

A family that drives together, thrives together



What happens if you put a family of six in a Kombi and send them on holiday? Ask someone who was in that Kombi, someone like **Nick Dall**.

ILLUSTRATIONS
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The travel bug can be terminal, and in my case it bit early. It all started before I could even sit up – there are photos of me being breastfed in the Kruger – but it was the family holidays when I was a little older that made me fall in love with travelling.

Every June we would set off in our Kombi to some or other corner of southern Africa, towing our Caravette 6 behind us. My dad always drove and my mom always sat in the passenger seat. Us four Dall kids were moved around the car, depending on who was fighting with whom at the time. Whatever the configuration, my poor sister Sarah always had to sit next to one of her three brothers: me, Phil or Alex her twin.

On those long drives we did our fair share of bickering, but we also played games – I Spy and Car Cricket – and made up songs and listened to radio commentary from Wimbledon in the days when Stefan Edberg and Boris Becker usually made the final. It wasn't just us kids who caused problems,

though. There were two different occasions, years apart, when my dad had to go to the same Graaff-Reinet dentist to get a crown replaced after eating an ill-advised after-lunch toffee.

Every year we drove. One holiday, Sarah steadfastly refused to go to the loo when we filled up with petrol, but invariably started clenching her legs and screeching "I'm deeeesperate!" about 10 minutes after we'd resumed driving.

Sometimes there were no toilets available, like the time when Phil had an onslaught of roadside diarrhoea at Mana Pools in Zimbabwe about 50m before we spotted an enormous male leopard on the hunt...

The drives were a means to an end. It was the places we camped at and the people we met that I remember most clearly. There was the time at Crocodile Bridge campsite in the Kruger when we encountered a particularly athletic family of four Afrikaans kids who found great joy in running laps

around the campsite and timing each other. Phil, Sarah and I decided to join in, and even though we were regularly lapped by even the smallest girl among them, we had a good laugh.

My youngest brother, Alex, had a different tactic: He would wait until the most strapping brother approached, then sprint alongside him for a hundred metres or so, to the immense irritation of the older boy.

On another trip, this time to Addo, Alex and Sarah read with trepidation that elephants love oranges so much that they'll sometimes try to pinch them out of cars. This was too much for me and Phil to resist. Every time we saw an elephant (and there are many in Addo) one of us would reach for the pocket of oranges below our seat and wave them out of the window. It worked every time: instant tears from Sarah and a lip-trembling cry of "He's not happy!" from Alex.

Our trip to the Kalahari was memorable for the people we *didn't* meet. We all contracted chickenpox and were forced into a caravan and Kombi quarantine. It was also the trip when Alex's rocking reached its peak. Let me explain: Being the youngest boy he slept in the stretcher bunk bed above my sturdier bed. He slept soundly but strangely. Soon after falling asleep he would get on all fours, much like a Muslim in prayer, and rock back and forth humming "Mmmmm uh mmmmm uh mmmmm". I probably should have swapped beds with him (for my own safety, not out of sympathy), but older brothers just don't do that sort of thing.

Then there was the year when the Dall family holiday went international. All the way to America, in fact. During a stopover in London we decided to get a bite at McDonald's. Phil burst into tears. "The only reason I came on this holiday was to eat Burger King!" he cried. My dad capitulated and we all traipsed across the food court to try our first Whopper. I remember wondering if people would go all the way to South Africa just to eat at Chicken Licken?

We finally arrived in America. At customs, Alex and Sarah stroked the beagle sniffer dog in a blue jacket and they were immediately yelled at by a policeman with a megaphone: "Do not pet the officer!"

At this point my parents must have been worried that one of their kids would get arrested. In South Africa we were relatively

normal but here we were walking hazards.

The format of the holiday was familiar: We rented a car and drove. All the way from New York to Florida, stopping a lot along the way. About a week into the trip, deep in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, we experienced a heavy snowfall. My dad was unnerved by driving in such conditions, so we followed a woman in a pickup who had a .243 Winchester mounted above her seat and a "Jesus loves you" sticker on the rear windscreen. She proved to be a solid guide and we got through the snow just fine.

The roads might have cleared up, but further along the snow still lay thick on the hills and trees. We had persuaded my folks to buy some cheap plastic toboggans in one of the towns we'd passed through and we were dying to use them. It was hard to know where this would be allowed, though. Eventually we found a field that seemed isolated and

not too important. We stripped down to shorts and T-shirts (Mom was worried about the laundry) and had great fun racing each other down the slope.

Suddenly we were interrupted by two overweight kids who were dressed for Everest. "Damn," I thought, "they're going to kick us off." But instead they just offered a word of warning: "Y'all gonna get nuuu-monia and die!"

Strangely enough, we survived, and we made it all the way to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow: Disney World. My parents took strain with so many

children wanting to do so many different things. The tension came to a head one day when we all sat down in a restaurant for lunch, exhausted, and my overstressed father asked for the wine list, only to be rebuffed by the waiter: "Anything the little ones can't handle, we don't serve."

If you'd met my dad, you'd know that this didn't go down well. After a high-speed sandwich, the whole family made a detour to the local supermarket to stock up on booze. Splash Mountain would have to wait.

That trip to America was memorable, but so were the less glamorous trips to Bontebok National Park and the Gariiep Dam; the Cango Caves and the Big Hole. It's often not the thing you look forward to most – seeing the Big Five or going to the top of the Empire State Building – that ends up being the highlight of your holiday. Instead, it's that special time you get to spend together as a family. Now that I have my own family I'm starting to understand.

I wonder how much a second-hand Caravelle goes for?



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