls in love with her and her best friend is a spunky Jewish gal named Rhoda Morgenstern who lives in the apartment upstairs.

Mary has it all, and like most sitcom stars, she has a lot of goofy problems and miscommunications in relationships that quickly are resolved and never spoken about again.

For example, in the episode "It's Whether You Win or Lose," we discover that Mary's good friend and co-worker Murray Slaughter has a severe gambling addiction that almost destroyed his marriage—a problem which makes the office poker game hilarious. Luckily, Murray is cured forever after Mary confronts him and he agrees gambling isn't that great.

Watching Mary Tyler Moore in my little apartment in Kirksville reminds me of being home with my mom. Although it's my last year in college, I still feel homesick sometimes and wish I could just apparate home for the night and for breakfast in the morning. I don't think that occasional craving will go away after graduation. I'll probably always become a little homesick from time to time.

Doing things like watching "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" on Hulu is silly, but it's comforting. We should all make time to do things that remind us of home — whether it's a too-cheesy casserole, a ratty sweatshirt or a silly TV show.

I'm preparing to move far away from home a few months from now, and I'm ready to be an adult. But I know that when I'm living in a new city, there will be some days I'll want to climb into my mom's bed and watch a disc of Mary Tyler Moore, and I won't be able to.

I'll have to settle for a phone call home and a Hulu playlist. But I think it will be more comforting than sad because I know home, just like Mary Tyler Moore, will be there when I really need it.

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