

# Road Trippin' The Passage to Manhood



We've all done it. Road trips. That long drive with close friends to some getaway destination. Along the way, you've probably experienced the extended stop for gas, the passenger with flatulence, the group laughing fit, or a myriad of other things where hilarity ensues. Recently, I took such a road trip with three buddies from Los Angeles to Monterey to meet with five other guys for an unforgettable event. Although the drive started off like any road trip, it ended with a tragic loss—one of the guys was getting married!

**T**he dearly departed bachelor was Steve. Within my eight-man posse who've all been buddies since junior high, Steve has a special identity. It is scientific law that for every three Asian friends, one Caucasian friend must accompany them at all times. This element is known as the Token White Guy, or TWG, and Steve is one of our two TWGs. Although we've always joked about Steve's TWG status, he is infinitely more than that. Steve is the guy who loves cheese. Steve



David and Chris  
pimpin' in the SUV.

is the guy who passed the AP European History exam after dropping the actual class. Steve is the guy who had “Vanilla Ice” hair as a senior, six years after it was cool (actually, it was never cool). Steve is known for many things, but as I left my Los Angeles apartment for the trip to Monterey, I realized that Steve was about to acquire his most notorious distinction. He was going to be the first one in the posse to get married.

There are five key elements to any great road trip: friends, music, laughter, memories, and girls. These elements usually mix together into a delicious jambalaya of free entertainment during the course of a road trip. On the six-hour drive to Steve’s wedding, I was joined by three members of the posse. Chris, the driver, is the flirt. John is the one-man Def Comedy Jam. Masa is the crazy Japanese guy. And I’d like to believe I am the charming, quiet one. We would unite with the other posse members at the wedding. Ryan,

the smart one, was flying in from Chicago. Scott, the other TWG, was driving up from the O.C. with Baek, the technophile. Steve, residing in Monterey, was already at our destination. For the first time since high school, all eight of us would be at the same place at the same time. This was an exciting notion. Ironically, however, we reunited to witness one of our own leave the group and start his own posse.

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On a sweltering Friday in July, Chris, Masa, and John picked me up from my apartment around 7 p.m. After a quick dinner at a local Thai restaurant, we were off and running. Chris borrowed his boss’s pimp SUV for the weekend, so we were psyched to not all be crammed in a Honda

Accord for once. All we needed was to kick the trip off on a good note with the perfect musical selection, the soundtrack to our road trip. With my iPod in hand, we unleashed an onslaught of hardcore rap as we began driving up the 101. Other drivers witnessed four Asian guys bobbing their heads to Mike Jones, The Game, and the Yin Yang Twins. During this block of rap, a grand champion emerged—“Get it on the floor” by DMX. This track got everyone dancing, especially John, the posse’s most gifted dancer. The song became our anthem, and played several times throughout the drive.

After our hip-hop dance-off, we decided to slow the tempo down with some Kelly Clarkson. Four guys listening to Kelly Clarkson doesn’t seem like a ringing endorsement for masculinity, but imagine her singing to you every night as your girlfriend, and you’ll understand why we played her songs. With this change in music came a transition into actual con-

versation. Masa shared his plans of buying property. Chris talked about his first season as a high school volleyball coach. John explained his new job in finance. After we discussed the progress of my documentary, I came to the realization that we weren't teenagers anymore. Gone are the days of exchanging Nintendo cheat codes, playing Capture the Flag, and loitering at 7-Eleven. Instead, we live in a world of real estate, 401K, and late 20's self-discovery. Not even Kelly Clarkson could hide what we have become: four grown-ass men. Is there a song for that?

Although we are now full-fledged adults, there will always be moments when boys will be boys. Whenever good

cue, Masa steps up and starts crumping against John. Like a scene from *You Got Served*, John and Masa battled each other in an intense crumping session.

John was victorious, but ultimately everyone was a winner with this public display of embarrassing behavior. However, the dance-off was trumped by a gas station employee standing outside with a gigantic wet stain on his crotch. Naturally, we all assumed that he peed himself. Masa busted out laughing, which ignited the first of many laughing fits on our trip.

Laughter is a key component of any road trip, and there is plenty of it to go around when old friends are stuck in a car together for several hours. Whenever

roast session. It was like being at a taping of Def Comedy Jam, with hip-hop music playing in the background while vulgarities, profanities, and jokes were heard in the foreground. Despite an endless supply of ammunition, we all referenced the same high school stories. Whenever the gang reunites, we inevitably reminisce about the same 15-20 things that happened in high school. This might seem very repetitive, but like a fine wine, these tales only get better with age. During interludes in our roast, we all fondly remembered tales from the good old days.

For example, there was the time when Masa showed up to volleyball practice sick and puked right behind the girl's soc-



Left: The posse parties at the reception. Back row: Ryan, Scott, Baek, Steve. Front row: John, Masa, David, Chris. Right: Masa, David, and Chris get ready for the wedding ceremony.

friends get together, everyone regresses to a ninth-grade level. At this point in the journey, it was time to stop for gas. I have no idea where we stopped, but we were at one of those large roadside gas stations with a huge food mart and blinding bright lights. As with any road trip gas stop, we took our bathroom breaks, roamed the candy isles, and scanned the place for any co-ed motorists. Once these tasks were completed, we waited for the SUV's gas tank to fill. Unprovoked, John suddenly started crumping. Yes, the South-Central Los Angeles hip-hop dance form made famous by the film *Rize* was being demonstrated at a roadside gas station. Sensing an impromptu dance-off, Chris and I quote TV's syndicated gem *Dance 360* and yell, "Tag your man! Tag your man!" On

we're together, we basically roast each other into submission. What else are friends for? The posse has existed for almost 15 years, with individual friendships within the group lasting even longer than that. We all know each other's faults, idiosyncrasies, and embarrassing moments. As a result, there is so much ammunition to draw from that we rip each other for hours on end.

Everyone has their own unique insult styles. Chris likes to throw body shots, while Masa opts for sharp jabs. I wait for the knockout punch. John uses Tyson style and bites your ear off. After we left the large gas station, we started an epic

cer team bus as they watched in disgust. There was also the time when the onceshy John got freaky on the dance floor at Homecoming. John was lethal, but not as deadly as me when I nearly killed everyone driving to Magic Mountain because I was messing with the radio tuner. The majority of the roasting targeted departing bachelor Steve. This guy didn't even like girls as a species in high school, and now he's getting married. It is frightening how fast time flies and how quickly our memories have aged.

I'm not sure how long we reminisced for, but it was time for another gas stop. Following road trip bylaws, we took our

mandatory extended gas stop. Chris was sleepy, so he rested in the car while Masa, John, and I hung out in the parking lot. During Chris's slumber, Masa gave us a lecture on the art of drinking Red Bull. We then had another session of crumping, where I learned that I suck at it. Finally, much to his surprise, Chris woke up after napping for about 20 minutes. He kept insisting that he was only asleep for five minutes, but the hands of time do not lie. Once everyone was ready, we departed on the final leg of our drive to Monterey.

No road trip with four bachelors is complete without a lengthy, intellectual discussion about the only subject that matters—girls. Shocking I know, but we talked about girls ad nauseam as we approached our final destination. As teenagers, girl talk consisted of only the following question: "Is she hot?" Although we still ask that question today, a few extra questions are added to the mix. For instance, we'll follow up "Is she hot?" with "Is she married?" or "Does she have friends?" We ask these questions in jest, but at the same time we're not joking. With one bachelor flying the coop, we all must consider when we'll each leave the nest of bachelorhood.

The general consensus in the car was that none of us was in a position to get married anytime soon. First of all, there is no place to meet girls anymore. Life was much easier when you could meet a girl simply by stepping into your dorm hallway. Secondly, dating is harder because girls in my age group have become women, and it takes more to win over a woman than just driving her to the mall. Finally, speaking for myself, I'm still trying to figure out my own life, so I can't really even contemplate being married right now.


As with growing old, the discussion got depressing, so we switched to playing a game as we got close to our motel. The game was unofficially named "Girls you would've hooked up with if you could in high school." Since we were all awkward teenagers, the general answer to any girl mentioned was "yes," until John started ruining the game on purpose by naming the most horrific girls he could remember.

It was funny in a wrong sort of way. The most challenging aspect of the game was trying to recall the names and faces of girls we hadn't seen since our youth, which led to the best laughing fit of the ride.

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During one round, Chris named a girl that no one else could remember, so he tried to describe her as "the one girl with the big face." Chris became adamant that describing this girl's "big face" would spark our memories, so he kept emphasizing it continuously. Out of sheer delirium from the long drive, I started repeatedly yelling, "Big face!" My exaggerated impression of Chris ignited a laughing fit of gigantic proportions, which carried us all the way to the parking lot of our motel.

At approximately 1 a.m., we were all relieved to finally reach our destination. Although our drive was filled with reminiscing, dancing, and lots of laughing, we were all anxious to get some sleep. The motel was supposed to be a "romantic seaside cottage," but it was really a roadside shack from

any "B" horror film. Our tiny motel room had only two twin beds, which is not ideal for four grown-ass men. There weren't enough bath towels for everyone, and the shower head was permanently set at extreme power blast. As teenagers, anytime we had a sleepover we would wrestle, fart, and stay up late watching a cheesy Steven Seagal film. At this sleepover, we charged cell phones, checked voice mail, flossed, and set our alarms. We didn't stay up late because we had to wake up early for wedding errands, practice, rehearsal dinner, and other pre-wedding activities the next day. We were adults now, and there was no driving back. 

**David Ngô** is the writer/director of the recently completed *The Queen from Virginia*, a documentary about Jackie Bong Wright's attempt at becoming the first Asian American Ms. Senior America. David would like people to watch his film in 2006 and visit his website at [www.doubleohthree.com](http://www.doubleohthree.com).

AD: 1/4 Vertical  
3.375" x 4.625"