

Dashlane America

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Howdy!

This booklet is a result of my trip to Georgia, USA during the Corona-outbreak in 2020. Taking a last-minute flight from Schiphol, Amsterdam on the 13th of March I safely reach Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson, where my adventure starts.

I didn't book any hotel or motel upfront so what you're reading are the experiences of a man and his backpack taking on the great America by foot.

Georgia is a southern state and known for its American conservatism, yankee rednecks and violent cotton-plantages with pestering slaves. To me however it's the birthplace of a beautiful blonde babe with a hell-of-a-sexy accent, who I met years ago on the interwebs. Having read "*Americans don't walk*" by another dutch correspondent, studying some maps and buying all the right tickets to the wrong destinations, the sudden corona pandemic forced me to throw overboard all tedious mental preparation baggage and just head out, leaving the Netherlands abruptly on a Friday morning.



"Fasten your seatbelt, Cap. We're flying overseas. For real this time."



: Along The Dashlanes

I'm sitting with my back against a treestump. There's just a backpack in between. On Interstate 485 behind me is a nearly uninterrupted flow of cars racing towards and away from Atlanta, one of America's busiest Metropolises. The evening has fallen, and in the few moments the stream of automobiles is thinning down I can hear some birds whistling in the trees above me.

Here in America everything is huge. On practically every mile I see the lightworks of American businesses, presented with large fonts and promising slogans. From Wendy's to the post-office. From the Tacos restaurant to Walmart, from small gasstations to large Entertainment-centers. America seems to have it all from one mile to the next. And I find myself trapped in between. Just like the many Americans who can't seem to ever escape this overindulgent wonderland of free-market capitalism.

I come to know, the Dollar has long lost its shine and shopping at the Sprouts Farmers Market I am confronted with a fearful American middleclass, having the Coronavirus as its latest enemy.

Under the guise, they all feel terrible times are coming, but no one seems to be capable of truly and truthfully address the issue. To whom here can you entrust your heartfelt opinion anyways?

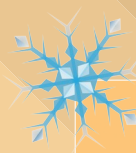
Interstate Highways System:

Presidents Eisenhower's gift to America. Inspired by his love for the German 'autobahn' he gave command to asphaltize more than 40,000 miles of land connecting the states in what would become one of the most expensive federal projects. Approximately 75% of American roads are Interstate Highways.



BEWARE THE TAXES.

- "Here it's all about the taxes, man." the Indian guy at the Royal Dutch Shell Gasstation tells me.
- "All about the taxes huh?" I rephrase putting a question mark to it as I lay down a few extra pennies adding to the visible pricetag of the small brightgreen lighter I'm buying. A few minutes later I step back into the Gasstation.
- "How much are you going to tax me if I clean up outside?" I ask the guy. When he finally understands my intention he offers me a drink. I refuse. I just drank an unopened can of Dr. Pepper which I found amidst the trash, I'm now about to clean. For free.
- Yeah! Just because I can! And because I had about enough of walking along littered lanes of trash in a dirt-rich country like the States.
- I need a friggin' eyesight of rest. Half an hour later the little grasspatch next to the Gasstation looks clean and green and I'm joyfully delighted to sit down on the stony wall next to it. Easy..
- Yes here in Amerika it's easy to spend your dollar, but with genuine emotions you seem to get stuck fast. Thank God, there's some people in this Wild West who listen to His voice.



2: Shelter Business

Thank God, there's some people in this Wild West that listen to His voice.

The Yost-Ice Arena

Home of the Michigan Wolverines. Brian mentioned it relating it to my name which sounds the same.

The following morning before dawn I sneak across the Interstate towards Dunkin'Donuts where I freshen up for the day in one of the restrooms. One of the female employees barges in while i'm brushing my teeth in front of the mirror. “*Oh my God!*” she shrieks as if she has just seen her first cowboy. Jokes aside, she likely didn't expect anyone to be in there that early. However the American people react to my odd presence, i'm enjoying the adventure freely. Even though what i'm seeing isn't very much looking like the Land of the Brave nor does it seem to be the Home of the Free.

Passing through a neat, little neighbourhood in Smyrna in search of the library, yesterday, I noticed a strange stale atmosphere around me. It was as if time had come to a halt, but not quite. A leaf fluttered through air in what almost looked like slow-motion. And aside from the squirrel hopping across an electricity cable into someone's backyard, there wasn't the slightest trace of any activity in or around the neatly modeled American homes. But, quickly I come to learn, that even though I didn't see anyone, I was being seen.

“Hi, I wonder, do you happen to know any churches around here?” It is sunday-morning and I got hold of an older afro-american gentleman stepping out on his property to retrieve a newspaper or something.

“There's a large church around that way and a smaller new church if you'd follow along that road.” he willfully gives me directions.” Little did I know the road ahead was filled with many churches left and right. The guy mentions that he saw me yesterday from his car.

“Yeah I was looking for the library.”

I say slightly relieved I'm having a truthful alibi for having been there. I'm aware, around here I do look rather suspicious in my hiker pants and with my **brandit** backpack. (*see picture above*)

About twenty minutes later I sneak around a beautiful little church building in search of an open door. Having found one, i'm greeted by a man's voice coming from the dark hallway.

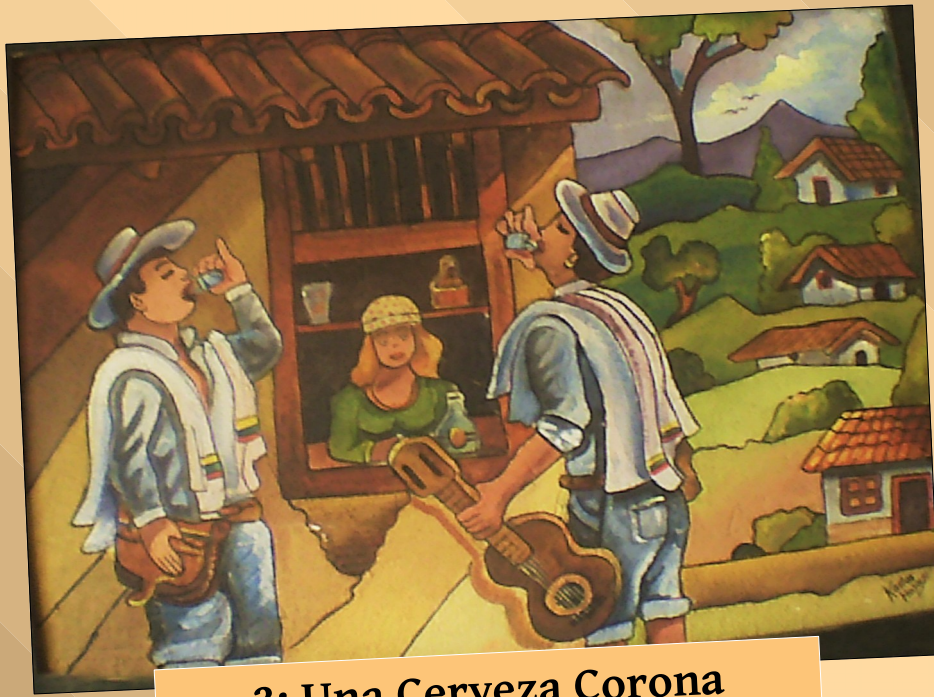
“Hello, my friend.”

“Where are YOU?” I answer, then come face to face with Brian, Pastor of the Oakdale Church. He must have seen me coming over the camera-system, I think. Having exchanged a few words, Brian who like myself has grown up in a faithful household, shows me the church. I feel welcome and relieved i'm dealing with a genuine man of God, not a snakes-oil imposter.

After church service Brian provides me with some food and lets me use his laptop to send a word to my brother and to Faith. Still feeling bad about the way I left the Netherlands, I can't relax into the generous aid i'm receiving here. And even though we're not in the Yost-arena, it seems like we're both maneuvering on ice, never getting quite comfortable. I, in my guards, having crossed the boundary of the Atlantic ocean, on an abrupt plane flight into America on lockdown. Brian in his task as a pastor, providing and taking care of the needy in times of great uncertainty.

I come to find this supposed presence of this corona-virus has an uncanny impact on people's behavior and more than a few times I have the brave americans step back, hearing I come from Germany, Europe. I take it lightheartedly, not intending to mock people's attitude nor to shame them for buying into the next big story. The whole disinfection craze I find stupefying and the people choosing to walk around with face-masks equally. Thank God i'm no virus-expert, but common sense tells me sanitizing with unnaturally smelling chemicals is an oxymoron and breathing air a base premise for life. Preferably the heavenly air that comes from His Spirit.

Brandit: A german brand specializing in making durable outdoor gear and clothing. The founders of the company have said to be inspired by military wear.



3: Una Cerveza Corona

Somewhere in Marietta, GA there is a Mexican restaurant with a waiter named Johnny. As I take a seat in the restaurant the morning after my Kennesaw Mountain adventure, Johnny is the only one present. He walks back and forth and scratches his head and behind. **“I don’t know what’s up today, man. None of the cooks are there yet. I’m not sure if we serve today with this Corona-situation.”**

I like Johnny, even though he is a little foul-mouthed and generally makes a lousy impression. I order a Heineken and tell him I come from Holland, kindly hoping he won’t ask what brings me here. I’m sure me and Johnny both have dirty secrets. Maybe it’s just less visible on me.

“Hey would you like to hear some music?”

Johnny asks me as there is still no cook in the building. Very customer friendly and considerate, that question.

“Sure can you put on some Blues?”

I carefully pick a musical genre with the thought that drinking Heineken and listening to latin-american hipswinging joints doesn’t feel like safe territory this morning. I’m on guard. Ten minutes later there’s still no Blues playing. A few mexicans, among them the owner, have arrived. One of the guys tries to get me into a conversation. I’m initially friendly but some logo on his cap makes me wary. I’m thinking bounty-hunter. Then there’s Johnny who suddenly behaves odd. It’s like someone pulled a switch, short-circuiting the neuron-transmission in his brains. **“Oh yeah, I still have to put on some blues..”**

He vanishes out of sight just to come back a little later as if he couldn’t find the speaker-system. I don’t need no blues anymore. The whole situation is getting shady and having decided against lunching here, I freshen up in the bathroom and ask for the bill. The cashier expects a bold 5 Dollar for the Heineken. I take it with a wry smile and a salty dose of skepticism. It feels like they’re pulling one on me. In response the pretty guy calls Johnny to the front who regurgitates the same price like a robot. A sadness overcomes me. Not because of the expensive beer, but because of the money game and the gloomy destiny of soulless Johnny. To counter the whole with a bit of a human touch, I ask Johnny what he wanted to be as a kid. The answer coming with such carelessness, I already forgot what he said. Only the second part remained. **“I’ll probably always be here.. in the restaurant.”**

The Corona Brand:

This mexican brewed beer takes up the pole position in popularity In the United States. Heineken comes second. Corona is a corn-dominant beer and on the market since 1925. Traditionally it’s enjoyed with a lemon wedge stuffed inside the bottle-neck. To prevent flies landing in the drink.



4: Living Water!

It's a cool morning and I find myself laying in a haystack. Literally, a stack of quadratic bundles of hay from which there is a row missing, enabling me to lay in the stack. Not the most comfortable place to spend the night, but not the worst either. It's predominantly the cold that is making it difficult to get a full night of restful sleep. I brush my teeth and check my face in the small mirror I brought with me. I look just the way I feel. Not too good.

I decide to walk into the Farm Supply Store that is just about to open. The owner is friendly, a farmer, I assume. As I mention the fact that I spend the night outside on the haystack, he is neither mad nor surprised. **"They told me someone was sleeping on the front."** he simply says. I buy an orange and start walking again. My feet and legs still tired from yesterday's track, I have to watch my steps. Both literally and figuratively.

After an hour of walking along the dashlanes i'm mentally relieved to find a little sidetrack, leading me towards some barns and a stable. There are three horses standing on a small patch of dirt They don't seem too interested in me. Further-up there's an older guy loading his trailer. I tell him I was taking a look at the horses, tired of these long roads of American Sale busi-ness. If this is a representative sample of America, i'm dissappointed. Where's the Wild Life? The guy, looking like the long haired character from the Devil's Rejects, is sympathetic to my sentiment.



Some hours later I set foot in Roswell, an old mill town. I enjoy a free Ice-Tea outside a cafeteria and optimistically rejuvenated I decide to explore this little town, that feels like a fresh breath of air to me. It might have something to do with the large off-shoot of the Chattahoochee river that is streaming down here. Sitting on a tree-trunk, my feet peddling in the water, I come to a heavenly rest. Time seems to have stopped, but in stark contrast with the eerie silence I experienced in the picture-perfect neighbourhood in Smyrna, this eternity is full of vigorous life as is apparent in the roaring river which elemental presence surrounds me. Praise God for living water!

1 Cent is a Pennie, 10 Cents are a Dime.

It's the following morning I come to meet Penny, an elderly lady full of spirit. I'm sitting outside in front of a bar, waiting for it to open, as she drives up in her car. The day before I took cover inside for a while, mainly to charge my phone and use the wi-fi. I refused a beer from a pleasant fellow named David, who granted me the honor of being the first dutchmen who declines a free beer.

Penny happens to work at the bar and be a woman of God as well. She tells me David is a cultural jew who together with his orthodox brother owns the place for over thirty years.

We step inside and during cleaning I fill her in about my journey here. We have a good laugh, now and then and it becomes clear to me what stark contrast there should be, between the children of God and the unbelievers. Especially in anxious times. Penny, despite her age, seems a bright light in the otherwise dark locale and the hopeful upbeat in a minor mood. On one of the large television screens hanging over the bar, the professional talking heads of CNN or whatever other mammonic media channel are stirring up the cauldron of impending doom with their blabbering. It's Corona, in all capitals. On another screen there's a wrestle-match of sorts. MMA. Two half-naked guys beating the sense out of one another and the numbminded spectators. I turn my sight away from it's artificial light towards that of my burner phone. It's a challenge using the internet on this thing. I slow-text some messages towards my family. They're usually worried. I'm at ease. Even though I might not get a hold of Faith, i'll go where the Lord leads me.

A free coffee later i'm sitting in Pennies car. ***"My daughter is going to kill me."*** Yet she decided to come back and give the European tourist a ride anyway. I'm cool with it. It gets me onward. We try at a shelter of a christian ministry. And another. To no avail. I don't mind. I'm not to fond of these overregulated ministries anyway. She drops me off at a Salvation Army Store, prays for me, then we say goodbye. As I get up from my seat, there's a penny laying on it. We smile.

PS: If ever you get to read this: Miss Penny, you're a dime.

5: Back to the Draft



The folks at Salvation Army strike me as particularly unsympathetic. Clearly in the States 'christian' is a label worn by the many. And the corona-emergency isn't an excuse for these people to be sulky individuals. The Salvation Army is a business here, not a work of love and the employees seem to be wrapped into it. Outside, I try getting into a conversation with a friendly 'gringo', but my highschool spanish quickly leads me into a rut. It's fine. Friendliness does work even with little words of understanding.

I step back into the store, keeping my eyes out for a present to send to Europe, since US Mail is two doors further-up. I come across a metal US Army airplane in camouflage colors. I decide it to be a present for my uncle, back in Germany. He is my biggest 'fan' if ever I had one. About three years ago he was set free by Jesus from a lifetime of alcohol abuse. He can't walk very far, sits in his small apartment day in day out, but is the best example of contentment I know. Not the 'New Age Yogi-sit still and be' type of contentment, but the internal peace that comes with truly knowing the Lord.

Stepping into the Sports Bar next door I pick a table to write him a letter. I place the toy airplane on the table in front of me. The camouflage matches exactly with the one on the sleeves of my sweater and I feel like i'm being drafted into the Army, writing a letter home to my loved ones. Solid rock-music is playing in the background and a pretty waitress serves me with respect. I write about the American Man; saying he is friendly but surpressed. I write about Faith, who I couldn't meet yet. And I write my uncle to be wary of the corona-scaremongering coming from folks who aren't save in Christ. Of course they are afraid and they have ample reason to!

I head out to find some glue and some scissors, to patch some red crosses on the wings of the plane. I'm not sure wether I'll even make it back to Europe. The air here is thick and the people are stressing. How much would it take to push this nation over the edge?

It's a warm day in Georgia, lack of good sleep is catching up on me, and getting this plane shipped to Europe seems to take hours. I need to eat. In the Greek restaurant located on the same plaza I get a humane boost from a guy behind the counter.

"You allright? You look tired. Here i'll pack you some extra vitamine with your drink."

I look into the bright face of Mark, an energetic guy from Denmark, who tells me he has travelled in over 70 countries.

"I know what it's like to be far from home in a strange country. Here i'll give you my number. If you need something. I'll be off at 7."

I take my food and drink and have my dinner outside on the curb in front of the store. Corona take out measurements. As i'm about ready, the large owner from the store next door comes out a second time. ***"I saw you sitting and wondered if you'd like some doritos?"*** He hands me the half empty bag he was about to finish. ***"Sure, thanks a lot man."*** I can use it and going by his size, he can lose it.

Mark who married the daughter of the Greek Restaurant owner, checks up on me. I tell him about the package I like to send off and he let's me use his address for the formular. I head to the US Mail building to wrap the whole thing up and get it flying. Pssshhtt... I did it!

Meanwhile my next move has already formed in my head. I'll drive with Mark back towards Atlanta and let him drop me off at Pastor Brian's place, where'll ask if his camper is still available. From there on i'll go Grey Hound instead of flatfooting along the Dashlanes.

6: One Call Away

It must've been quite the peculiar sight when I set foot in Hannamill Dr. that final morning of my America adventure. I'd seen the ghetto's, walked the dashlanes and slept the motels. Hell, I even hiked down Kennesaw Mountain in the middle of the night because I was unable to sleep at the cold ridge. But walking into this quiet suburban neighbourhood wearing a neat grey collarshirt in combination with tracker pants and a large backpack, I begin to experience some nervousness. The properties here are extra American large. No one comes here by foot and most definitely not to ring unannounced at the doorbell of the mother who's daughter you have been secretly online-chatting with. But, this is it. Moment of truth.

Funny enough the jamaican taxi-driver who had dropped me off had given me the precise rundown of what would happen. Telling him about my trip, he had gone off in a rant about women and how eager they were to call the cops on you. I had let him spew his frustration, while I occupied a peaceful spot of heart where the battle of the sexes didn't reign. A little later I step on the veranda and knock on the door. Weird to think, I had already been there on the inside of this house.

A friend of the family opens the door. I tell her I know Faith from way back and that I'm here to talk with Mums. So far so good. She tells me to wait and disappears. I'm actually excited to stand there. Then the door swings open again and I stand face to face with the mother who's daughter I had been secretly close with for years. I immediately see this isn't going to work. Fear. Unfortunately.

"Hi, my name is Joost. I know Faith from way back." I try politely.

"Yeah, I know who you are."

Already holding a phone she tells me to leave on the threat of calling the cops if I don't.

Fine. I'm going to stay gentle. As much as I had hoped for a conversation, I'm not going to push in any way. Apparently I'm already branded. The odds and when they are against you. Truth be said, I'm a tad bit afraid I'll end up in an American jail for falling for a girl half my age. Yet I walk off with a sober conscience, but before I reach the end of the street I'm greeted by a police car. The female officer takes a look at my ID and asks what I'm doing here. I tell her, plain and simple. And that was it.

That same day I flew back to the Netherlands. No, I hadn't gotten what I had hoped for, but I had done what God had put upon my heart. Despite everyone intimately involved telling me not to. The odds, and when they are against you. I had peace on my way back. And joy. I danced the waiting halls in Atlanta airport. Only to return into a Netherlands on lockdown. Fear. Unfortunately..

7: Home is where the heart is..

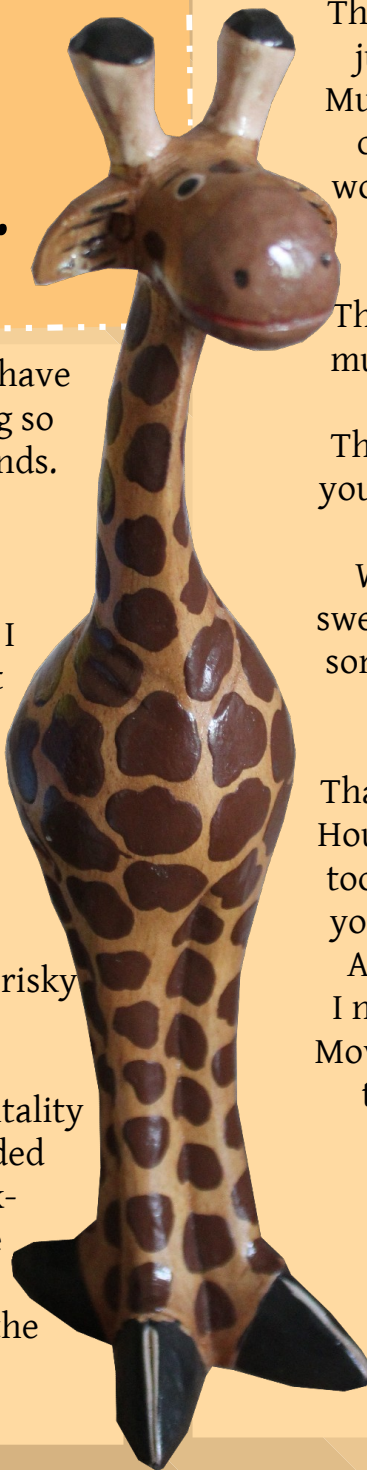
Southern hospitality is a thing and on my trip there have been several people who helped me feel at home being so far away from my dwelling in Kerkrade, The Netherlands. This page is a token of gratitude to those folks.

Thank you **Ricardo** for welcoming me as a friend at Hartsfield-Jackson airport. I won't forget the moment I picked up a pennie and you joyfully commenting on it as if it was the start of a great adventure. And truly it became just that! May God one day restore your legs, so that you can run as fast as Forrest Gump.

Thank you **considerate waitress** at the Waffle House at the Bolton Road for being so free, treating me on a second, orange juice. Yes, I was thirsty.

It was as if God had placed you there at the end of my risky trail through the Atlanta Hoods.

Thank you **Pastor Brian** for being the champ of hospitality and provision. Summing up all the ways you've provided help would make quite a list. I'm not doing God's book-keeping today. I believe what helped me most was the way you aided in thinking along without pushing me in any direction. May God bless you, your family and the Oakdale community richly.



Thank you **Lawrence** for trying to be open and non-judgemental towards me during our exchange at Must-ministries. Not many people know what it is to carry a heart-disease, while being a good sport. I would've enjoyed to workout with a fellow sufferer. Keep kicking it!

Thank you **Johnny** for intending to play me some music on that blue Monday. Or whatever day it was.

Thank you **Mark** for seeing me as a friend. Whether you really are a millionaire or just a con-artist, I can't say! God surely did give you a diverse lifestyle. We'll save the shamanic drumming, hunting and sweat-lodging for another time. Oh yeah, I once made some money with a porn-website as well. Nothing to be proud of, you crazy hack.

Thanks to **the big guy** seating next to me in the Grey Hound Bus for your genuine attention. At first sight, I took you for a lousy guy with a trashy character, but you singlehandedly got rid of my stereotype that all Americans are mindless consumers of Hollywood. I never had thought I would meet a guy calling 'The Movies' for what they are. "It's ALL so FAKE." Imagine that coming from a large gayish afro-american.

*There is many more people I could've mentioned.
God blessed me through all these exchanges, whether there was faith or fear, **which brings us to...***

How' re You doing?

It made me think Georgia folks were really interested in knowing about my well-being, but then they never waited long enough for an answer..

"I feel kinda sad about this.."

Me having brought a little wounded squirrel to a Gainesville vetenarian, signing it's death-contract.

Ghetto-guy showing me his smartphone seeing me navigate with a compass:

"My man, we got these things in 2020 and they're hella accurate, too."



Three Wooden Crosses

There's no way I would've been able to make this trip without the peace of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It was just a year after that horrible night in which I was utterly paralysed by fear and chained in hell. Thank you Jesus for paying the price and buying me free, to be yours.

*"There's three wooden crosses on the right side of the highway
why there's not four of them, heaven only knows."*

(Randy Travis - Three Wooden Crosses)

When I saw those three large wooden crosses standing in a field along the road to Smyrna, I knew I hadn't dreamed this up myself.