

Excerpts from a Travel Blog

By Gayle Wroble

These excerpts were taken from a blog I started, to chronicle the start of a new relationship between me and my newly acquired Chinook Concourse RV. I purchased it on Ebay, and flew out to Arizona to drive it home in the Winter of 2009. I had some travel and camping experience from family trips, but never owned or drove any type of motorhome. I arrived home with it the day before the "Ice Storm of 2009" hit Arkansas.

*As a woman traveling alone, I have to do everything myself, including dump the tanks. I hope that my experiences will help to illustrate that anyone can do this! Sometimes it just takes a willingness to step out of your comfort zone and plunge right in!
(no pun intended)*

The Trip Home With My New RV

It was such a relief to get my new RV home safely. The weather at home in northeast Arkansas had been cold, and it was expected to be below freezing for a few days at least at night, so I moved my car away from the house and backed the RV up the driveway and parked it so it was just a few steps from the back door of the motorhome to the back door of my house. This also allowed me to plug into the outlet on the outside of the house. It wasn't 30 amp, but I had been told that it would be enough to run the heat strip so I could keep the water tank and plumbing from freezing until I could get it winterized. I was tired and there wasn't any reason to unload the few things I had in it until tomorrow. I had to work the next day, so I locked it up and went in the house to rest up from my crazy trip.

The weather report was calling for possible severe winter weather, so I set my alarm a little earlier just incase driving to work would be difficult. It proved to be impossible!

[The Ice Storm of 2009](#)

January 31, 2009

Where I live, winter weather quite often means ice, more than snow, so when I heard it start to rain, I knew it wasn't going to be good. I just hoped it would drop below freezing quickly and more snow than ice would fall. At some point during the night, I was vaguely aware that the electricity had gone off. That wasn't too unusual, and it usually came back on within a few hours at the worst.

When I woke up, I realized it was cold in the house, and the electric was still off. Then I looked outside.... then I turned on my emergency radio. Apparently, while I was sleeping, one of the worst ice storms to ever hit this area, and quite a few other states, had occurred.



I headed out the back door to assess the situation, and fell hard onto my back steps which had transformed into an ice ramp overnight. I had a momentary thought that if I had injured myself badly no one would see me until I froze to death, because I live out in the country and only people in cars can see my house. From the looks of things no cars would be going down the road today. (Note to self: not a bad idea to stick my cell phone in my pocket when going out.) Luckily nothing happened except some monster bruises. So I got up and just stood there taking it all in. There was thick ice on everything. Large trees were broken or bent all the way to the ground. It was deadly silent, except for the hum of a lone generator running in the distance. The silence was intermittently interrupted by what sounded like small explosions and cracking sounds. They were the sounds of electrical transformers exploding and tree limbs breaking. It was eerie and unreal!



My Driveway

I called in to work because there was no way I would be able to get there, and found out they were without electricity also, so no work. My house is all electric, so with no way to heat it, I turned off my water pump, ran the water out of the lines and poured the RV antifreeze I had bought for the RV down the house drains.

Then I got out the RV paperwork and user manuals and looked up how to use the generator. I still knew nothing about the propane furnace, so all I knew was that I had to heat it using the heat strip which runs on electric. I figured out the generator, and started it, turned the heat up, and turned the TV on. Turns out an RV is a pretty handy thing to have when the electric goes out. I had heat, a TV, a microwave, a bathroom, and a comfortable place to sit. After warming up, drinking a couple cups of coffee, and gaining a clear understanding of the scope of this natural disaster from the TV reports, I ventured out to see what the roads looked like.



Road to Town

Everything had ice on it! But when I got out near the road, the full impact of this disaster really hit me. Trees were broken and branches were everywhere. The roads were almost impassible because of trees, telephone poles, and electric wires that were strewn about or hanging down across the roads. I dragged some of the bigger limbs out of the way that had fallen from the large oak tree in my front yard and were blocking my driveway. There was still no way I was going anywhere, so I grabbed some food from my house fridge, and made myself comfortable in the RV for the rest of the day and watched coverage of the storm damage on TV.

The next day parts of the town where I work were getting back to normal, and I had to go to work. My car was parked by my garage, which uses a different driveway, and I was able to carefully maneuver it over small branches and onto the road. The road was nearly impassible in some places, and there were a few spots where I had to drive under low-hanging power lines, but I made it to work and back. The next day went much the same, except I began to think about how I was going to get gas into the RV so that I could keep using the generator if I couldn't drive it to a gas station.

I borrowed a couple of 5 gallon gas cans and took them to work with me.

The town I lived in still did not have any gas available. The stations that didn't lose electricity ran out, and all the others were still unable to pump it.

So for the next week my routine was to live in the RV, go to work, and about every other day get gas and bring it home in the gas cans. I couldn't fill them all the way to the top or they would be too heavy for me to lift and pour into the funnel. It wasn't too bad a way to live. While others were cold and without a way to cook or watch TV, I had everything I needed. Everything was going along just fine so far. That is, until I encountered another challenge.

[A New Problem](#)

February 1, 2009

I had already attempted my first try at emptying the RV tanks on my way home with great trepidation. I made sure I had full hook-ups at the last campground I stayed at, as I had no where to dump them when I got home. I figured it would be easier to do at my campsite than at a dump station where there might be a line of other campers waiting for me to get done, and critiquing my every move (and mistake).

I did ok, but was glad I could take my time. Even so, I had a few surprises. I'm a reasonably educated person, and somewhere in the back of my mind I'm sure I knew that if you squeezed together a hose that was made like an accordion, it would reduce the volume of the interior space, therefore causing the contents of that space to have nowhere to go but out. After a few splatters that caused me to have to change my clothes, I got the deed done, and firmly committed to memory the order in which you want to disconnect each end of the hose from the RV and dump drain, and why it's good to thoroughly let it drain before compressing the hose it to put it away.

I now had a different problem with the dump situation. I had been using the RV toilet for a week, and it was getting full. I started filling jugs of water in town and trying to use the bathroom in the house. The amount of water needed to pour down the commode to properly flush it was

getting to be more than I could keep up with. I set my mind to solving the problem of how I could dump my RV tank with no dump station.

[Problem Solved... Sort Of](#)

February 1, 2009

I'm not going to describe all the details of what happened here. Nor can I offer any explanation for how an intelligent, educated, adult could completely ignore the rules of physics that would dictate what would happen when a valve, at the end of a horizontal pipe that is holding back 120 lbs. of waste water, is opened.

Anyone who has ever dumped the full blackwater tank on an RV knows how hard it is to close the valve before allowing the entire tank to empty. I now know this too. After the first few seconds of frozen horror, I was able to react when I realized that the contents of the tank was going to forcefully overshoot the 5 gallon bucket sitting below the end of the pipe. I yanked the bucket up over the opening on the pipe while simultaneously slamming the valve shut. Sort of... I got the valve shut after working it back and forth a few times, luckily before the bucket filled.

Well, long story short, after getting a garbage bag for my clothes, changing clothes, and grabbing another change of clothes for after my shower, I headed for a visit with one of the few people I knew that had electricity and working water. After my shower, and finishing my load of laundry, I headed back home, where I added a little bleach to the few jugs of drinking water I had and tried to rinse the splatters off the driveway, which created a fine layer of ice on the cement.

I sure wish the electric would come back on.

[Another Week](#)

February 7, 2009

Electricity! What a wonderful invention it is. It's one of those things that you appreciate so much more when you don't have it. After my black

tank dumping fiasco, I tried to use the house bathroom whenever possible, and save the little bit of room I had made in the RV tank for emergency use at night. I had accumulated many jugs of water that I filled whenever I drove anywhere, and I was able to use the shower at work so the rest of the time before the electric came on was just a routine of going to work carrying water jugs, and gas cans, coming home from work and pouring gas into the RV, and setting the water jugs in the house. The first thing I did as soon as I could was to take a nice long, hot, shower in my own house and do laundry. Fun!

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[Got To Dump It](#)

March 22, 2009

I don't know what it is about me and my RV waste tanks, but we seem to have an ongoing love/hate relationship. I love it when I think I've got the hang of it, and hate it when I'm reminded of all the little ways that something can go wrong. I'm fervently hoping that I don't have to experience them all.

So I wasn't living in my RV anymore, but the time I spent in it after my less than stellar attempt to empty the black tank was enough to fill it back up. I was contemplating if I should just not worry about it until I took it on a trip where there would be a dump station. I didn't think I should leave it full that long. The only problem is, I don't have a dump station at my house.

That's not strictly true, I realized, when I noticed the septic clean-out pipe sticking out of my front yard. The pipe has a screw-on cap just like in the campgrounds, and runs right into my home's septic tank, so why could I not use it?

Had I thought this through, it would have been obvious why I could not use it. It wasn't so much the fact that it was a small septic tank, but more the fact that I didn't have enough sewer hose to reach the 30 ft. or so between the pipe and my paved driveway where the RV was parked.

The only way I could do this was to move the pipe and the RV closer together. Obviously, I could not move the pipe.

[Mudding in a Motorhome](#)

March 22, 2009

So I needed to get the RV closer to the clean-out pipe that would carry the contents of my RV tanks safely into my septic tank. I had driven on my front lawn before in my car. Nothing bad ever happened. It seemed solid enough when I walked on it. What could go wrong? So it was, that in that one infinitesimal moment when I knew without a doubt that it would work, I jumped into the RV, backed it down the driveway a bit, and pulled forward making a sharp right turn onto my lawn so that the left side of the RV and the tank drains, would line up next to the drain pipe.

It was a short ride. As soon as I felt myself moving in slow motion, I stopped. I was afraid to look as I slowly opened the door and saw that the ground was closer to the step than when I got in. Now I was pretty certain what would happen next, but I had to try anyway. After a few attempts at moving in reverse, then forward again, I was skillfully able to get that running-board step smack down tight against the ground.



After doing everything I could to make sure that the RV was not going

anywhere, I surveyed the damage. Yep, all six tires sunk to the axels in my front lawn, my RV sitting broadside to the house like a giant lawn ornament. A big, white, shining beacon shouting to every neighbor who drove past my house, "Look what I did!".



Well, there was nothing I could do about getting the RV out without help, but it was now within reach of the septic drain pipe. I figured I might as well dump it while it was there. I attached the hose, opened the valve, and watched as the contents of the black tank gushed out, filled the hose full, and stopped. (Note to self: make sure your septic tank has enough capacity to accommodate the contents of what your pouring into it.)

At this point, there was nothing left to do but give up in disgust for the day, go inside and forget that there was an RV parked 5 feet in front of the house, attached to the septic pipe with a hose full of... well, you get the picture.

Unsticking a Sticky Situation

March 23, 2009

After returning from work, I noticed that, much to my dismay, there was still an RV 5 feet from the front of my house, and still attached to my septic drain pipe by a dump hose. I was overjoyed, however, when I walked to the other side and learned that the hose was no longer full. During the night the contents of the RV tank had slowly made its way into the depths of the septic tank where it belonged. (Note to self: Make an appointment with a septic clean-out service.)



It was about this time that my lawn-care guy drove by, and since I had a large white beacon in front of my house alerting everyone to "Look what I did!", he stopped to look. Neither of us spoke for a few minutes, then he said, "I'm not gonna ask how it got like that, but do you need help getting it out?" "Yes", I said. Nothing more to say.

As deep as it was buried, I was surprised how easy it was to get it unstuck. Some long chains, and his 4 wheel drive pick-up truck and it came back out the same way it went in. Well, at least I now had empty waste tanks, and a plan to have an RV dump drain installed right next to the driveway.

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These excerpts were taken from a blog by Gayle Wroble on HikeByPhoto.com

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