



MONUMENT, COLORADO, JUNE 29, 2004

photo by Kevin J. Anderson

MIRACLE IN COLORADO

One morning in February 2015 I received a call from an old friend, Rob Wallis. For close to twenty years, with his longtime partner Paul Siegel at Hudson Music, we had collaborated on a series of drumming DVDs. Just a few weeks before Rob had been in Southern California, and we had got together with a couple of other East Coasters who were also in town for the annual musical instrument-makers' show, NAMM.

Like many good friends who have many good friends, Rob and I are not in frequent contact, maybe once or twice a year. But to add to the truly *paranormal* aspect of these events, Rob had just been out shoveling snow around his house. He thought of my affection for winter and snowsports, and snapped a selfie to send to me.



SNOWY SELFIE, FEBRUARY 4, 2015

By Rob Wallis

When Rob went indoors, he picked up a mysterious voicemail. An elderly lady said she was calling from Colorado Springs, then launched into a story about her husband having found a duffel bag years ago, then forgot about it in their garage. Recently she was clearing out the garage, and found the bag again. She said there were papers in it with my name on them “dating back to 2004,” “a very nice watch,” and, somehow, Rob’s telephone number.

As Rob recounted these facts to me, he sounded hesitant and mystified—it made no sense to him. I knew right away what it *had* to be—though my brain was reeling at even the possibility.

It had been *eleven years ago*.



WESTERN COLORADO, JUNE 2008

photo by Brian Catterson

As we set the Wayback Machine for June, 2004—a time for which few photographic records survive—we may pause along the way in June, 2008. This day was a fine example of the typical conditions for that season in the high elevations of Western Colorado, and featured the same cast of characters.

In 2004 I had been riding through that same area with my American riding partner Michael and frequent guest rider Brian Catterson (every tour since *Vapor Trails* in 2002). Brian's rides with us always seem to be accompanied by thunderstorms, torrential rain, blinding fog, and even sudden blizzards. The summer of 2004 was no exception, as Brian joined us for two days off between a show in Houston and one at Red Rocks in Denver. It was Rush's Thirtieth Anniversary Tour, R30, and as we travel back to that time, I have a handy "vehicle" for the journey. The events in question were carefully documented for the book I wrote about that tour, *ROADSHOW: Landscape With Drums, A Concert Tour by Motorcycle*.

We pick up the action in Colorado, on June 28, 2004. The previous day Michael, Brian, and I had ridden up through New Mexico's fine backroads to Taos for the night (with thunderstorms), and that day across Colorado (with roadside snow, rainshowers, and even thick flurries at the summits).

Nearing Denver in early afternoon, I waved to Michael and Brian and split off where highways 24 and 285 divided. I was heading east to spend the night with Kevin Anderson and his wife Rebecca near Colorado Springs, while Michael and Brian rolled on to Denver to visit Brian's brother.



MONARCH PASS, JUNE 2008

photo by Brian Catterson

*[blurry focus time-shift to June 2004 — from **Roadshow** . . .]*

. . . the dark clouds finally began to release their showers, so I settled into a more relaxed pace. As the road descended, I just stayed with the flow of traffic, taking it easy on the wet road. I began to encounter lines of vehicles backed up at traffic lights, and at one of them, just after Manitou Springs, a small pickup pulled up beside me. A bearded man in a park ranger's uniform leaned over and called through his passenger window, "You dropped one of your boxes back there."

I automatically looked to the rear of the bike, saw that my right-side luggage case was gone and felt an immediate chill of alarm and fear. The

hardshell cases were locked onto the frame of the bike, so one of them coming off was like, say, losing the trunk of your car.

“About a half mile or a mile back,” the ranger said.

Thanking him, I made a U-turn at the lights and raced back up the divided highway a mile or so, then turned around and rode back in the drizzling rain, slowly scanning the roadside. At first I hadn't been too upset, thinking I would surely find the case lying beside the road and everything would be okay, but I didn't see it.

Still hopeful, I thought, “Maybe I didn't go back far enough.”

I turned around again, sped uphill a couple of miles this time, then circled back and rode slowly over that same stretch of road, desperately scanning for that luggage case. It wasn't there.

I tried again, riding back a little farther this time, but there was no sign of it.

I started to get upset, going over in my head all that was in that case. Some of it was replaceable, of course: a few clothes, the “little black book” of our itinerary, a spare faceshield for my helmet, tire repair kit, some maps, Swiss Army alarm clock, *Cycle World* baseball hat, and the venerable plastic flask half full of The Macallan. (Precious, but replaceable.)

Then I began to add up the irreplaceable items, like my shaving kit and medicines, my phone and address book, a copy of *Traveling Music* with all of my proofreading notes in it, the little Zeiss birdwatching binoculars Jackie had bought for our East African safari in 1987, and—worst of all—the Patek Philippe watch Carrie had bought me for my fiftieth birthday and the Cartier engagement ring she'd given me in 2000. I didn't wear them when I was riding or drumming, but I liked to have them with me, in what ought to have been a safely locked case.

Where was it?

One corner of my mind knew this wasn't the *worst* that could happen—my imagination always allowed for the possibility of extreme,

fatal disasters. But at the same time, having barely survived some tragedies that weren't imaginary had left me permanently fragile. I lived and functioned inside a thin armor of "adaptation" that was easily pierced, and I was feeling bad about this lost case, near tears. I stopped at the side of the road, lit a cigarette with shaking hands, and tried to think what to do.

Nothing I *could* do, really, except hope. Perhaps some Good Samaritan had picked it up, a fellow motorcyclist tossing it into his van or pickup. As a Canadian, I naturally hoped it hadn't inconvenienced anyone, but maybe the fallen case had landed in the road, blocking traffic, and a cop had picked it up.



"NEVER ONE AROUND WHEN YOU NEED ONE," COLORADO 2008

photo by Brian Catterson

From the time the case fell off (caused by the failure of a five-dollar bolt, it turned out) until the ranger told me about it and I raced back there, not more than ten or fifteen minutes could have passed. [Later I learned I wasn't the only new BMW GS owner that dropped a luggage case, either—I shoulda sued 'em.] But I would still hope for the best. It was the way I was made.

At least I still had the directions to Kevin and Rebecca's house in the map-case on my tankbag. It was getting late in the afternoon, and still raining. I decided to carry on, get to their house, then try to deal with the situation. Following the directions onto I-25 and north in the chilly drizzle, I climbed again from 6000 feet at Colorado Springs to 7000 feet at Monument, before getting lost in a maze of tree-lined roads in the rainy twilight.

Some of the street names made sense, but something seemed to be missing—I couldn't find *their* street. Worse, I didn't have my phone book, so I couldn't even call them. I headed back toward the interstate and stopped at a little strip mall. A dentist's office was just closing, and the nurse gave me the missing piece of information. When I had copied down Kevin's directions from his email, I had missed one line, one street name where I was supposed to turn.

After all that, and 734 kilometers (458 miles) of mountain riding, I was tired, cold, wet, and feeling low. When I pulled up in front of their house, I tried to pull myself together and prepare to be sociable. Kevin walked out into the driveway to meet me and I began blabbering about what had happened.

[I think first I asked if he had any whisky.]



KJA AND NEP, JUNE 29, 2004

photo by Rebecca Moesta

*[Blurry time-shift again—to four or five days later, up in Washington state,
still from **Roadshow** . . .]*

When the bikes were parked outside our adjoining rooms at the M&M Motel in Connell, Michael and I performed the Macallan ritual, then split up to have our showers and quiet time. Turning on my cellphone to check for messages, I paused to listen to one from my brother Danny. He wanted to make arrangements for him and his family to meet us the next afternoon. I made a mental note to call him, erased the message, and listened to the next one.

It was a man's voice I didn't recognize, and after he gave his name, he went on to say he had picked up my luggage case. It was "all intact," and he had drilled it open and found my phone book, with my cellphone number inside. When I realized what I was hearing, my mind went *electric*, and I thought, "Omigod—I've got to play this for *Michael!*"

He had been skeptical about my earlier optimism, and indeed, by that point I had resigned myself to the loss. Now I couldn't wait to show

Michael there *were* good people in the world. My finger went down to save that precious message, but out of habit, shock, and fatigue (“fatigue makes you stupid”), I realized—even as my mind screamed, “No-o-o!”—I was pressing the “Delete” button.

My head dropped, and I stared at the phone and my traitorous finger in disbelief.

Even then, I didn’t think it would be a big problem. Surely we could trace the number of that incoming call. Or the Good Samaritan might call back; he had sounded like a good guy.

I went next door to Michael’s room and told him what had happened. He looked at me, shaking his head, and I snapped, “*Shut up, man—he’ll call back!*”

You would think so, but so far, Michael had been getting nowhere with the phone company and we had decided to be proactive. After a local investigator had failed to turn up any clues, or any witnesses, Michael arranged to place a good-sized ad in the Colorado Springs newspaper. We offered a “substantial reward” for the return of the luggage case, and gave Michael’s 800 number. We ran it for a few weeks, but no response.

In Michael’s case-hardened (ha ha) view of humanity, he figured the guy would eventually find the valuable watch (in a zippered side compartment of my shaving kit), and change his mind, deciding, “Oh well, he didn’t call back—it’s mine.” But I still had faith—or at least hope.

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LOST 6-28-2004

One Motorcycle luggage case.
 Lost on Highway 24 East -
 near Manitou Springs

SUBSTANTIAL REWARD

Call 800 405-7422

[blurry focus time-shift back to the present day]

The years went by—a *decade* went by—and the lost case slipped from memory. But as I talked on the phone from my office in sunny Los Angeles to Rob in snowy New York on Tuesday, February 4, 2015, all of that flooded back. But from *so* long ago, I could hardly absorb it.

How many times in the past ten years had readers of *Roadshow* asked me if I ever got that case back? I'd always had to give a rueful shake of my head and say, “Unfortunately, no.”

And now—*presto change-o!*—that luggage case and its contents were back in my life. Imagine losing a suitcase or a cardboard box full of close personal possessions for over ten years—at first the vanished items would be achingly real and personal, and their loss would hurt. With the passing of years, the objects cease to be “attached”—or you cease to be attached to *them*—and they are all replaced in your life by new versions. Like one of those time travel stories where a person or object can't appear twice in the same place—these are a phantom shaving kit, gold watch, binoculars, ring, and so on.

And of the two identical Patek Philippe watches, which one would I *keep*? I would sell one to pay back the insurance company (yes, I know—it’s like a twist on a recent humorous turn of phrase I like:

“*Let’s give the insurance company back their money*’—SAID NO ONE EVER.”

But Bubba and the Professor agree it’s the right thing to do.)

So I have to choose between the sentimental value of the first watch and the much longer-term possession of the second—less than two years versus ten years. And the older one had been sitting in a garage in the extreme weather of high-elevation Colorado, the deep freeze and the simmering swelter. It’s going to need some work.

One thing I changed right after that loss was to replace the BMW luggage cases with aluminum Jesse cases that *couldn’t* fall off—their ads showed the bike being lifted by the luggage mounts. I was never able to trust the BMW cases again.



LATER THAT SUMMER—SNAZZY NEW CASES

TUPPER LAKE, NY

Right after I got off the phone with Rob, I had to call Michael. He would not believe it either. I also decided to enlist his help in getting it back—I was so weirded out, as the saying goes, that I “couldn’t deal.”

Fortunately Michael and I were friends with a police officer, Mike Abromowich, in a neighboring Colorado town. (In fine dramatic irony, Michael got to know Mike at around that same time, 2004, during a local investigation into a psycho-stalker who was threatening violence against me. From the three of us dealing with the worst side of humanity, now we were dealing with the best side. You know, simply doing the right thing.)

I guess I also instinctively recoiled from this fairly stunning news, and wanted to keep a little distance. Anyway, I asked Michael to call the lady. When he did, and suggested to her that we would send someone around to pick up the bag (her husband must have thrown away the hard-case after drilling it open), she became audibly nervous.

“Oh—I don’t know . . . who . . . who are you going to send?”

When Michael explained it would be a uniformed police officer, she seemed comforted. I also requested that we arrange for Mike to give her the “substantial reward” our newspaper ads had promised eleven years before. And I insisted, “Don’t take no for an answer.”

When Mike reported that the lady lived in a trailer park, and was elderly, I was glad he had brought her a thousand dollars. It would mean a lot to someone in those circumstances. Later Michael forwarded a voice mail from her saying how they hadn’t expected anything as a reward, and were very surprised by the “dollar amount.”

For myself, I was even more impressed by the simple “benevolence” of her making that one move—just picking up the phone to make a costly call to the other side of the country, only guided by a *clue*. Mike reported she had first tried a few numbers from my phone book that were no longer in service. How did she end up reaching Rob Wallis, at the alphabetical end? And what are the odds of Rob having the same phone number all those years later?

(Plus now I see that back in 2004 her husband must have found my cell number, still the same, printed in the *back* of my book. I had printed it after this unmistakable notice:

“NEP—For reward call —.”)

Anyway, somehow, it all worked out. Eventually . . .

It just took a little longer—a little longer than *ten years*.

After talking to Michael, I wrote next to Kevin Anderson to tell him this amazing and completely unexpected resolution to the story. Addressing Kevin as the prolific author of wildly fantastic tales, I wrote under the title, “YOU THINK YOU CAN *INVENT* A TALE OF UNBELIEVABLE MIRACLES?”

Naturally, Kevin remembered the incident well, and was equally astonished.

I’m not sure if the pope would declare this a proper “miracle,” with no lives saved by the magical intervention of invisible friends (new definition of religious squabbles: “*My invisible friend can beat up your invisible friend*”), but come on—what else would you call it?

In this crazy mixed-up world, all I know is, it’s some kind of a story—with a happy ending and renewed faith in humanity. A small dark blot in my past, with its fading nebula of pain and regret, has suddenly flared into a bright star of relief and gratitude. You can’t make that stuff up.



TIME CAPSULE: JUNE 2004 — FEBRUARY 2015