

December 2003 ▶▶

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- [Restaurant Guide](#)
- [Past Covers](#)



Logan Duran, in the bright blue shirt, third from left.

Alternate Route

The story of a young Winnetka idealist

BY JUDY MARCUS

Clad in baggy, frayed khakis and a white T-shirt, Logan Duran looks a bit rumpled, like he just got off the bus. Which, in fact, he has: the BioBus, an old school bus altered by a friend of Duran's so it could run on vegetable oil. Duran, who hails from Winnetka, and 12 other ecologically-minded Middlebury College students recently drove the bus 6,000 miles across the United States. Sounds a bit wild, but Duran and his classmates in Vermont had a goal: to raise awareness about alternate fuel sources. And, oh yes, to go rock climbing along the way.

"The trip was about getting people to think more creatively about finding solutions to environmental issues," says Duran, who talked about Project BioBus during a stay with his parents in Winnetka last July. Stopping at small-town diners, pizzerias and Chinese eateries along the way, the college kids would pull over to a restaurant — not to fuel up on fast food (they chowed down mostly on camp food: pasta, rice, beans,

December 2003 Articles

- [How Much is that Doggie in the Window](#)
- [Best in Show](#)
- [The Rabbi Reminisces](#)
- [The Story of a Young Winnetka Idealist](#)
- [Nearby Dining](#)

etc.) but to ask if they could have the restaurant's used grease for fuel. "A lot of people just looked at us cockeyed, but after we explained what we were doing, they were really enthusiastic," says Duran. "And we never got rejected from getting oil." The aroma of stale French fries or fat-laden onion rings often hovered over the bus. "It smelled like whatever had been cooked in the oil before," says Duran.

But the smell never overwhelmed Duran's purpose. The former New Trier senior class president (2001) has always thought about ways to serve his community. Every summer during his high school years, Duran participated in Habitat for Humanity through the Winnetka Youth Organization. He also encouraged his classmates to fund and build a Habitat house in Waukegan as a senior class project.

Instead of going directly to college after graduation, Duran spent two and a half months hiking, mountaineering and rock climbing at the National Outdoor Leadership School in the Pacific Northwest. The following February, he entered Middlebury College with a major in environmental studies and geology. This fall, after the BioBus journey ended, 20-year-old Duran moved to Fiji to work as a missionary. "I've been given a lot," he says. "I feel I should give back."

But Project BioBus was unique, proving to the tall, red-bearded Duran that what seems impossible at first can be accomplished if you believe.

Each of the Middlebury students chipped in \$300, but the rest of the funding came from donations. To publicize the use of recycled waste on their cross-country adventure, Duran's 26-year-old sister Danica Elliott, who runs her own design firm in North Carolina, put together Project BioBus' snazzy website (www.projectbiobus.com). On the brightly frescoed side of the bus the students painted the words, "POWERED BY VEGGIE OIL." The BioBus crew also sported "VEGGIES GIVE US GAS" T-shirts. These were great ways to create "an enormous billboard" for the cause, says Duran.

Recycled veggie oil, Duran explains earnestly, gets the same mileage and fuel efficiency as diesel fuel, but the emissions are greatly reduced. Still, Duran doesn't think recycled vegetable oil alone will solve the nation's energy problems. Instead, he suggests the solution to America's love affair with automobiles might also include bio-diesel (a refined vegetable oil product sold at a few gas stations that can be used in vehicles with diesel engines), hybrid and electric cars, hydrogen fuel cells and solar power.

Traveling 6,000 miles from Vermont — crossing West Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois (so Duran could attend the graduation of his 18-year-old brother Brayden from New Trier), Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Washington — and finally landing in California, Duran and his companions never had arguments or a major bus breakdown. There were no injuries either, except for a friend's bike, which Duran accidentally ran over while backing up the bus. After making its grand finale at the Marin County Fair, the bus was sold on e-Bay for \$2,375 (Duran and his pals originally paid \$1,500) to an Oakland bluegrass group. The group plans to use it for touring and will continue to promote it as an operable, "reused vegetable oil-fueled" vehicle.

Duran doesn't know where he will be stationed in Fiji during his two-year stint as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He doesn't know whether he'll live in "an apartment or a hut." But although the

Fiji mission is more about service than soul searching, Duran hopes the experience may help him "figure out what to do with my life."

Still, if his past is a true reflection of his future, it's likely Duran will end up doing many important, civic-minded things throughout the course of his life. For this self-possessed young man, the journey is clearly more important than the destination.



Top

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