

looking for a bigger challenge. I woke up one morning and got this idea of investigating the separation-of-church-and-state metaphor.

SIDE EFFECTS: I got to the point where I'd walk in the capitol and start hearing church bells.

WHAT I LEARNED: I grew up Catholic, and this trip opened my eyes to all kinds of other faiths and denominations.

Melanie Tucker: Visited federal lands in all 50 states

HOME: Lambertville, New Jersey

WHAT I LEARNED: The National Park System best embodies what is most special about each state – the alligators of Florida's Everglades, the wildness of Katmai's grizzlies in Alaska, and the beguiling sea caves of the Channel Islands in California, to name just a few.

Kelly Will: Visited all 50 states in a single year

HOME: No fixed address

WHY: As a journalist, I traveled the world and it was glorious. Then I turned 30 and really felt like I had turned my back on my own country.

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Living with two potbellied pigs in Vermont. The girl pig cuddled up with me, but the boy pig wanted to fight.

FAVORITE SPOTS: In July, the Paradise Valley in Montana between Livingston and the entrance to Yellowstone is the most lush, extraordinary countryside. Maine in the fall – I just can't even describe the fall colors. The coast of Oregon is also unbelievable.

WHAT I LEARNED: We sometimes appear so divided as a country, but wherever I went, everyone was equally kind, generous, and loving.

Cari Sheets: Drove a golf cart in every state

HOME: Macomb, Illinois

WHY: My dad played golf in every state, and when I was in Alaska to celebrate his 50th state, I drove the golf cart and thought to myself, *Hey, this is fun!*

MEMORABLE MOMENTS: I've driven through public streets with a parade permit, on university and high school campuses, and on islands in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

Jeff Fazio: Ran a 5K in each state

HOME: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

WHY: It wasn't planned. When I started running in February 2013, a coworker named Dee who has muscular dystrophy asked me to think of her and others who can't walk while I was running. I was doing a 5K and pinned "4D" onto my shirt, representing "For Dee." I forgot my pin two weeks later when I was running a 5K in the Bronx, so I wrote "4D" on a fast-food napkin, and they asked me about it at the registration table. I heard myself saying I was going to run a 5K in every state in a year – it was one of the moments where the mouth said something the brain hadn't checked out yet.

"We sometimes appear so divided as a country, but wherever I went, everyone was equally kind, generous, and loving."

–Kelly Will

MEMORABLE MOMENT: In Seattle, I ran an event called Mock the Clock, which started shortly before daylight saving time began. I finished the 5K 35 minutes before I started it.

WHAT I LEARNED: The importance of challenging myself to get out of my comfort zone.

Dan Nainan: Performed comedy in every state

HOME: New York City, New York

WHY: I had performed in almost every state anyhow, so I decided to finish the few states that were left.

NEXT GOAL: I have performed on every continent except Antarctica, and I'm trying to figure out a way to perform there also – maybe for the scientists at a research facility.

Bettie Wailes: Collected a magnet and mug in each state

HOME: Winter Park, Florida

WHY: I've run in every state, and I like to have something to remember them by. The magnets are on the front of my refrigerator in order of my visits, and the mugs are on a display rack.

WHAT I LEARNED: The real heart of America is not the cities; it's the small towns and rural areas.

Bob Bentz: Visited a baseball field in every state

HOME: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

WHAT I LEARNED: There's nothing that says community like youth baseball.

Rochelle Peachey: Dated a different man in every state

HOME: Miami, Florida

WHY: I'm from England, where I was working as a journalist. I was interested in taking a look at personal ads, and I ended up writing a book about going on dates with the men I met through the ads. From there, I got a deal to write a similar book in America.

ODDEST DATES: One arrived with a cuff around his ankle because he was on house arrest; another was carrying a dead cat in his bag.

BEST DATES: I liked Texas men; they were so friendly it made me feel all warm and fuzzy. Californians too. Maybe nice weather makes people nicer.

WHAT I LEARNED: I love America even more after doing the experiment. It's so vast, and I do love the way people are so patriotic.



Roadside attractions: Clockwise from top left, David Miller and his dog, Max, pedal through New Milford, Connecticut; John Lent hits a high point on Kings Peak, Utah; Kelly Will (right) soars over Florida; Janine Stange sings the national anthem in Nashville.

PHOTO BY DOUGLAS HEALEY; PHOTOS COURTESY JOHN LENT, KELLY WILL, JANINE STANGE

Cain Pence: Visited all 435 congressional districts

HOME: Minneapolis, Minnesota

WHY: What better way to learn about America than to visit where every U.S. Congressperson was from?

John Lent: Climbed each state's highest peak

HOME: Waltham, Vermont

WHY: I love adventure.

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Climbing Britton Hill, Florida – elevation 345 feet. A lot of people take pictures with ropes and ice axes as a spoof.

WHAT I LEARNED: How to push myself. Denali in Alaska was a true expedition: Not many people have experienced 24 days of backpacking with everything you have on your back or on a sled. One night inside the tent, it was minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit – the experience was leagues apart from the ordinary hike or climb.

Matthew Jordan Smith: Photographed people in all 50 states

HOME: Los Angeles, California

WHY: I wanted to visit every state in America to create

images for my book, *Future American President*, that would inspire children. I stopped and talked to parents with young children by asking one simple question: "Do you think your child could become the president of the United States one day?"

Paula Boone: Ate at a Subway restaurant in every state

HOME: Humble, Texas

WHY: My husband, Steve, and I run races across the country. Subway tastes good no matter where you go.

WILDEST EXPERIENCE: In Georgia, we were approached by a mama bear and two cubs while standing outside our car taking pictures.

NEXT GOAL: Taking our sock monkey to 50 Subways. We got him four years ago; he's already been to 35 states and has 700 Facebook friends.

WHAT I LEARNED: America is an amazing, amazing country. We've run into people who've said, "I wouldn't want to go to that state," but there's always something in every state that makes it worth visiting. You never know what's going to be around the bend.

Linda Bentley: Spent one full week in each state

HOME: Sydney, Australia

WHY: Approximately 90 percent of international visitors to the USA go to only four states: New York, Florida, California, and Hawaii. That leaves 46 states unaccounted for. Why? I wanted to answer that question.

Janine Stange: Sang the national anthem in every state

HOME: Los Angeles, California

WHY: I love what the national anthem means and the brave men and women who embody the meaning of that song.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS: I got to fly a T-34 Air Force plane. We did two rolls and flew over the Beartooth Mountains in Montana. I also got to drive U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *IBIS* to the “Star-Spangled Banner” buoy, where Francis Scott Key wrote the national anthem.

HIGH POINT: I met a guy in Kentucky named Cliff, a 92-year-old World War II veteran who stormed the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. He reads obituaries and when a veteran has passed on, he calls to offer to do the eulogy.

WHAT I LEARNED: There are a lot of differences among Americans – accents, preferences, sports teams – but at the end of the day, we are all family.

Mindy Bianca: Had a touristy experience in every state

HOME: Baltimore, Maryland

WHY: To understand an aspect of pop culture in every state.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS: I went up in the Arch in St. Louis, ate my weight in cheese and toured breweries in Wisconsin, went deep-sea fishing off the coast of Florida, hiked part of the Lewis & Clark Trail in the Pacific Northwest, and heard the Mormon Tabernacle Choir rehearse in Utah.

Frank Bartocci: Ran a marathon in each state nine times

HOME: Rochester, Minnesota

WHY: I wanted to be a role model for my son, who had cystic fibrosis.

MEMORABLE MOMENT: In 1995, I was doing a 100K in northern Minnesota and it was snowing. I was the only solo runner who didn’t have a crew. A little girl ran to a truck and brought me back a pair of Mickey Mouse gloves that I still have to this day.

WHAT I LEARNED: A marathon is a struggle; but when I do each race, I reflect so much on my son and what a struggle he had 24/7. To me the marathons are a temporary struggle; a person can endure temporary struggles.

Lance Longwell: Visited all 50 states before graduating high school

HOME: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

WHY: When I was a child, my parents set the goal for me. For

a visit to count, I had to learn something new – visiting a national park, a museum, or an educational institution.

Ben LeRoy: Did volunteer work in all 50 states in a single year

HOME: Madison, Wisconsin

WHY: I had a friend who died last year, and part of his legacy involved charity and volunteering, so I wanted to take up the mantle for him.

WHAT I LEARNED: In Greenville, South Carolina, there was a homeless tent city under the Pete Hollis Bridge. It was hard to overcome all the uncertainty about going into a place that has a notorious reputation. I realized when everyone drops their fear and suspicion and all those things that keep us from helping each other, you have a true bonding experience.

ANOTHER LESSON: I started thinking of travel in a different way. Instead of sitting in a hotel room and watching TV, there are opportunities to make a difference and forge real and beautiful and meaningful relationships. It’s very easy to go out and contribute no matter where you are.

Cindy and Garry Shelton: Visited each state capitol building

HOME: Plainfield, Indiana

WHY: We’re interested in history and love to travel – it was fascinating to hear how each state was settled.

Jim Simpson: Stayed overnight at a Walmart parking lot in all 50 states

HOME: Huntington Beach, California

WHY: I run marathons all over the country, and I’m a thrifty person. Walmart allows you to stay overnight for free instead of maybe paying \$20 or \$40 a night at a campground.

BONUS ROUND: I’ve previously run marathons in all 50 states in the same pair of shoes.

WHAT I LEARNED: Traveling in an RV, you see a lot more of the countryside. People who fly miss the most important and breathtaking sights. Everybody says “America the beautiful,” and it certainly is – whether it’s the sun coming up in the morning or five miles of sunflowers along the highway.

Chuck Miller: Played golf in all 50 states

HOME: Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

WHY: I’ve been playing golf since I was 10 and like golf very much. I played city courses, country courses, along the seashore, in the mountains, nine-hole courses, 18-hole courses. No two golf courses are the same.

SURPRISING STATS: In the end, I drove 21,503 miles and stayed in 126 hotels and motels.

Haley Shapley has written for American Profile and Every Day with Rachael Ray, among others.