



# Walden on Wheels: On the Open Road from Debt to Freedom

*Ken Ilgunas*

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The story of a student who went to extraordinary lengths - including living in a van on a campus parking lot - to complete his education without sacrificing his financial future. In a frank and self-deprecating voice, memoirist Ken Ilgunas writes about the existential terror of graduating from college with \$32,000 in student debt. Inspired by Thoreau, Ilgunas set himself a mission: get out of debt as soon as humanly possible. To that end, he undertook an extraordinary 3-year transcontinental journey, driving to Alaska and taking a series of low-paying jobs. Debt-free, Ilgunas then enrolled himself in a master's program at Duke University, using the last of his savings to buy himself a used Econoline, his new "dorm." The van, stationed in a campus parking lot, would be an adventure, a challenge, a test of his limits. It would be, in short, his "Walden on Wheels." Ilgunas went public in a widely read Salon article that spoke to the urgent student debt situation in America today. He offers a funny and pointed perspective on the dilemma faced by those who seek an education but who also want to, as Thoreau wrote, "live deep and suck out all the marrow of life."

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