

The Road Less Traveled

Wendi Ezgur

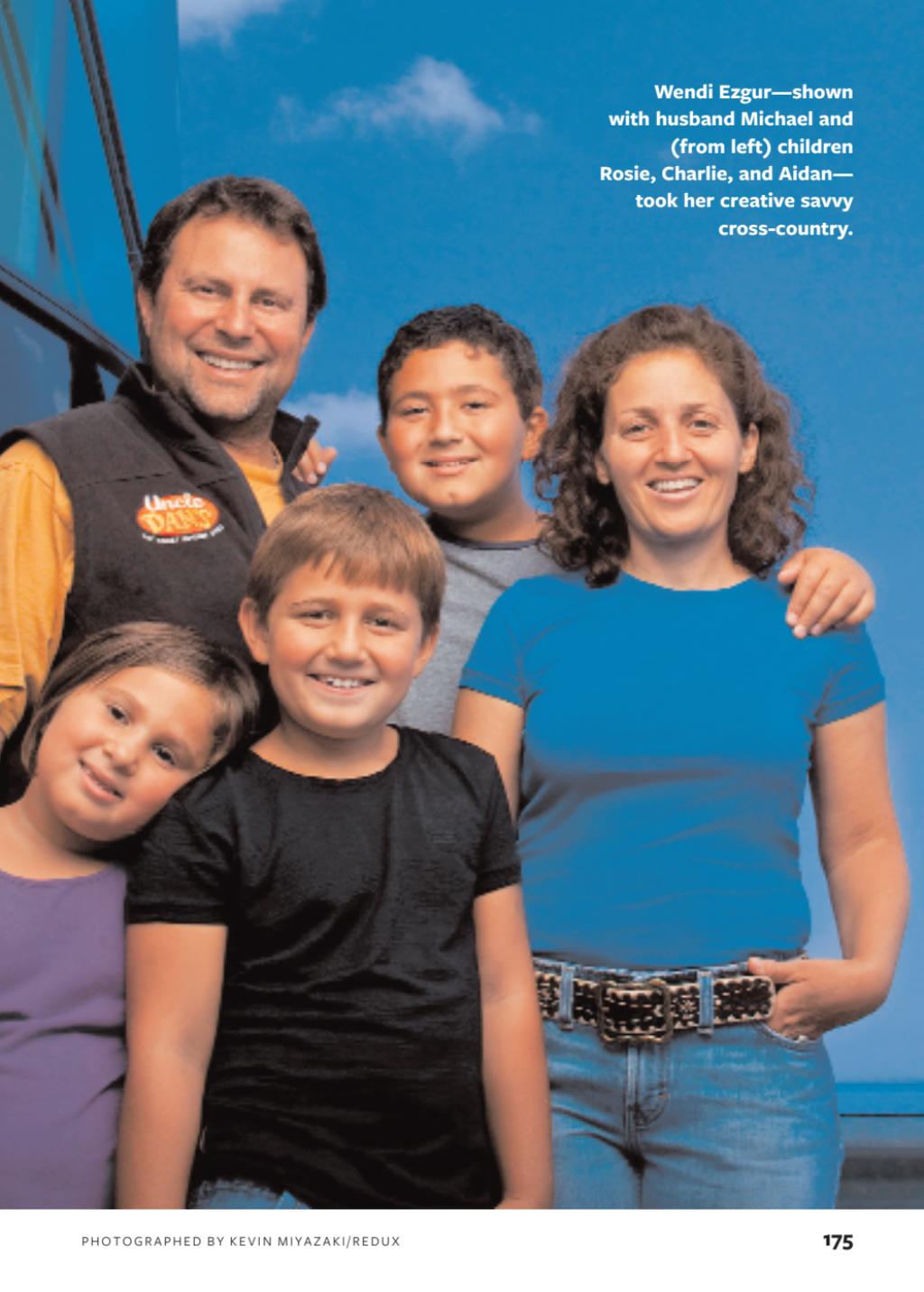
My husband, Michael, an attorney and a co-owner of a real estate development company, came home from work one day and said, "It's not looking good." In the middle of the night, I'd wake up and see him sitting in a chair, with his hand on his forehead. I was worried. I wanted to cheer him up and help us financially.

I've been a corporate consultant for years, brainstorming ideas for top companies such as Campbell's and Mars. I also teach creative thinking at the college level. I thought, What if we embarked on an adventure and monetized it? As a family, we'd always talked about traveling more, but we'd been tied to routines. Now I saw no point in sitting around worrying when we could see the country. We'd take our kids, Aidan, 11, Charlie, 8, and Rosie, 6, out of school and teach them on the road. It was the perfect time, before they reached high school. We'd rent out our house.

I pitched this to Michael: "What if we took a road trip in an RV?" He resisted at first but realized that with his BlackBerry, cell phone, and computer, he could work anywhere.

We listed our house for rent and got a great deal on an RV (no payments for six months). Wearing my idea consultant's hat, I created a brand strategy, logo, and website for us—familyofftrack.com—and secured five major sponsors, including Geico and



A photograph of a family of five—Wendi Ezgur and Michael, and their three children. They are standing outdoors against a bright blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The family is posed in two rows: the adults in the back and the three children in the front. Wendi is on the right, wearing a blue t-shirt and jeans, with her arm around Michael. Michael is on the left, wearing a black vest over a yellow shirt with a logo that reads "Uncle DANNY'S Famous Fish & Chips". The three children are in the front row: a girl on the left in a purple shirt, a boy in the center in a black t-shirt, and another boy on the right in a grey t-shirt.

**Wendi Ezgur—shown
with husband Michael and
(from left) children
Rosie, Charlie, and Aidan—
took her creative savvy
cross-country.**

Encore campgrounds. Their ads on our site would help defray travel costs, and we'd promote their brands in campgrounds on our trip in exchange for their support. Plus, in the RV, we wouldn't spend money on things like dry cleaning and baseball league fees.

We never rented the house, which cost us thousands, but with our minds made up, we took off on April 3. Our first stop: Springfield, Illinois, home of Abraham Lincoln. In the Whispering Gallery at the presidential library and museum, Aidan was blown away by political cartoons of the day that criticized Lincoln for his stance on slavery. I thought, Already we've embedded learning in our trip.

All spring and summer, we visited national landmarks and treasured lands. In the South, we drove along the Natchez Trace, the 444-mile parkway lined with Civil War history. At Bandelier National Monument, in New Mexico, we climbed ladders up to the ancient cliff dwellings of Native Americans and down to their sacred com-

munity prayer pits. And we took swims in Oregon's sparkling rivers. We kept a video blog; Aidan added the music. Rosie made a slide show of photos, while Charlie put receipts in a folder.

By the end of August, we were ready to return home. Michael's company continued to slide and now may have to file for bankruptcy. But he and I spent so much time planning that we're now going to make the RV a permanent part of our lives and reap the rewards: This winter, we hope to make a southeastern run, and next summer, we'll be on the road again. With a Chicago-based production company, I'm developing the Family Off Track brand by creating videos, educational programs, and exhibits. And Michael has new ideas for commercial leasing and management businesses. It's great to see the spark in his eyes again.

I've always felt that my husband and I make a great team. Now I feel it even more. Together we taught our kids a lesson: Nobody ever made history by living 100 percent by the book.

NEEDED: NEW BOYFRIEND

Things were going so well between my new boyfriend and me, we decided to drive out to the country so I could meet his family. I'd heard that his sister and mother were a formidable duo, but during a stroll around their farm, we were getting along great. Then my boyfriend and his father walked ahead, leaving us women behind.

Nervous about the animals in the field that we were crossing, I cried out, "Darling, you aren't going to leave me alone with these scary cows, are you?" *Katy Reiter*

