



RELUCTANT TRAVELER
EUGENE LEVY

KICKING HIS OWN BUCKET LIST

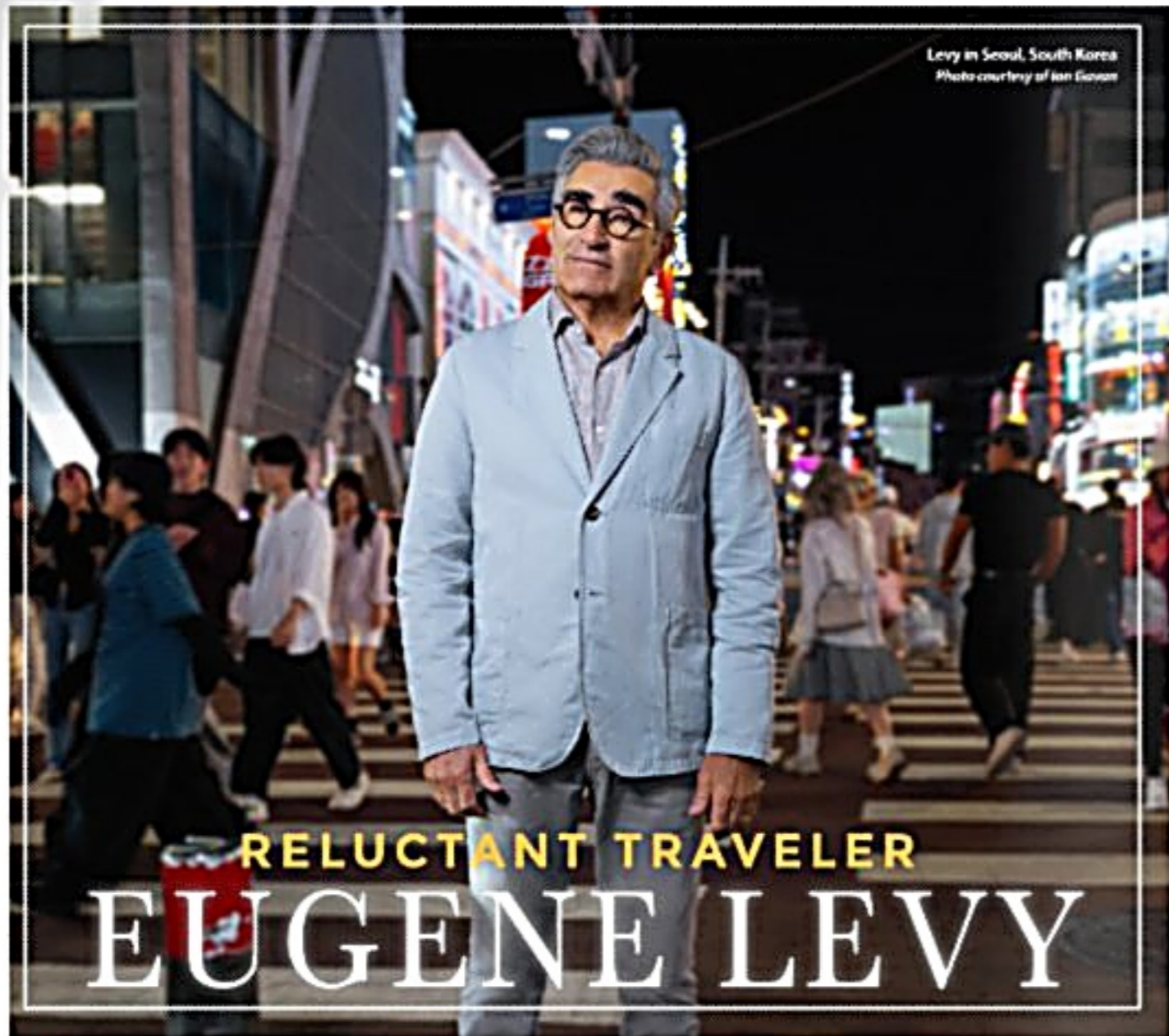
by Margie Goldsmith

Eugene Levy, considered “Canada’s National Treasure,” is also one of Hollywood’s most popular comedic actors. He has appeared in over 60 television shows and motion pictures, including *Schitt’s Creek*, *Best in Show*, *Waiting for Guffman*, *For Your Consideration*, *A Mighty Wind*, *Finding Dory*, *Splash*, *Armed and Dangerous*, and countless others. He won a New York Film Critics Circle Award and Grammy Award® for *A Mighty Wind* and a Golden Globe® nomination for *Best In Show*. *Schitt’s Creek* swept the Canadian Screen Awards, winning nine of ten categories. From the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television, Levy received the prestigious Legacy Award (along with co-star and long-time collaborator Catherine O’Hara). He won two Emmys® as a writer for SCTV.

Eugene Levy in Oaxaca, Mexico for the third season of “The Reluctant Traveler With Eugene Levy.” Photo courtesy of Christina Belle



Levy in the Signiel Seoul hotel at the Lotte World Tower in Seoul, South Korea. Photo courtesy of Ian Gavan



Up until three years ago, award-winning actor/writer/producer Eugene Levy avoided travel, which he considered beyond his comfort zone. "My life was steady, predictable, and reassuringly repetitive," he says. Yet, in 2023, he agreed to host an original travel show, *The Reluctant Traveler*, for Apple TV+, which turned out to be a life-changing decision. Says Levy, "Even though the experiences were often uncomfortable, travel transformed me." Eugene Levy is currently starring in the third season of *The Reluctant Traveler*, eight episodes that send the iconic comedian to Austria, Canada, England, India, Ireland, Mexico, South Korea, and the United States.

Levy says, "The tough thing about starting this show was I had to be myself, and I'm not really an open person, so it was an emotional experience. But now that I'm considered something of a traveler, I've challenged myself to complete my own bucket list before actually kicking the bucket." His famous black eyebrows shoot up as he continues, "I did a lot of research, kept an open mind, and came up with a list of my own. I'd be a liar to say these experiences have not made my life richer, because you're only passing through once. I'm inching closer to being a more seasoned traveler, but I'm not there yet. However, my enjoyment in discovering and appreciating different countries and cultures has grown considerably."

Levy begins the new season of *The Reluctant Traveler* with a bucket-list journey to Mexico, a country visited by more Americans than anywhere else on the planet. He is not there to visit the typical touristy places such as Acapulco or Cabo San Lucas. He has arrived in Oaxaca to immerse himself in Mexico's Day of the Dead, a yearly festival which dates back to the Aztecs and embraces death as part of celebrating life. Along the way, he meets Rosario, the first female Mezcal maker to make the spirit the old-fashioned way: chopping up the agave plant, roasting it, pounding out the liquid, then adding spices, fruits, and a raw chicken. Levy makes a disgusted face and says, "Chicken is an ingredient in an alcoholic beverage? I prefer it Southern fried." Later, as he tastes the Mezcal, Rosario admits it's 61% alcohol. "I hope there's a smile on people's faces when they remember me," Levy says dolefully.

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His guide, Samuel, a fifth-generation Zapotec weaver, invites Levy to a family dinner but first sends him out alone to the market to buy raw chocolate and chapulines. Levy makes a face when he finds out that chapulines are grasshoppers. At dinner, Samuel encourages Levy to try the delicacy, and Levy refuses. "But they have so much protein," argues Samuel. Levy answers, "So does milk."

Levy loves classical music and, in another episode, travels to Vienna to attend the Philharmonic Ball. First, he must take dance lessons from his chosen partner. Admitting he is a terrible dancer, Levy says, "She better have two steel cleats on her feet." Before the ball, he assists the chef, who is making thousands of specialty desserts. Levy's job is to spread pink icing on a tiny cake, but as he tries, his cake tilts sideways. "Uh-oh," Levy says, "This one needs a priest."





In another episode, Levy decides to hit the open road through Louisiana's Cajun Country to New Orleans on a three-day RV road trip with a local guide. Says Levy as he tentatively enters the oversized vehicle, "RV stands for Recreational Vehicle, but I always thought it stood for Ruined Vacation." His guide, Will, explains that RVs always have names. What does Levy want to call it? "How about Nightmare?" suggests Levy. They decide on "Old Shaky."

Their first night's stop is in an RV Park. In Cajun Country, food is friendship, and for dinner they join a local crawfish boil. At first, Levy doesn't want to eat the crustacean but finally tries one and likes it. He also gets on stage and plays washboard with the band, a huge grin on his face. "There's an enormous sense of community with some of the friendliest people I've ever met," Levy says after they leave the party.

The next day, they stop for snacks, and Will asks Levy to buy him boiled peanuts. In the store, Levy tastes one, makes a horrible face, spits it out, and says, "Why do people in Louisiana boil their peanuts?" The shop owner says, "For the people who don't have teeth – and there's a lot of them."

The series is much more than Levy's ad-libbed quips and jokes. The last night of the RV excursion, roasting marshmallows over a campfire, Levy and Will share a heart-to-heart exchange about coming out – Will to his father, and Eugene's son, Daniel Levy, to Eugene. It is one of the season's most emotional highlights. Says Levy, "I discovered a sense of connection I hadn't expected, not to mention taking a vacation in an RV that I never would have considered a few years ago. My thing was always the sooner we get there, the better. But this was a great lesson in not getting there as fast as you would like, because there are always things to see along the way."

In another episode, Levy goes to Galway, Ireland, to share a Saint Patrick's Day adventure with his daughter, Sarah. He travels to Seoul, South Korea, to meet K-pop stars and dance with them. He flies to Rajasthan, India, to meet some cricket legends. Next stop: Vancouver to meet up with his friend, singer/songwriter Michael Bublé. Levy admits to Bublé, "My bucket list is to try everything once, because you never know when you'll get another chance, especially at my age." [He recently turned 79 years old.]

But Eugene Levy's most impressive trip is to London, where he is personally invited by the Prince of Wales for a private tour of Windsor Castle. As Levy somewhat nervously waits in



Levy staying at Casa Silencio in Oaxaca, Mexico
Photo courtesy of Apple TV+



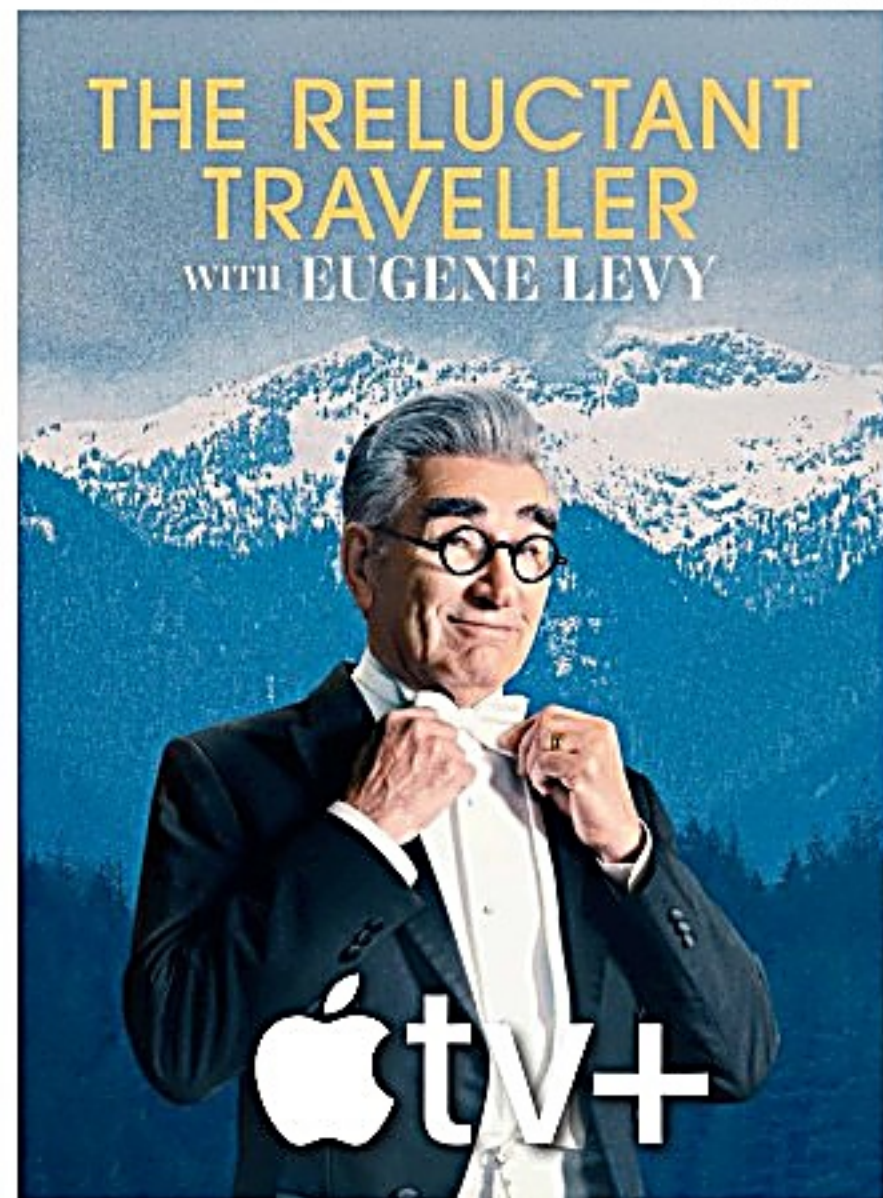
Will Edmond and Eugene Levy in Louisiana
Photo courtesy of Christine Bell



Levy with Prince William at Windsor Castle
Photo courtesy of Ian Giovan

the quadrangle, Prince William arrives on a motorized scooter. Levy says, almost to himself, "He's certainly not afraid to roll with the times." So, what did Levy expect in meeting the prince? "I didn't know what to expect," he says. "But Prince William really set the tone. He made me feel a lot better and comfortable. Quite honestly, when he pulled up, I didn't even know how to address him. I mean, am I allowed to shake his hand? But again, it was how gracious he was, making it so informal and casual and conversational. He's charming and approachable."

First, the prince takes Levy on a private tour of Windsor Castle, the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world. Then, they walk with Prince William's dog through the gardens and finally adjourn to a nearby pub for a pint. Levy asks William what is most important to him, and the prince responds, "My family." Levy says, "We're all sweating the same stuff: work, health, and family, that's true even for a future king."



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So, what was the takeaway from meeting the future king? Says Levy, "I came away with my own personal sense that this was going to be a reinvigorated monarchy, that the formalities might not be the same."

What else did Eugene Levy learn about his quest? "I thought a bucket list was all about the big-time epic adventures, and sometimes that's true. I've also found that even in the grandest of settings, it's the little things that stay with you—the quiet conversations, becoming comfortable with things that are unfamiliar, and learning you don't have to go to the ends of the earth to discover something new. I'd be a liar to say these experiences haven't made my life richer, because they have."

Was getting a chance to meet Prince William on his bucket list? Levy says, "Well, that's the bucket." His eyebrows shoot up. "And as bucket lists go, this is going to be pretty hard to top – borderline impossible." •