

Second place, Non-fiction  
**The Beach and the Bed Pan**  
by Dana Carpenter

It was finally Friday morning, and the sooner I got this day going, the sooner I could start my weekend of being a bum. I got to work and started my morning routine of checking messages and reading emails. Amongst the various listserv tirades and policy revisions, I came across an email from my friend Sofia. She had the day off and wanted to know if I wanted to take a day trip to the beach. Now, I'm all for spontaneity, but this seemed hardly worth it. A three hour trip there and a three hour trip back seemed almost ridiculous for just a couple of hours on the beach, right? "But where's that sense of adventure you used to have?" I asked myself out loud. My inner turmoil lasted all but two seconds before I realized I was crazy to miss out on an adventure like this! I called Sofia and said I was in, and then called my boss to request the afternoon off.

I got home, had some lunch, and got together a few CDs. Since I had plenty of room in my van, I asked my little sister Chelsea and our gangster friend Mike to go along. A few minutes later, Sofia drives up with her yellow lab named Maggie and an old friend of ours, Travis. Not long after they arrive, two broke college students, a real life gangster, my teenager sister, me, and the dog all load up in my van and set out on an adventure with nothing more but the clothes on our backs. After about 100 miles, Sofia turns to me and says, "I probably should have mentioned this earlier, but what do you all think about spending the night?!" For some this would be a no-brainer -- get a hotel and spend another day at the beach, sure! Why not? For someone in a wheelchair who depends on lots of accessories, however, this question brought with it some trepidation. I mean, it was only supposed to be a day trip, so I didn't even bring extra clothes! After much discussion and debate, we came to the conclusion that the only thing I couldn't do without was... my bed pan. Not thinking this would be a hard object to find, we decided to stay to stay the night and headed straight to the beach.

I spent an hour listening to the waves as they carried my stresses away while the wind massaged my troubles away. All too quickly, it was time find a hotel room and get something to eat, although this would turn out to be one of the first struggles of the night. We circled and circled that island, but every hotel in a 10-mile radius was booked solid. After about an hour and a half of hopeless searching, we decided to find a place to eat and then drive back to the city. We still had that pesky bedpan search ahead of us, but hunger came first. We stopped at the nearest restaurant that ended up having a 45-minute wait, so we ended up out on the patio had a few cocktails. After what seemed like an eternity, we were seated. Dinner was great, but those cocktails had kicked my kidneys into overdrive. It had been 15 hours since I had peed that morning, so it was time to find a bedpan. The time was 11:30 p.m.

The last bedpan I bought was at HEB, granted that was five years ago, so naturally we decided to try there first. We park and me, Mike, and Chelsea get out, and head inside. A manager stops us and says, "Hey, the store is closing in five minutes, and I want to get home tonight, so can y'all come back tomorrow?" We explained that we only needed one thing and would be very quick, so he asked us what we needed. Being in a person with a disability, you learn to sacrifice a few things during your life... one of those things is modesty. It wasn't bad enough that a car full of friends (two being guys), who before now knew little of my personal habits, are now driving me around the beach at midnight looking for a bedpan, but now I had to tell a total stranger. There was a long pause, so he asked again, "what is it that you are looking for?" I looked at Chelsea, she looked back

at me, we look at Mike... another awkward pause... and then I break, "a bedpan, I'm looking for a bedpan." "Oh!" he says as he starts to fidget. "Hang on." He walks a few steps away and talks to someone on his walkie-talkie. A few seconds goes by, and he came back over to inform us they don't have any. Next stop, Wal-Mart.

We get back in the van, and Travis assures us he knows where there's one and proceeds to lead us on a 30-minute wild goose chase. The whole time Sofia is yelling at him, while my bladder struggles to hold it all in. Sofia has almost reached her boiling point, when she decides to make a u-turn and accidentally stumbles upon a 24-hour Wal-mart! This time, just me and Chelsea go in and walk straight to the pharmacy. We looked and looked, but couldn't find anything, so we stopped a lady that worked there. We proceeded to tell her what we were looking for, and she immediately got a confused look on her face. "Bed pants?" she says. "No, a bedpan" we correct her. She explains that this is not her section and asks us to wait while she finds the right person. She then yells across the store, "Heeeyyy Michelle, do we have any bed pans?" Five minutes later she comes back with three more people. "Now, what are you looking for?" ask one of the ladies. "A bed pan, I NEED a bed pan!" She then leads us to the adult diaper section. "No I need a BED PAN", I repeated. Then one of the other ladies says "Oh bed pads, they're right here!" Then Chelsea says "NO, bed pan, like pots and pans!" The ladies stare blankly at each other, and finally one of them says, "No I don't think we have those, but you should try the super Wal-Mart down the street." Knowing that Sofia was not up to another wild goose-chase, we asked if we could just call the other Wal-Mart and ask them. They walk us to a cashier, and ask her to make the call. The cashier calls the other Wal-Mart and asks them to transfer her to the pharmacy, all the while she is continuing to check out people in her line. She finally gets someone on the phone, and asks them if they carry bed pans. She repeats herself about five times and then proceeds to spell it out... "I need a B-E-D P-A-N. No D- as in dog." Turns out they didn't have any EITHER!

We felt defeated when we got outside, and after a short round of the potty dance, we decide to just turn around and go home. Travis decided to drive since Sofia was so tired and frustrated. We got about 20 miles outside of Corpus when all of a sudden Travis pulls over. He explained that he was also too tired to drive and that it would be unsafe to continue. This day trip had quickly turned into a nightmare, and if I didn't get to pee soon, it would get even scarier! Sofia decided to get on her cell phone and tried in vain to locate a 24-hour Walgreens. Finally after what seemed like an eternity, she found one that was 24 hours, but of course they had NO bedpan!!! Then Chelsea came up with the bright idea that we should try a hospital. So, there we were at was 3 in the morning searching for the nearest emergency room. At last we find one! Travis and Chelsea go inside and bring out a BUCKET! "The lady inside, didn't feel like going to the back to find a bed pan, and if she was to get one, they would have to register you as a patient." She asked them if I could just come inside and when they said no, she handed them a bucket! I told them there was no way that I could pee in a bucket. Finally Mike, my gangsta friend, decided to go back inside and vowed not to come back without a damn bed pan! I said, "Mike, what would your home boys say if they heard you got arrested for trying to steal a bed pan?" He laughed and said, "When you gotta go, you gotta go!" So he went inside, approached the lady at the front desk. He told her that either she gave us a bed pan or he would go in the back and find one, so she finally give in! Success!

Now we had the bed pan, but still no hotel room! After searching for about another half hour, we found a Days Inn with vacancies. We still didn't have a transfer board, change of clothes, or toothbrushes, but we were

all too tired to care. Mike and Chelsea managed to get me in bed without the board. Finally, after almost 24 hours of holding it, I was ready to let it all out, but unfortunately the bed pan was so small that we had to dump it 6 times before I finished. The bed pan was pretty much a failure and pee ended up all over the sheets and the only shirt I had on the whole trip! We were able to call for new sheets, but I had to borrow a shirt Mike happened to have. We all managed to get to bed around five.

The next morning we wanted to hit the beach before we headed back home. We all ended up getting burnt to a crisp, and wouldn't you know it, my batteries on my chair were dead, so I had to be pushed off the beach and into the van. All in all, I have memories that will keep me smiling for years. Though this trip was only a day and a half long, I learned lessons that will last a lifetime. First, I can be a spontaneous person. Life does not always have a master plan. Second, humor and creativity can make any situation bearable. Laughter can brighten any narrow mind. Third, our first instinct to run home when faced with adversity is not always the best way to solve problems. By charting unknown waters, you can extend the journey. Fourth, great friends make the world go around. Once you find them, never let go because they truly are rare and precious gems. And finally, the last thing I learned is always carry a spare bedpan!