

“Out of the Frying Pan and
into the Fire!”

Summer Reflections

Episode 2

By Kevin Garman

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“It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door,” he used to say. “You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to. Do you realize that this is the very path that goes through Mirkwood, and that if you let it, it might take you to the Lonely Mountain or even further and to worse places?”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Washington State. What in the world am I doing? I don't do this. My name is Kevin Patrick Garman. I plan my week out every Sunday or Monday with every event for the week in its respective place on my calendar. Heck! Sometimes I am even planning out each hour of every day depending on the week. WHO IS THIS MAN AIMLESSLY DIVERTING FROM HIS TRAVEL SCHEDULE???!?! This isn't me. I write out what I am going to have for breakfast, lunch, and supper every week on the white board in my kitchen. WHY AM I DRIVING TO WASHINGTON?! THIS IS NOT PART OF THE PLAN!!

These were the thoughts and questions racing through my mind as I trudged along Interstate 90 leisurely driving at 85 miles per hour, as laggardly as one can drive at eighty-five miles per hour. I had recently stopped at a rest area just as the sun was setting somewhere near the Idaho and Washington border. I had shoved an overpriced ham and cheese sandwich from some middle of nowhere gas station in some quaint town in Idaho just off the interstate. I was back on the road and close to Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, which was my last major city until I hit Spokane. Idaho was a simple enough drive, but I was ready to be in Spokane to rest my head on that overpriced pillow I had paid for in one of the last hotels I could find availability for without paying \$200 for a night.

My arrival into Spokane was uneventful. The only real exciting part of my night is when I stopped at a gas station in a part of town most preachers aren't seen in after dark. I mustered up the courage anyway to walk past the stares and barred windows to get something to drink so I could just make it to hotel. A gentleman, who was quite inebriated, told me he recognized my shirt, which I replied was odd because it was a company shirt for a group home I worked at in Florida. He insisted he knew the company and how much it helped him. He asked me how the program was going in Butte after all these years. I just replied, "Never better!" purchased my drink and proceeded to the car.

Let me pause for a moment and let you in on a little insight about Pastor Kevin in public. I have an invisible, neon, glowing sign

connected to my head that says, “Everyone, please come talk to me!” I have tried to turn this sign off and I have even attempted to locate the master plug to unplug this wretched sign, but even after all the years of trying, I have yet to locate this sign although everyone else seems to see it but me. I say this because you should know it is a common occurrence for people to walk up to me and randomly share information that I did not ask to procure for simply walking next to another human being. However, I digress and return us back to Washington.

I made it to the hotel, texted a couple family members to let them know I am still alive, and rest my head on the hotel pillow to dream about sunrises on mountain peaks from the previous morning. I was on vacation. I was gradually starting to slow down and get acclimated to that time and space only vacation can bring out of you. Vacation time is like a black hole where you are able to come out the other end of the time tunnel to find this magical land of peace and relaxation. That is unless you have children. Than vacation is just another wrestling your little gremlins to sleep but this time they have more energy!

The next day I did what every millennial does every morning as I checked my Facebook to see how many people had liked or commented on my posts and pictures of my newfound adventure. They were about to be drastically surprised when I tell them I am in Spokane instead of Helena as the itinerary insisted. After searching through a few apps and blogs on “must see places in Spokane,” I settled on taking a walk across Riverfront Park. It was quite the site to see in the middle of city as I took in the beauty of all the foliage and environment. It reminded the beloved Washington Park (otherwise known as Wash Park for the locals) in Denver, Colorado where I lived most my years of my graduate school studies at Iliff School of Theology. I didn’t know how big Riverfront Park was or how or how long I was going to walk it that morning. It didn’t matter because I had sunk back into my newfound love of meandering through some unforged street or under some sprawling

tree across the park grounds. Washington was wonderful but my day far from over.



Unfortunately, I was back in the vehicle figuring out what I wanted to do next. The only thing I had to do was make sure to account for the Thursday evening hotel reservation I had made previous to my departure from Glendive, which was the historic Hotel Arvon in Great Falls, MT for tomorrow night. I was heading back towards the direction of Montana but had told myself I would continue my random adventures by taking whatever exit caught my eye.

Lake Coeur D'Alene was a stop I had to make as I had passed by in the dark the previous evening. Considering both Spokane and Coeur D'Alene are directly near their respective borders, my drive was minimal, and I was out of the car again. The lake was stunning, but lakes and I have an interesting relationship. Growing up in Florida, lakes were something to fear and always be cautious around because of gators and more importantly, moccasins. However, I did not cautiously scour the shoreside looking for any critters crawling or slithering here. I took my shoes off and stuck my feet in the water almost immediately. Even though it was mid-July, it was your typical Rocky Mountain water. Once again, being

used to the warm waters of the Atlantic in Florida and the mountain water seeping into the valley in Tennessee, I consider Rocky Mountain water more like an ice bath that melted than a refreshing swim, but it didn't matter that day. As my pale skin cooked like a piece of bacon in the frying pan, I splashed my feet in the ice-cold water as I filmed some stock footage of the lake and meditated on stillness along the shoreside.

I packed up and drove around the scenic view of the lake taking in all its beauty and splendor. I found a nature path which led you to a clearing over top the lake to see yet another breathtaking vista. Stillness. Something I had not experienced in quite some time since being a pastor in a global pandemic for the first time in my life as I adjusted to my move across the country from Tampa, Florida. Stillness, breathe in and breathe out.



I was continuing my drive back east to Missoula on Interstate 90. I passed through little towns of Idaho like, Kellogg and Wallace,

and these two towns were by far the biggest towns passing through these little mountain communities nestled charmingly alongside the road. I would drive through a couple just to see what they looked like and ended up learning about the fires of 1910 that would drastically change this area forever. There were no names to memorialize these heroic figures who kept these forests from being decimated. Most of these people who died fighting the fires were poor miners, immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe. Some of them had been here years and others only a brief amount of time before their adventures were cut short as they protected their fellow countrymen from the destruction the fire caused. Thank you to all those firefighters out there keeping us safe today! Your service and heroism does not go unnoticed or forgotten.



Then, all of the sudden, the heavens opened up and a side quest was revealed just to my right. It was a side quest telling the tale of an old, forgotten mining town far up in the Garnet mountains east of Missoula so appropriately called, Garnet. It is one of the most well-preserved ghost towns in Montana.



It was like going back in time and being stuck as I visited old residencies, miner camps, saloons, and blacksmith shops in a town that used to boast a population of one thousand people in the mid-19th century. It was quite the site to see. However, this would only be the beginning of my fortuitous adventures for the day.



As I departed Garnet, another side quest appeared! It was a sign telling of a treacherous, one-way gulch mountain pass that descended down the mountain bringing you out on the other side of the mountain you drove up to get to Garnet. I took the unruly road down the mountainside in an encounter that I can only describe as terrifyingly marvelous. I did encounter one other driver making the ascent on this one-way road but thankfully we met early on the road where it was wider and less distressing as some of the latter section, I could peer off the edge of the cliff with no guard rail and

seemingly nothing below me with absolutely no room to spare if someone was coming up the mountain. Although I thought I would certainly meet my maker as I turned and slid on the gravel down the mountain, I was having fun. This vacation was taking me places I never thought I would be.



However, I still had tonight to look for the one thing I wanted to do this entire trip, which was camping. I was determined to find a camping spot to build a small fire, place my tent, and get swooned by the choruses of crickets and coyotes that evening. It was going to happen no matter what!