

## Conversations with My GPS – A Lesson in Listening to Myself

### Start Your Engine

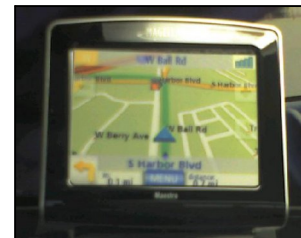


Day 1 of a 14-day car trip by myself: A beautiful day, filled with clear skies, warm sun and an open road. It was a perfect day for a drive through the countryside.

I had a destination to reach the following day. But, for a day, I was totally on my own—free to explore a bit of the lovely countryside that patiently waited.

Alone with my thoughts, I was suddenly tempted by the promise of a scenic by-way. As I chose the new road, my peaceful reverie was suddenly intercepted by a woman’s voice, quietly announcing: “Calculating route.”

Ah, yes, I’d almost forgotten about my new travel companion—my recently purchased GPS (Global Positioning System). Inspired by her brand name (Magellan) and feminine voice, it had seemed only natural to name her “Maggie.”



“Such a pleasant change,” I thought, as I recalled car trips with my late husband, during times when I was driving. Whenever I would choose to stray from a route that he had expected me to take, he would often respond with a startled and impatient “Why did you turn there?” or “Where are you going now?” Followed by either raised voices or stony silence, with an unhealthy dose of blame or shame and hurt feelings thrown in for good measure.



As the days of my journey with Maggie unfolded, I found that—just as she helped me navigate a 2000 mile car trip—she emerged as a kind of metaphor for my inner wisdom as I navigate my personal life journey. With a growing sense of curiosity, I explored various ways I might listen to myself that were nestled within my experience with Maggie as a travel companion.

### A still, small voice

Once Maggie knew our destination, she became like the still, small voice of wisdom inside of each of us—our inner compass. As I neared a turn or an exit, she would always give me gentle spoken reminders, ending with a little chime as I would arrive at the designated exit. Often, especially when on the freeway, she would even let me know that I should “stay on the current road.”

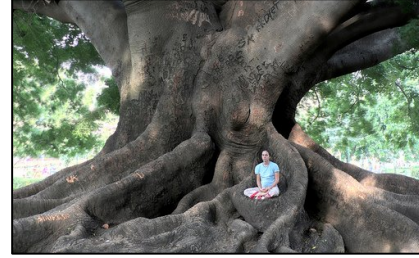
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*Reminder to self:* How often do I check in with myself—my inner wisdom? Do I remember to listen to my “felt sense”—that bodily sense of knowing that I can always trust to keep me on my right path? How often do I ignore that little voice inside of me? How often do I wait until it has to practically shout at me before I stop and pay attention?



### **Maintaining focus**

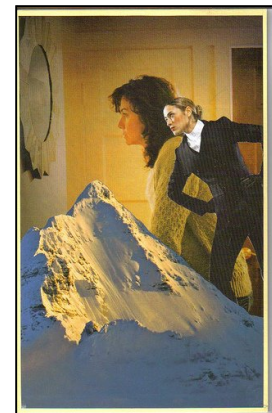
As Maggie started to work, her opening screen would include a reminder to keep my eyes on the road and pay attention to my driving. Brief check-ins with the screen images were ok, but my focus needed to be in the task at hand: driving safely from here to there.



*Reminder to self:* In my daily life, where is my focus? Am I paying attention to the present moment, or am I lost in thoughts and feelings from past events? Am I so bogged down with could’s, should’s and ought’s that I miss the beauty and perfection that surrounds me? When I’m feeling stressed and overwhelmed--not sure of where to turn--do I stop at least long enough to breathe? Do I remember to check in with myself and get my bearings before barreling ahead?

### **The inner critic**

Once I had programmed the desired destination, Maggie offered several alternative settings (i.e., fastest time, shortest distance, most use of freeways or least use of freeways) before creating the recommended route. Whenever I happened to deviate from the route she had provided, Maggie always maintained her equanimity, with never an emotional outburst replacing her ever-present, even-tempered response, “Calculating route.”



*Reminder to self:* That inner critic that often resides inside my brain, is NOT part of my inner wisdom. Is there an effective way for me to silence (or at least ignore) my self-talk settings of blame, shame, snarky and snotty?

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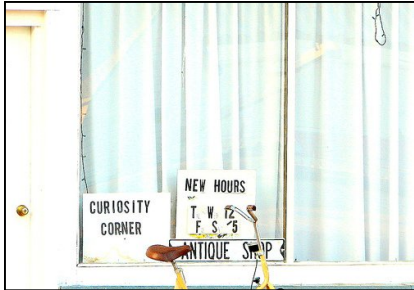
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## A long leash of serendipity

A few times, I evidently chose one too many scenic detours from the established route. However, Maggie declined to pout or offer any snide comments. Instead, in a sort of resigned puzzlement, she quietly invited me to “Say a command,” as her screen offered several options for me to clarify my needs. Once she was reassured of my final destination, she was content to let me continue to explore various byways. Blessedly, she also kept track of my time commitment, so that I could easily arrive at my destination on time.



*Reminder to self:* The more I can honor my creative urges, while respecting necessary deadlines, the less stressful my life will become. Knowing my inherent level of curiosity and my propensity for immersing myself within an exploratory journey of learning, how can I consistently anticipate and include that exploration time into my scheduling process?

## Tuning out the world

On several occasions during the trip, I knew exactly where I was and how to get to where I was going. I was self-assured and confident, my direction was clear. At times, I simply ignored the quiet commands as they occurred (especially easy if the radio or a CD was playing). Once or twice, I actually turned Maggie off, with gratitude for both her willingness to assist, but also for the renewed silence in the car.

*Reminder to self:* Sometimes the chatter from the outside world distracts me from my values and goals. Am I able to separate myself from the distractions that surround me? Am I able to make a well-reasoned decision and move forward toward desired action steps with confidence and without need for outside support and acclamation? And am I willing to bless myself with occasional silence? Do I schedule opportunities to withdraw from the busy push-tug world around me (e.g., by turning off email and cell-phone)?



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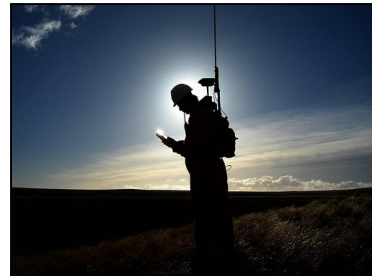
## A personal GPS unit

For all her recognized benefits, Maggie could never quite measure up to being my ideal travel companion and conversationalist. She's a bit too matter-of-fact, with no ability for idle chit-chat. And she seems to have no sense of humor. While I loved her non-judgmental approach, I did miss the opportunity for compassionate and empathetic dialogue.



Interestingly, during the middle of my two week journey, I participated in a Focusing Institute Summer School. During 6 full days, along with about 70 other wonder-full souls, I learned to listen to my “felt sense,” which Ann Weiser Cornell ([www.focusingresources.com](http://www.focusingresources.com)) describes as “a body sensation that has meaning.”

As a result, I returned from my travels with a second fully-functioning personal GPS system. In this case, GPS could mean “grounded power source,” “gut-perfect sensations,” or even “grounded presence, subtly.” This newly tuned device resides deep within my body wisdom, ever ready to compassionately keep me on track. As long as I'm willing and ready to listen.



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