

# Middleton Times-Tribune

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VOL. 123, NO. 9

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2015

SINGLE COPY PRICE: \$1.25

## On the road to authenticity

*Christine “Kee Kee” Buckley grew up in Middleton. Her career took her to Hollywood, where she worked at a major film company. When the recession hit in 2009, Buckley was let go from her high-powered, high-salaried job.*

*After a year of searching Los Angeles for another position, she and her dog, Yoda, took to the road for five months where she found so much more than the answer to her question, “What do I do next?”*

by **DEB BIECHLER**

*Times-Tribune*

### *What led you to Hollywood?*

**Buckley:** When I was in high school I knew that I really wanted to produce films. I went to UW Madison and got a degree in journalism. But, I knew that wasn't enough to get a job in Hollywood, because I didn't have any contacts in the film industry.

So, I went to Chicago and got my

law degree, and as a law student, took every entertainment job that I could find to get experience. I knew that Hollywood needed lawyers. That was my ticket in.

*Was it after you left L.A. or while you were working there that you realized that you weren't happy in that job?*

**Buckley:** I quickly realized that the film production company position wasn't my dream job. I loved the creative aspects and that the films were entertaining and can have a social impact.

But, there was so much shallowness. Hollywood thrives on youth, beauty and power. I played the game and climbed the corporate ladder, and got the enviable title and income. And, I was in Hollywood. But, through it all,



Photo contributed

**An “existential crisis” led Kee Kee Buckley to load up her car, Princess Leia the Prius, with her dog, Yoda, and take to the U.S. highways for five months to find peace.**

I never felt authentic.

One day, when I was at my desk, listening to an actor's agent trying to negotiate a personal trainer for him while he was on the set, I was struck with how indulgent it all was. On a pad of Post-It Notes I doodled, “I welcome change.”

For ten years that became my mantra. But, change didn't come. I let myself be shackled by velvet handcuffs and didn't do anything substantial to make change happen.

In 2009 when the great recession hit, I knew my company would have to lay people off. When I saw my boss walking to my office, I thought he wanted to talk to me about the people we would have to let go.

I was blind-sided when I was told that I was to be the first one. I had worked there for over thirteen years and had worked on more motion pictures than I can count.

How could this be happening? I don't lose my job. I'm the over-achiever.

After that nothing was a fit for me in Hollywood. The year after losing my job was a very dark time for me. I finally came to the conclusion that I had

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to get out of L.A. Because I didn't know where to go, I decided to just drive and see if I could find the answers on the road.

While I was pulling things together to leave, I reached into a junk drawer and pulled out that old Post-It Note that I'd written ten years before. I read the words again, "I welcome change."

So, I taped the Post-It to my dash board, loaded my things and my dog Yoda into the car and without a plan, just started to drive.

*Your five months on the road wasn't just a physical journey. It sounds from your blog and articles in the Huffington Post, that it was an emotional and spiritual one as well...*

**Buckley:** The first week was filled with a lot of tears and self doubt. It rained almost the whole first month. I thought for a long while that I was just running away from life.

But, it wasn't long before I realized that I wasn't running from it, but driving to it. When I realized that, everything started falling into place.

Each place I landed had a lesson or an important connection. I blogged with family and friends to let them know that I was safe and where I was.

The realization of the lessons of the road came out in the writing that I did on my blog.

For instance, San Luis Obispo, California was once voted the happiest place in the whole United States. It struck me as a good place to go.

I also read that it was the a resting

place for migratory monarch butterflies. In addition to being the happiest place in the nation, Pismo Beach, in San Luis Obispo county held the claim to fame as having the biggest gathering of monarchs in the US.

I was excited to see the monarchs because they symbolize rebirth into a new life. I was really disappointed when my time came to leave there and I hadn't seen any of them. But, just as I was heading out of town, I spotted a small cluster of them on a tree.

The migration of the monarchs was just beginning. It was symbolic to me, that just like them, I was in the beginning stage of my own migration. My first lesson of the road was that metamorphosis cannot happen overnight. It was going to take time.

People and the weather influenced where I went next. When I was driving through San Antonio, Texas an ice storm hit.

Storm or no storm I had to walk Yoda. We were out on the River Walk when I suddenly came face to face with a cowboy named Wade from Alabama. He was looking for the Howl At The Moon piano bar. I didn't know where it was. We went to the Hard Rock Cafe instead and drank hot cocoa and exchanged stories.

We had an instant connection.

His story was fascinating. He used to be a successful professional cowboy. That is, until he was impaled and almost died. After that he became a teacher.

Teaching earned him a living but it didn't feel like an authentic life to him.



**Kee Kee Buckley**

He was a cowboy at heart. His story of wanting to live authentically resonated with my own. The lesson of the road here was that I want to embrace the cowgirl spirit and live my life authentically.

When I was in the Arizona desert, I stopped to fill my gas tank whenever I saw a filling station. You never knew, for sure, where the next one would be.

I stopped for gas one day where there was a sign announcing good beef jerky for sale. The proprietor, Dwayne, sold me some and told me about a group of octogenarians who were in the area for their 30th western swing jam.

They called it the Side Man Jam-boree, as each of the musicians were side players to some of nation's greatest country western singers.

The octogenarians started every day with a 5:00 potluck and then jammed for 3 hours into the night. I told Dwayne that he had to take me there.

The musicians welcomed me and even secured a camper for me and

Yoda to stay in.

I kept in contact with them and am now making a documentary about their jams.

Meeting all of the people that I did on this trip, helped me to understand that everybody has a story. I want to help gather and tell those stories.

On my road trip, I realized that, instead of working in Hollywood in a supporting role, I wanted to make my own films and to write about real people and real situations.

It was on the first leg of my road trip that I got the idea to query Huffington Post to see if they'd be interested in articles about my it. I heard back from them, the next morning, with a resounding yes.

The road trip led me to new understandings, new inspiration, new work and to my new home of Austin, Texas.

*What are the important elements that you've created in your life in Austin that are different from your life in L.A.?*

**Buckley:** Well, I'm still defining my post-LA life. For one thing, I work for myself now. I'm rebuilding financially, but, it's on my terms.

Being a story-teller feels right. I'm living more authentically and fulfilling the desire that I had to make films, way back when I was in high school in Middleton.

I'm passionate again about making movies, but this time through making documentaries. I'm passionate about telling the stories of other people.

It wasn't so much that I was doing the wrong thing in L.A. There was just a better way for me to be work on movie production that kept me truer to myself. The road trip helped me to realize that.

I got stuck in in those velvet handcuffs because I was afraid of being judged and of failing. But, since I made the move from Hollywood and struck out on my own, I've had nothing but support from my friends and family.

*You can read more about Kee Kee on Huffington Post or in her blog: [www.seekingshama.com](http://www.seekingshama.com)*