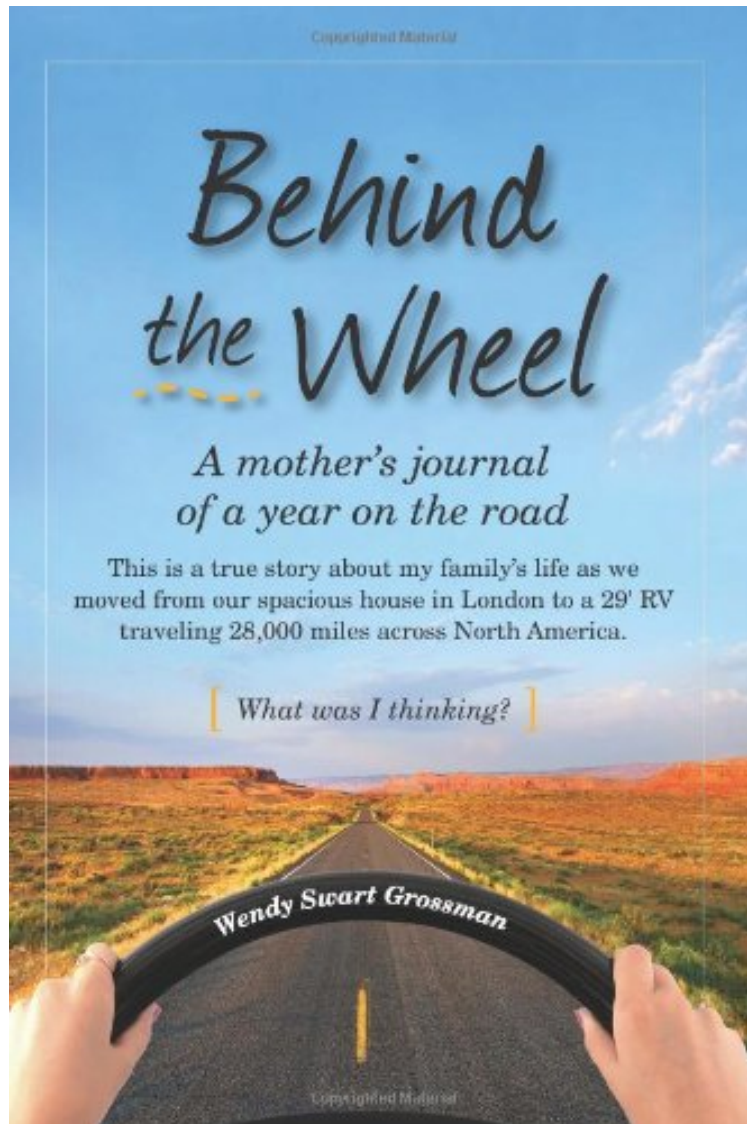


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## **Behind the Wheel: A mother's journal of a year on the road: This is a true story about my familys life as we moved from our spacious house in London ... across North America. What was I thinking?**

Wendy Swart Grossman  
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Wheel: A mother's journal of a year on the road: This is a true story about my family's life as we moved from our spacious house in London ... across North America. What was I thinking?:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Road Trip: How America looks to a long-absent AmericanBy Scott in Saudi ArabiaWendy Swart-Grossman and her husband Evan and two boys come back to the US after living six years in London, and find that their wander-lust isn't quite sated. It's no use looking for jobs, they decide; they arrive in the midst of the worst recession in decades. So instead, they put their stuff in storage, buy a mobile home, and explore the home country one state, RV park, and diner at a time. We all have a Wendy in our lives. She's the smart funny gal who never stays put; who speaks her mind but is never mean-spirited; who takes a few years off to climb the Himalayas to discover herself; who's not afraid to flout the conventional wisdom. She has a Woody-Allen-like ability to tease out profound thoughts from absurd situations. Take her to the deserts of Mali or to the Wal-Mart in Des Moines, and she'll observe human behavior like a sociologist, and then top it off with a dollop of Garrison Keillor-style folksy humor that speaks to normal values. Her Odysseus-styled trek back home might make her seem erratic, but Wendy is also one of the most rooted, family-oriented people you will ever meet. She reminds the reader that she's lucky she married a guy like Evan, who shares her sense of adventure, her tolerance for chaos, and her insatiable desire for unusual experiences. She thinks constantly about how this trip will give enriching learning experiences for her two boys, as well as a group activity that will bond her family for years to come. Together with Evan, she focuses on what she considers her most important job: raising two precocious boys who, for the most part, embrace the challenge of this year of self-imposed homelessness, and who understand that education is more than mere books and classrooms can provide. This book is a fast read, the collected journal entries of a year - okay, seven months - on the road. It's a journey that I think many of us imagine that we would like to take, like Jack Kerouac or Hunter S. Thompson would take, but with kids brought along instead of hallucinogenic drugs. Wendy assures us that such a trip is not for the faint of heart, however. A 29-foot camper is a mighty tight space for a family that includes a young hormonal teenager, an imaginative 2-grader, a self-described menopausal woman, and a quiet husband with a penchant for organization and efficiency. Brave souls are the Swart-Grossmans, and we can view this book as a kind of journey into the American Heart of Darkness, if we define darkness as triple-A baseball games, homeschooling, road-trips to the world's largest ball of string, train-rides up to the Arctic Circle, and yes, a weekend in Vegas. Look on this family and learn, dear reader. The results are not always pretty, but they are usually quite funny. As someone who has just returned from a decade of expatriate life, living in India and in Africa, I sympathized with Wendy's challenges in adapting to this foreign culture that is 21st century America. I laughed at her self-deprecating chapter titles like "Does this RV make my butt look big?" But I also treated her observations on the people she met and the places she visited with the same curious respect as a political scientist would treat the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville. For someone like me, returning from a long tour abroad, "On the Road" is a must-read, a survival guide for reintegration to America, a quick tour of the cultural Mother Ship. But this book isn't just for returning expats. For those who have lived in the US all their lives, but who need a good chuckle about how America looks to an outsider, this book is a welcome reality check. And for everyone else, buckle up for a great ride. And remember, most of life's pleasures are affordable, if you know which coupons to clip. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. hilariously witty with many life lessons intertwinedBy Christine KimTwo things made me pick up this book: 1) I'm a traveler myself and love hearing stories of people's travel experiences; and 2) London. 'Nuff said. That being said, there are about a million things I appreciated about the book. Her writing style is easy-to-read, easy to put down and pick back up, and personable. You get the feeling she's talking directly to you, over a cup of tea, and half the time, you're roaring with laughter together (warning: you may get glares from fellow public transportation-takers when you disturb their commute). What I loved the most was how freely she exaggerates, yet keeps true, her observations: American road rage; English allergic reactions to random conversations; RV culture; etc. Final takeaways: I am now equipped to take an RV adventure across the US. I also have some great tips for parenting. Pajamas adventures are cool. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Throwing it all away for a yearBy Joshua GansThis is a book about what happens when you throw it all away for a year. The Grossman family decided to do what might be optimal in a recession -- revert to leisure. They were Americans in London but left in 2009 to return. Instead of getting straight back into what might be termed normal life, they decided to do what many talk about but never do: take a year, rent an RV and drive around the US. This is the kind of extreme behaviour that can get you on Wife Swap. And indeed the Grossmans were approached auditioned, got it and then declined! Of course, that is surely a sensible position for a family to take but we were this close to knowing someone on a major reality TV show. In the process, they blogged about it and that blog became a book. It is a light read and to tell you the truth leaves you wanting some more. But if you ever had a yearning to throw it all in for a year, spend a considerable amount of time with your kids and go on an adventure, this book is a good place to start to see what it is like. For me, if we ever go driving across the US it will be without kids.

A mother's journal of a year on the road is a humorous collection of true stories and journal entries chronicling the adventure of a family of four as they trade their life as expats in North London for the Semi-Affluent Homeless

subculture and trek across North America on a tight budget in a Winnebago. Laugh, seek inspiration and then take heed as these intrepid travelers—a menopausal mom, a techno-geek dad, a preteen, and a 7-year-old—confront unforeseen challenges and constantly adapt their goals in an effort to stay on the road and avoid becoming road kill.

**About the Author** Wendy Swart Grossman has spent her professional career as a visionary advocate for community service, citizen participation, economic and social justice and all sorts of fascinating—in varying degrees—nonprofits and political campaigns. She has worked with a multitude of people and organizations from Mike Dukakis, President Bill Clinton, and President Nelson Mandela to the Harvard Museum of Natural History and the Science Museum of London. Wendy holds a BA from St. Olaf College and an MA from Tufts University. But really, Wendy is a traveler, a mother, and a wife who plays the guitar poorly but with passion, sings off key but remembers all the words, has trouble resisting the temptation to swim in fresh water ponds, and embarrasses her kids on a regular basis. This is her first book but given the number of voices she hears, it may not be her last.