

"Heather's enthusiasm for healthy living will inspire you. . . . It's hard not to fall in love with her recipes."

— Angela Liddon, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Oh She Glows Cookbook*

Yum Universe

Infinite
possibilities
for a
gluten-free,
plant-powerful,
whole-food
lifestyle.

Heather Crosby

Founder of YumUniverse.com

FOREWORD BY Brendan Brazier | Former professional Ironman triathlete and author of the *Thrive* book series

Praise for *YumUniverse*



I've admired Heather Crosby, founder of [YumUniverse.com](https://www.yumuniverse.com), since she started out years ago. Through her wildly popular website, she has truly changed the way hundreds of thousands of people transition into, and maintain, a plant-powerful lifestyle and now she brings her energy, dedication, and approachability to *YumUniverse*, the long-awaited book. Heather takes an often intimidating topic, and shows us that this lifestyle is absolutely possible. And her recipes are some of the most creative and delicious out there. The idea here isn't deprivation or drastic measures. It's about cumulative change—making incremental, deliberate health-boosting decisions until they stick, because true wellness is a life-long journey.

— Brendan Brazier

Former professional Ironman triathlete and author of the Thrive book series



Heather's enthusiasm for healthy living will inspire you to get busy in the kitchen! It's hard not to fall in love with her fresh, vibrant, and accessible plant-based recipes.

— Angela Liddon

Author of *New York Times* best seller, *The Oh She Glows Cookbook* and creator of [OhSheGlows.com](https://www.ohsheglows.com)



If you are looking to improve your health, eating a plant-based diet is the best thing you can do. In *YumUniverse*, Heather shares recipes that will give you the very best of health without sacrificing any flavor or fun, proving just how delicious plants can be. More than a cookbook, this is also a guidebook — her helpful tips for the transition period make this an invaluable resource for anyone who is new to this way of eating. If you're interested in test-driving a plant-based diet, let Heather be your guide, and enjoy the journey!

— Neal Barnard, MD

Author, and founder of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine



YumUniverse is a gorgeous cookbook filled with tasty, creative recipes that is perfect to kickstart a plant-powerful diet. It's also a comprehensive guidebook filled with the must-have tools and know-how to help transition and maintain an inspiring wellness adventure for a lifetime. Heather Crosby's spirited and encouraging approach to "simply eating more plant-powerful foods" leaves you feeling confident that you can make healthful changes, and keeps you excited about every step ahead.

— Julieanna Hever, MS, RD, CPT

Author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Plant-Based Nutrition* and host of Veria's wellness talk show, *What Would Julieanna Do?*



I believe you become a plant-based eater by having fun and experimenting with new recipes. Heather is a creative recipe goddess...her recipes provide that "yum factor" to inspire you to skip right into the kitchen and get cooking more whole, plant foods. Her step-by-step tips help you feel confident and supported. I appreciate that her approach is nonjudgmental and embraces all types of plant eaters — even those who eat some meat.

— Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD

Author of *The Flexitarian Diet*



Heather Crosby is as glowing, beautiful, and health-inspired as the plantiful, UnDiet-friendly decadence she creates in the kitchen. Her creativity using fresh, real-food ingredients makes this way of living effortless. I love having her join me as crusader for the great life—and this book makes the great life so easy and delicious!

— Meghan Telpner

Director of the Academy of Culinary Nutrition, author of *UnDiet*



Heather Crosby's *YumUniverse* is a bold and beautiful tribute to plant-based, whole foods. These recipes will prove to you that there is no need to choose between food that will nourish your body, and food that will delight your taste buds. Heather is a passionate and knowledgeable guide, and her culinary talent is only rivaled by the intelligence and common sense that she brings to healthy living.

— Gena Hamshaw

CCN and author of *Choosing Raw*



Think plant-based, gluten-free food can't be exciting? Think again — with her inspired recipes, beautiful photography, and infectious enthusiasm for healthy living and cooking, Heather Crosby shows that fueling your body with whole, high-energy foods can be anything but boring.

— Matt Frazier

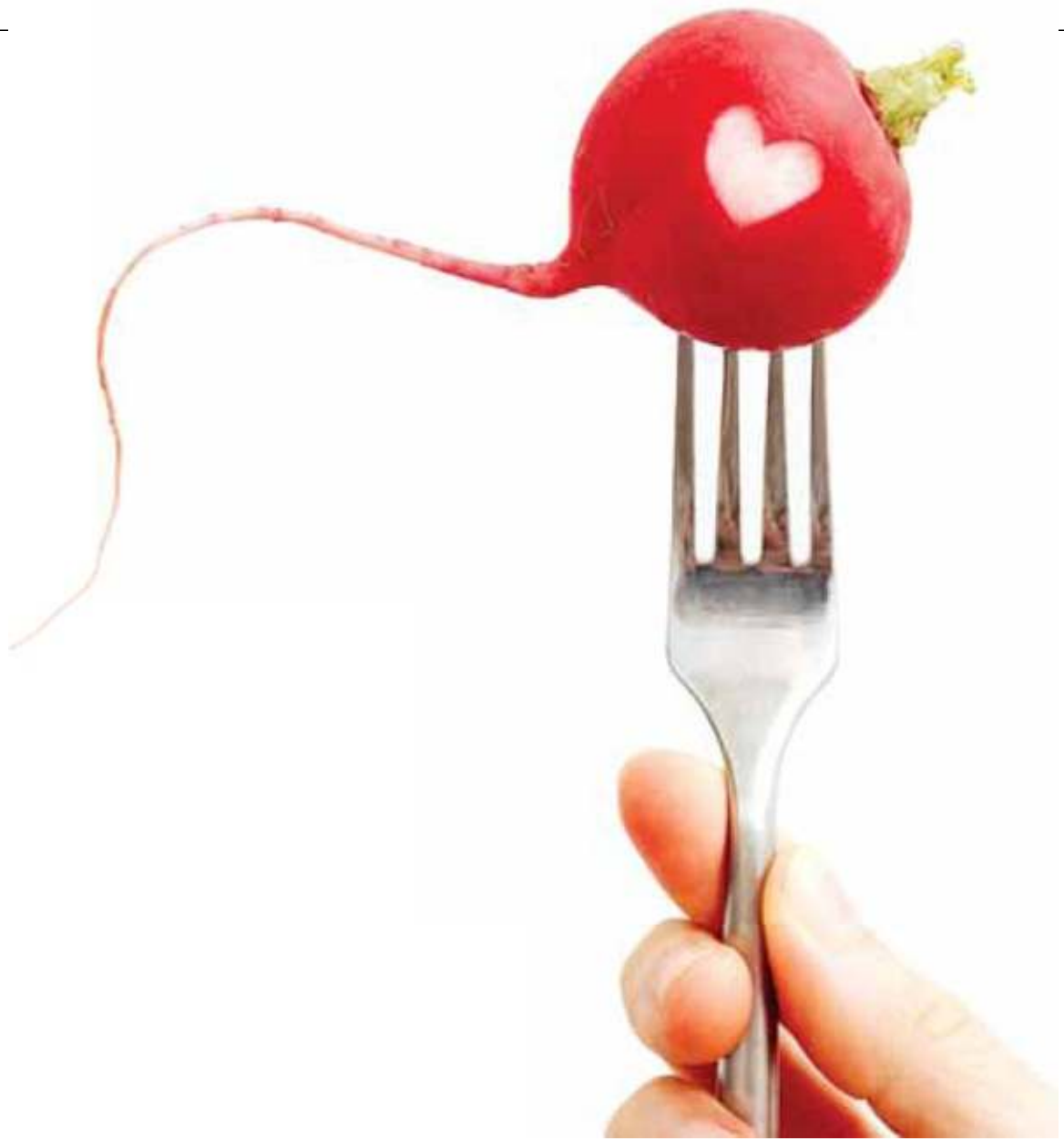
Creator of NoMeatAthlete.com and author of *No Meat Athlete: Run on Plants and Discover Your Fittest, Fastest, Happiest Self*



Finally, the comprehensive, plant-powerful book you've been waiting for! So much more than just a cookbook, *YumUniverse* provides all the tools you need to thrive, beginning with “why” you'll benefit from eating more plant-based foods, to “how” to implement baby steps toward change, and ending in a drool worthy collection of what to “eat.” If you've ever thought about moving toward a plant-inspired diet — or even if you're already a long-term vegan — you'll find something to love in this enticing, engaging, and educational culinary universe. Heather's extensive knowledge and experience as an online plant-powerful pioneer and foodie is evident throughout this lavish, stunningly photographed book. *YumUniverse* goes beyond recipes to prove you can take control of your health and achieve vibrant, plant-inspired wellness — all without gluten or refined sugars!

— Ricki Heller, RHN, PhD

Author of *Naturally Sweet & Gluten-Free* and *Living Candida-Free*





*Yum*Universe

Infinite possibilities *for a*
gluten-free, plant-powerful,
whole-food lifestyle.

Heather Crosby

Founder of *YumUniverse.com*

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This book is for YU
(yes, you).

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Foreword

In high school, I made the decision to become a professional endurance athlete, and I knew early on that if I wanted to achieve my dream of becoming successful at the highest level, I would have to really focus on the fuel I was putting into my body. I tried many diets, but eventually found that I recovered from my workouts more quickly, was able to sustain energy longer, and built strength more efficiently when I consumed nutrient-rich, plant-based foods. Even as coaches and fellow athletes questioned my approach, I continued to experience superior performance results — that eventually even they couldn't deny. I had discovered the competitive advantage I was looking for. By adopting a plant-based diet, I was able to train harder, longer, and at a higher level, which inevitably separated me from my competition — both in high school and later as a professional Ironman triathlete and two-time winner of the Canadian 50K Ultramarathon championship.

The sustainability of my athletic achievements was, without a doubt, a direct result of the food I was eating, but it's important to know that these benefits go beyond athletic performance and well into everyday life. The standard American diet has resulted in a nation facing one of the gravest health crises in recorded history. Millions of people in this country sustain themselves daily with a diet consisting mostly of chemically enhanced, processed, nutrient-devoid “foods.” The result is a population with soaring obesity rates across all age groups and steady increases in heart disease and cancer. Cases of depression, insomnia, chronic stress, and anxiety also continue to rise in this country. But there's a simple solution that, while rarely talked about as an option in mainstream culture, is finally gaining some well-deserved traction.

A diet rich in whole, plant-based foods has been shown to consistently, and almost immediately, help people lose excess weight, boost mood, decrease stress levels, improve sleep, and prevent and improve numerous physical and emotional conditions. And long-term studies about the effects of a plant-based diet have also revealed dramatic reductions in cases of heart disease and certain cancers.

From an environmental perspective, eating plants over meat makes sense, too. Simply put, producing plants requires less water, less land, and less fossil fuels than producing meat. Drastically fewer CO₂ emissions are released as well, and the ripple effect of production-related damage to the environment pales in comparison to that of the meat and processed-food industries — with many of its members concerned about only one thing: profits. It's not exactly a secret anymore — a healthy diet makes for a healthy life, any way you look at it.



While the benefits of this lifestyle are clear, many people assume that it's too difficult to make the transition, which is why this book is so important. I've admired Heather Crosby, founder of [YumUniverse.com](https://www.yumuniverse.com), since she started out years ago. Through her wildly popular website, she has truly changed the way hundreds of thousands of people transition into, and maintain, a plant-powerful lifestyle, and now she brings her energy, dedication and approachability to *YumUniverse*, the long-awaited book. Heather has translated an award-winning design career into an inspired approach to a "wellness adventure." The artistry she puts into her recipes, and the support and comprehensive resources she develops for the plant-powered community, are on a level all their own.

[YumUniverse.com](https://www.yumuniverse.com) has always remained one of my personal favorite online food resources — excellent design, packed with plant-based, whole food recipes and beautiful photography. What ultimately distinguishes *YumUniverse*, however, is how Heather takes an often intimidating topic and shows us that this lifestyle is absolutely possible. Her real-talk approach to transitioning helps us realize that we're more than capable of incorporating plant-based foods into our busy lives. And her recipes are some of the most creative and delicious out there. The idea here isn't deprivation or drastic measures. It's about cumulative change — making incremental, deliberate health-boosting decisions until they stick, because true wellness is a lifelong journey.

YumUniverse stands as a beacon in the plant-based diet movement. Heather passes no judgments, and instead invites folks of all kinds into her own inspiring experience so that they can better understand their potential. She has an incredible loyalty to her community, and it shines through in her ability to encourage people on any level that they can do this, one delicious step at a time.

You're about to start making a lasting impact on your quality of life and those you share the planet with. Congratulations, and enjoy the ride.

Brendan Brazier

Former professional Ironman triathlete and author of the Thrive book series





***Plant-Powerful &
Plant-Inspired***

It's all about bringing more freshness,
brightness, and flavor to the diet (and life)
by simply eating *more* plants.

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE INFINITE.



This is an exciting moment, because you're about to kick off a remarkable adventure, loaded with countless rewards and powerful lessons. I know, because I'm on this wellness journey, too.

It begins with a simple truth: Eating more plants is the best thing we can do to bring more “life” to our life.

Whether you're here to turn around your health; to prevent disease; to improve animal welfare, the environment, your spirituality, and the health of your family; or if you're simply interested in adding more creative veggie dishes to your menu rotation, I applaud your curiosity. See, that desire to discover is the golden ticket to health and happiness.

It Takes Guts to Venture Outside of Societal Norms

Making a plant-powerful lifestyle change — in a world designed to support and enable the opposite — is a courageous thing to do. I personally know how exciting and overwhelming this transformation can be, so I'm officially giving you permission to start breaking some “rules.” So, instead of always doing what the mainstream or a supposed “authority” tells you to do, maybe ask questions first. Turn down the opinions of others and turn up the volume on your instincts. Let them catalyze some good old-fashioned sleuthing. You're going to clear your own path and have fun doing it, and I've got your back if the going gets tough.

Thanks to the increasing awareness of the benefits of a plant-powerful diet, more and more folks like you are motivated to give it a try, but after a few weeks or months, many people fall off track. Old habits, emotional food associations, and straight-up food addictions can, and will, return with brute force. Then the guilt and resentment usually follow, right? This is not a sustainable approach to health and instead, I'm going to provide you with the tools you need for a lifetime of success.

There's a Japanese term I like to think of when it comes to many aspects of life — *kaizen*. It means “change for the better” and consciously finessing, learning, and applying new ideas and experiences to shape a stronger, more successful daily process. Wellness is all about this type of continuous improvement. It's like a practice of any kind — chess, yoga, parkour, knitting — things we have to keep working at on a consistent basis. And when we do, we get better at that thing. We'll have moments of bliss and mastery, and we'll have moments where we feel frustrated or unmotivated, but we can learn from all of these experiences if we just keep moving forward, with all lessons neatly filed under “Now I Know.”

So be nice to yourself on this journey. Be proud of every step you take. Even if you fall off track, it means you're trying. Missteps and victories will walk hand in hand — it's how we learn, and it gives us a basis for comparison. Let's measure success by how quickly we get back on course toward our goals every time we derail. Mistakes are great teachers.

YumUniverse Is More Than a Cookbook

It's the ultimate guidebook — filled with the know-how and recipes you need to take the journey from S.A.D. (Standard American Diet) to plant-inspired. And it's written from my perspective as a former veggie-phobe who ate her first salad at 19 years old. Yep, that's no typo. I truly understand the challenge of shifting to a plant-powerful life. YumUniverse is the WHY, the HOW, and the EAT. The whole enchilada, so to speak.

I'm here to be honest with you, support you, and give you the tools to build a comprehensive foundation so you can discover how creative, comforting, and fun the journey can be. I've helped thousands of people transition and it all started because of my own experiences (including those mistakes).

My Journey to YumUniverse

I never touched vegetables as a child. Even as a baby, if it was puréed and green, I'd seal my mouth shut. I was that dinner-table-all-night-standoff kid who would create the illusion of eating my broccoli by stealthily spitting it into my opaque whole milk and then offer to do the dishes so no one was the wiser. I would hold my breath and swallow lumps of cooked spinach whole so I wouldn't have to chew it. Lima beans were my absolute nemesis. But bread, sugar, potatoes, chips, soda, candy, juice, tater tots, doughnuts, and pancakes? Now, *they* were my besties. And like any troublemaking friends, they got me into bad situations, like coming home from the dentist with at least one cavity per visit. It's really no surprise that I also suffered from chronic strep throat and colds most of my childhood. That ill health turned out to be a profound catalyst and the very thing that helped change the way I looked at food.

Creative expression is in my bones and luckily, I grew up on a farm surrounded by inspiration. I always had a project going on — building multilevel hayloft forts (with trapdoors to the hay chute for my little brother to find); designing clothes, jewelry, and shoes (thanks, Mom, for actually wearing the notebook paper and hay-bale twine flip-flops); baking, sculpting, building death-defying dirt-bike ramps — you name it.

When I went to college, like many other arty-farties with a few opinionated family members, I chose to major in graphic design because I was convinced that it was the “only way” to make a living while still being “artistic.”



THE C&O CANAL TOWPATH

This path is a stone's throw from my West Virginia home and runs 185 miles along the Potomac River, from Washington D.C. to Cumberland, Maryland. While I enjoy walking, running, and biking along it as much as possible, some of the most fun I have is when I leave the trail, pave my own way, and explore.



After graduation, I moved to Chicago — 800 miles away — for a three-day-a-week freelance gig at a respected design firm. I’ve always been brave — I had a chance and I wasn’t going to miss it, even if there was only one month’s rent rolling around with the tumbleweeds in my bank account. That job kicked off my “dream” design career. But how did I feel when I first won an award for my work? Shockingly unfulfilled.

So I started to create side businesses to satisfy a corporate-free calling — painting, fashion design, jewelry design, fire performance (yes, even that). But wherever I found myself — whatever passion I was pursuing at the time — there it was: “This isn’t *it*, Heather.” For years, I dismissed that voice, instead focusing on continued distractions.

During this time, my body was also sending me a message. Shortly after I moved to Chicago, I would wake up in the middle of the night with intense stomach pain and nausea. One night I ended up on the floor involuntarily, passing out and hitting my ol’ noggin on my way down. I was scared. After countless visits to my doctor asking her why this was happening to me, I finally scheduled a bunch of invasive, embarrassing tests to gain some insight.

Let the disappointments begin. After slipping on the gown, drinking the gallon jug full of gelatinous liquid, getting radiated, and experiencing other unpleasantries, I was told, “Sorry, we don’t really see anything. You might have IBS.” *Might?*

How could they not see anything after those tests? Why didn’t they know why this was happening to me? IBS? I needed something more specific that I could act on. But with no answers, I kept living the same lifestyle because I didn’t yet understand the powerful connection between food and health.

And then one summer, while jogging along a sidewalk in Chicago, I was run over by a fella trying to score a prize parking spot. My left foot was crushed when he hit the brakes — it was under the back tire — and my knees were blackened from impact. All in all, it could have been a lot worse, but after six months with a persistent limp and no sign of healing, I somehow ended up in an acupuncture office for some help.

I heard something life-changing there that toppled the first domino in my happy, tumbling journey toward cleaning up my diet:

“We are not cows.”

We. Are. Not. Cows. That’s exactly what my acupuncturist, Diane, told me when I asked her why on earth she wanted me to stop consuming dairy in an effort to heal my squished foot. *How does one affect the other?* I remember my brain swirling with questions: “But what about calcium? How will I ever live without cheese...?” and the desperate “What on earth will I eat for breakfast?” Yet her simple statement stood secure against my status quo questions.

On the bus home, it started to sink in. *Why do humans consume dairy?* It’s a liquid, designed by nature, to help a baby calf (not a human) grow from birth to 1,000 pounds in its first year of life. And we’re the only animals on the planet to regularly drink the secretion of another animal — into adulthood, no less. A door had opened. A domino had fallen.

Despite a fear of needles, I became an acupuncture pincushion. (I say that lovingly.) And to my surprise, I experienced some powerful truths about how incredibly interconnected the body and spirit are, and how it takes both to heal. Within a few months, by following Diane’s entire diet and acupuncture protocol, I was back to my old self. Dancing (in heels!). Running (not in heels). There was no greater motivation than results, so I was fully on board. It was quite a victory, but I still had a long way to go.

I had switched to almond milk, and quit beef and pork, and only ate chicken sometimes, but despite these changes, I continued having serious health issues. Once again, I found myself in a specialist’s office looking desperately for answers. After some more humbling and uncomfortable tests, here were my “options”: I could come into the office once a week — for an indeterminate amount of time — and be injected via catheter with synthetic goo (shiver), and I could also try taking a particular antidepressant (even though I wasn’t suffering from depression) because the side effects of said medication were known to help a whopping 8 percent of folks in my position. I could do one or the other, or both.

I looked right at the doc, took a long deep breath, said, “No thanks — to any of it,” and walked out the door. It was officially time to take matters into my own hands. There had to be another way. Dear Internet, I’ve never officially said this, but thank you. Thank you. Thank. You.

A Tireless Search for Answers Finally Led Me to Some Solid Ground

To start, it looked like I was suffering from something called acidosis, which was manifesting in a

sorts of inflammation-based illnesses that could be reversed if I simply ate the right stuff. If I could reduce my intake of acid-forming foods, like animal products, gluten, sugar, and processed foodstuff and increase my intake of alkaline-forming goodness, like green vegetables, I could balance the pH of my cells, quiet the cry-for-help symptoms of inflammation, support my body's attempts to properly assimilate the nutrients in my food, and then heal.

I finally had an action plan, but how was I going to start eating vegetables? The closest I got to vegetables was maybe tomato sauce in a jar, and even then I'd locate all the tiny onions and shove them to the side of my plate.

Pea by pea. Step by step. That was, and still is, the name of the game. It can take years for us to end up at the poor health point where we need to make changes, and it can take just as long to kick the unhealthy habits that brought us there. But remember this — sometimes the wrong choices lead us to the right places, and progress is determined by how we choose to look at a particular situation.

We can come upon an obstacle and see it either as an opportunity or a dead end.

We can let uncomfortable moments in life empower us or disempower us. I chose the former because *it is a choice*.



LOVE FOR COOKING

Even though veggies weren't my thing as a kid, give me a spoon and a bowl, and I could play for hours. Or gimme some mud, my sidekick cousin Greg, and a cinderblock wall, and it was mud pie time! Childhood games always seemed to revolve around "cooking" up something tasty.



My mother has always loved animals and she got me started off early with a love for them, too.



I began by trying a couple of new recipes every week — mostly the desserts, but hey, it's a start. Eventually, I became courageous enough to try ingredients and techniques that I was completely unfamiliar with, like pitting dates, massaging kale, and blending hemp seeds.

I'd process vegetables into soups. Green smoothies were my hero too — I could blend everything. I wasn't quite ready to chew and drink it on down. It was nature's medicine, after all. I started to notice, even after a week, that I was sleeping better. My belly wasn't swollen. I had more energy. My symptoms were less severe. My palate was even changing. I was more sensitive to sugar — desserts at restaurants were intensely sweet. I began to *want* broccoli and even onions. Unbelievable. My body was asking for more plants because plants were healing my body.

But the creative gal in me wasn't satisfied with the recipes available in cookbooks and online at the time. (This was years ago.) The stereotypes about plant-based food were sadly being perpetuated left and right. *Cardboard?* Check. *Tree bark?* Yep. *Carob chips to replace chocolate chips?* Oh, thank you, humanity. There were more flavorless, boring, downright ugly recipes than there were the kinds of foods that made me excited to eat them. Then it clicked.

After a lot of practice in the kitchen, confidence developed.

And with that, I started to experiment with ingredients and flavors that reminded me of the rich, comforting foods that I grew up with. I started to curate a pretty solid library of original recipes that vegans and omnivores loved. I kept a binder loaded with these spilled, splattered, scribbled-on recipes in my kitchen for years, and then I went on a big summer road trip out West.

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