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Families ditch traditional housing, make journeys a way of life

THE ROAD HOME

BY BRITTANY BRITTO
The Baltimore Sun

After serving four years in the Army, Michael Trotter Jr. wanted to explore the America he and his counterparts fought for. “I remember saying to myself in Kuwait, if I made it home, I’m definitely going to travel,” said Trotter, 34. “What is it about America that several of my battle buddies gave their lives for?”

In 2014, the former Towson resident, his wife — singer Tanya Blount Trotter, 42 — their three-person soul and folk band The War and Treaty and their now-5-year-old son, Legend, packed up their lives and loaded them in a recreational vehicle to find out. Together, they have “busted up the road,” journeying from Maryland to Tennessee to Florida to Illinois and farther west — wherever gigs and curiosity have taken them, he said.

The Trotter family is among hundreds nationally who travel in their RVs full time, taking their lives — jobs and schooling included — with them, according to Kimberly Travaglino, founder of the website Fulltime Families. The online resource serves more than 1,200 subscribed “full-time families,” Travaglino said.

“It’s not uncommon for [these families] to tell you they’ve moved eight or nine times, or they’re See **ROAD**, page 8

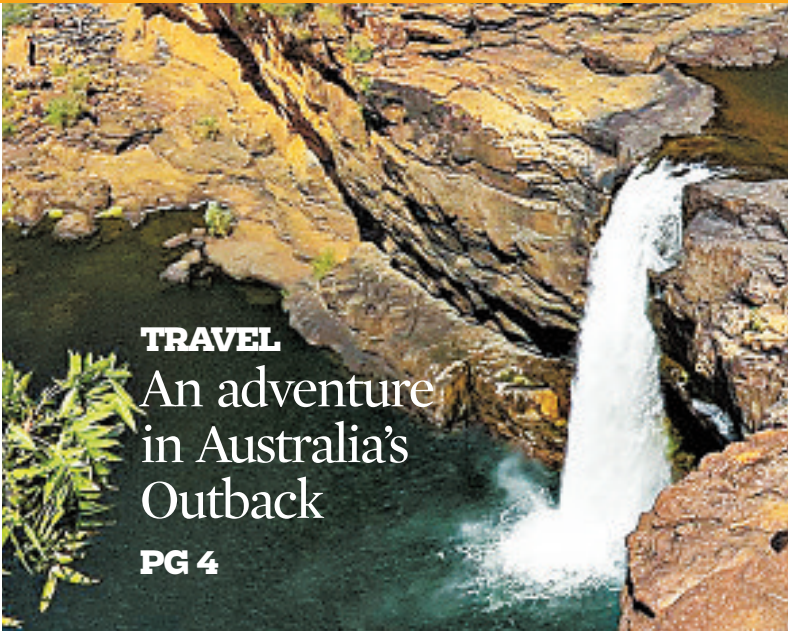


BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR/BALTIMORE SUN

Former Towson resident Michael Trotter, his wife, Tanya, their 5-year-old son Legend, and their three-person folk and soul band, The War and The Treaty, have been on the road since 2014, living in a conversion van that Legend named “Rocket.” Shown are band member Thillman Benham, left, Tanya, Legend, Michael Trotter and Antonio Traynaham, Tanya’s son, who travels with them occasionally.



WEDDED
A proposal in Central Park **PG 2**



TRAVEL
An adventure in Australia’s Outback
PG 4



DINING
Mediterranean flair at Gnocco **PG 6**

Cover story

Families opt to make their homes on the road

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restless,” said Travaglino, who has been traveling in her RV for the past 16 years. “But when they get on the road, they feel at peace.”

The demand for RVs is also steadily increasing. According to the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, the sale of RVs increased by 54 percent from 2010 to 2015, rising from 242,300 to 374,100.

Full-time traveling comes with its challenges. The drives can be tiresome, the lack of space can be a burden, and just as with a traditional home, there are responsibilities, including maintenance and parking costs, and home-schooling for children, Travaglino said. Income is also a concern for people who cannot take their jobs on the road, but expenses are often low, she said.

“If you are completely debt-free, and you own your equipment and vehicle, the lifestyle can be as inexpensive as you want it to be. ... You can budget your life so that you meet your needs,” she said.

Families on the road say they love the flexibility, sights, awe-inspiring experiences for children and the camaraderie of the RV tribe.

The Trotters

Trotter, whose occupation as a musician and singer requires him to travel to gigs, said anything can be made to feel like home — even a van.

Their van, named “Rocket” by their son, has everything they need, Trotter said.

The Trotters found their newest wheels, a no-frills Ford E-250 conversion van, for \$3,600 on Craigslist. There’s a table for Legend to do his schoolwork, portable outlets to plug in flatirons for Tanya to do her hair, hot plates to cook dinner, ample space for instruments and a fuel tank that can take them at least nine hours. The full-sized bed in the back and multiple seats afford sleeping space.

When the Trotters aren’t eating the food they packed, they dine at restaurants. They park at rest stops or RV campgrounds to sleep and use their amenities, like bathrooms and showers.

Travel is new to Trotter.

“I wasn’t raised this way. Up until this point of my life, I hadn’t been anywhere,” he said. “Even in the military, I joined to take care of my family.”

Trotter, who is black, notes that African-Americans are a small minority of campers. “A lot of times, we would pull up in parks ... and [people] were kind of shocked,” he said, adding that he was often asked questions by other African-American families and passers-by.

He loves the freedom and fresh air on the road, and the chance to see new places, including Tampa, Fla. — a refuge during Maryland winters. To Trotter, the campgrounds beat staying in a hotel.

“It’s a culture within itself. Everyone has an RV and is parked outside grilling. Children are playing. Ducks are by the water. People are speedboating,” Trotter said.

“It’s so cool to see America bond this way, and pretty soon you’re not labeled by race or ethnicity. You’re labeled by which brand RV you got.”

The Setzers

Web developer and former Columbia resident Doug Setzer, 36, takes his job wherever travels lead his family of four, which includes his wife Mandie, 37, his daughter, Paige, 12, and his son, Logan, 4.

In a \$40,000 small-apartment-sized Sabre trailer hauled by a pickup, Setzer said, his family can live on as little as \$2,000 a month, about two-thirds of what he would typically pay for housing. But his “edutainment” budget — educational trips that complement home-schooling curriculum — has skyrocketed because of gas, parking and entry fees to attractions, which can run



JOEL SHILLIDAY

Joel Shilliday, 45, his wife Elizabeth, 41, and daughters Addie, 11, and Amelia, 8, decided to sell their Eastern Shore home and travel full time in a 31-foot 2014 Winnebago RV.



BECKY SETZER SCHROEDER

Doug and Mandie Setzer, with children Paige and Logan, live in a Sabre trailer.

from \$20 to more than \$100 a night.

“It’s really what you make it. The costs [of living] haven’t changed much, but our experiences are wildly richer,” said Setzer, who before life on the road had never driven west of the Mississippi, which he said was a personal milestone.

Within their first year, the Setzers saw the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, celebrated Christmas in Florida and stood in awe of the vastness of Utah. Setzer and his wife, who home-schools the children, taught Paige about the Civil War while they were in Gettysburg, Pa., and about the Amish community while in Lancaster, Pa.

Paige’s curriculum, managed by the Howard County school system, lets her set her own schedule but requires her to submit portfolios documenting a year’s worth of work. It’s different from public school in Columbia, she said, but “cool.”

At times, the lifestyle has been challenging. After setting out in June of last year, the Setzers hit 16 cities in three months. They were exhausted. The road seemed isolated,

and the trailer at times felt crowded.

“We laid in bed thinking, ‘Maybe we made a terrible mistake. We should get off the road,’” Setzer said.

Instead, the Setzers changed their pace, taking in only the sites they had energy to see.

Setzer kept his own work schedule during the week, and in their free time, they convened with other “full-time families” through Travaglino’s program, which holds four-day “rallies” for families around the country.

It made crossing their one-year “road-iversary” in June all the easier.

“Once we found our people, it really made our experience,” he said.

The Shillidays

After living on the Eastern Shore for years, Joel Shilliday, 45, a web developer and co-owner of a paddleboard company, and his wife, Elizabeth, 41, who works in marketing, were bored of the “ho-hum”

lifestyle — and decided to travel before they settled down again.

They bought a 31-foot 2014 Winnebago Vista equipped with storage space, a kitchen, master bedroom, two pull-out beds, a shower and bathroom, then set out nine weeks ago with their two daughters and two dogs.

“It was just one of the spur-of-the-moment things,” said Shilliday, who was most recently in Florida. “We knew we wanted to sell our house. ... Living on the Eastern Shore was great, but it wasn’t something we wanted to do for the rest of our lives.”

On a quest to find a new place to call home, the Shillidays did “test runs” in a pop-up camper for weeks at a time, traveling to Florida and through the Appalachians. That’s when they realized they were capable of taking to the road, Shilliday said.

They put their house up for sale and while they waited for an offer, they home-schooled their daughters Addie, 11, and Amelia, 8, which made the transition to “road-schooling” smoother.

Being in close quarters for long periods can be tough, Shilliday said, but the active family learned “when you’re not getting along, you go out for a run or hike or something to get your space.”

The Shillidays are enjoying the flexibility and freedom of living on the road, staying roughly five days in each place.

“If we like someplace and we can find a place to park this thing, then we stick around,” said Shilliday, who plans to head west to Oregon and to the beaches in Washington state later this year.

While the Shillidays will travel until they find their next long-term, traditional home, neither the Trotters nor the Setzers have an end in sight.

“We’re going to do it until it’s not fun anymore,” Setzer said. “And if it’s not, we’ll try something else.”

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Family

Hillary Clinton is waving mom flag — should you?

BY NARA SCHOENBERG
Chicago Tribune

Have you heard the news? Hillary Clinton is a mom.

Her supporters hit that point hard at this week’s Democratic National Convention, with President Barack Obama celebrating Clinton as “a mother and a grandmother who would do anything to help our children thrive” and Michelle Obama championing her as a mother-in-chief who has shown a “lifelong devotion to our nation’s children, not just her own daughter ... but every child who needs a champion.”

It’s enough to make a working mom put a dozen baby photos on her desk and tell her boss that she’s leaving early for a pediatri-

cian’s appointment, but don’t let all the high-profile mom-love fool you, says Andie Kramer, a partner at the law firm McDermott Will & Emery and co-chair of the firm’s gender diversity committee. For most of us, waving the mom flag at work remains a risky strategy.

“You’re not Hillary. I’m not Hillary. She’s a very special case,” says Kramer, co-author, with her husband, Alton B. Harris, of the new book, “Breaking Through Bias: Communication Techniques for Women to Succeed at Work.”

To understand why, you have to look to American gender stereotypes, Kramer says. We tend to believe that a good mother is available to her kids 24/7 and



TAYLOR HILL/GC IMAGES

Chelsea Clinton, holding Aidan Clinton Mezvinsky, and Hillary Clinton on June 20.

thus, almost by definition, is an inferior worker. But if a mother shows competence and commitment at work, she’s viewed as a bad mother and therefore deep-

ly unlikely.

“What Al and I do in our book is we call this the Goldilocks Dilemma,” Kramer says. “If a woman is seen as too hard, they don’t

like her. And if she’s too soft, why would you have her on your team? She’s nice to have around, but you’re not going to promote her. So what she has to do is find the middle of the road.”

For those of us who haven’t, say, served as secretary of state, that would mean exercising a little discretion.

You might tell colleagues you’ll be unavailable at 3 p.m., as opposed to saying you have a pediatrician’s appointment for a sick child, Kramer says.

Among the indications that moms aren’t treated equally at work: Michelle Budig, a sociology professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, found that when men become fathers, their pay increases, while women

experience a 4 percent drop in wages with each child.

Clinton is the rare woman who is not suspected of being “too soft,” so it makes sense for her supporters to highlight her maternal credentials, Kramer says.

“I would say Hillary Clinton is unique and different in a number of ways, and the first is that she is so enormously competent that she falls into the ‘too hard, unlikely’ (stereotype),” Kramer says.

“And it turns out that the stereotypes about being ‘too hard’ include ‘untrustworthy’ and ‘only out for yourself’ — almost all the answers [we hear] to ‘Why don’t you like Hillary Clinton?’ ”

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