

If Your GPS Said Drive Off a Bridge, Would You?

By George Cunningham

Back in the 60s a lot of people I knew would talk about having an “out-of-body” experience. An “out-of-body” experience is where you would leave your body, float up to some other vantage point, and see yourself down below continuing to do what you were doing before the “out-of-body” experience took place.

It was a mystical and magical moment, which coincidentally usually occurred shortly after ingesting a volume of illegal substances.

For those of you too young to remember the 60s, allow me to say that it was a fun time to be young and alive, especially if you are willing to overlook the political assassinations, the race riots, the campus unrest, and that unfortunate military excursion into Southeast Asia. But I digress.

The scary thing about having an “out-of-body” experience for me is that I have started having them again without benefit of any illegal substances. It happens when I am driving.

I will be tooling down the highway and I will glance over at my electronic navigational device and see that little car going down the same highway I am driving on. And it's as though GPS George is floating up above, looking down on dull earthbound George, except on GPS George's highway, there is no traffic and since GPS George is floating up above it all, he can see things that earthbound George cannot. It may be a lake or an airport a quarter of a mile or so from the highway that poor earthbound George can't see because some trees or other obstructions are blocking his view.

I like being GPS George, although sometimes I worry that earthbound George isn't paying attention to what he is doing. Sometimes I feel like GPS George is going to be watching earthbound George as earthbound George suddenly veers off the highway and crashes into a tree. In my imagination, I can see GPS George, looking down and saying, “Oh my goodness, what a shame.” But in my real brain, which GPS George and earthbound George happen to share, I know that would not be the case.

GPS George would suddenly be reunited with earthbound George and they would both be bleeding and frantically calling for the paramedics.

Sometimes, it works the other way around. A few weeks back, I was leaving San Francisco, driving east across the Bay Bridge to Oakland. Those folks familiar with the Bay Area know that the Bay Bridge has two levels and the eastbound roadway is below the westbound roadway.

When that happened, my electronic navigational device lost its satellite connection. But instead of immediately reporting itself, it decided to fake it. And when the bridge turned a bit, shortly after we got on, the electronic navigational device kept going straight.

When GPS George looked down, he saw himself trying to drive across the middle of San Francisco Bay. His first instinct was to panic. Thank God, earthbound George – as usual – seemed to have things under control.

Earthbound George may be dull, but at least he knew better than to drive off a bridge just because his navigational device thought it would be a good idea.

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