that they couldn’t get worked out. She answered all of my questions about what she and my dad were doing, and what decisions were being made to go along with the final settlements. My sister and I would be living at home with Mom, and Dad would be renting an apartment in Chicago. Holidays would be different in that my parents would switch off spending time with us. This meant my sister and I would spend one holiday at home with Mom, and the next one out with Dad. It was a very difficult and emotional time for us, but we had each other to look to for support: me, my sister, and my mom. My family.

My sister and I still see my dad, but things are different. We’re not as close as we used to be, and I know he regrets that as much as we do. We see my dad on certain weekends during the year. Dad takes us out to eat, to the movies, or back to his apartment to order a pizza and talk about our lives. During the summer, we still take vacations on our boat, but this time there is only the three of us.

Overall, I think things have worked out for the best. My parents still have their disagreements occasionally when my dad comes to pick up my sister and me for the weekend. But at least the fights aren’t everyday anymore.

Life isn’t much different at home than it used to be. We still get by with just the three of us, and in some ways I think it’s made us stronger as individuals. For instance, instead of relying on my dad like we used to when appliances break, we’ve learned to fix them ourselves. I’ve learned to rely on myself a little more since the divorce, and I’ve learned to value relationships and to always try and make things work even when it seems like a lost cause.

THE ROAD TO LIBERATION
by
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To most restless sixteen-year-olds, obtaining a driver’s license is a big deal. To me, it was nothing short of monumental. Driving, however, was at first anything but fun for me. In fact, going down the freeway with Mr. Merkler, my drill-sergeant-esque instructor, is something which still pulls me from my sleep every now and again. My dreams usually involve driving to the Mexican border at an incredible speed in a car with an emergency break about as big as good old Don Merkler himself. The cops
are on our tail because of some unpaid parking tickets or something. Merkler's face turns beet red as he shouts to me, "Pass this semi NOW, Fett, or I won't give you your waiver!" He begins to cackle so loudly that it almost drowns out the torturous sounds of the dreadful radio station, Oldies 101.7. Actually, the dreams aren't too far off from reality, or at least, that's how I remember it. However, since then, driving has taken on a very different meaning in my life. There is nothing, in my mind, that compares to the freedom of the open road.

When I use the term "open road," I don't mean the stretch between my house and the nearest Amoco station. There is a big difference between making a "food run" and taking an authentic road trip. The open road upon which these trips are made is not simply a road that you drive over. Rather, it carries you. It is a road that you ride with a purpose. The destination in this case is only half of the purpose. In fact, there doesn't even have to be a predetermined destination or stopping-off point. The trip itself becomes liberating and inspiring if you are able to take in the scenery and see the big picture. I remember the first time I saw this "big picture." I was sitting in a plane over Arizona somewhere when an analogy came to mind as I gazed at the intricate network of roads and highways below me. The roads became veins which were embedded in the flesh of the various landscapes. The landscapes became organs and tissue and other larger parts which support the whole. The veins were the passageways through which various kinds of blood cells travelled to bring life to the body as a whole. The blood cells that brought this life to the body were travellers bringing life, in the same way, to the country. Just as a body cannot survive without the flow of its blood, the land cannot thrive without its travelers.

I was once again reminded of this when three of my friends and I decided to make the drive from Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Clearwater Beach, Florida, during our Spring Break last year. The trip was an inspiration, not just because I was independent during that week, but because I had the entire world spread out before me like a life-size map. It's funny, but I swear I can vividly remember every stretch of land from the oak trees to the palm trees. We took turns driving in shifts of about five or six hours. When I was not driving, I would fix my gaze out the window at the world that seemed to flow as we drove by it. The view from the side window was constantly changing as if it were racing to keep up with us. The sky overhead intensified and dulled its hues as if it were a giant mood ring in the sky. It seemed to me like the view changed with the music we listened to. When we listened to softer or more mellow music like Simon and Garfunkel or Tori Amos, it seemed as though the inspiration for the song playing at that time had been the view that we now saw. When we played louder, more passionate music like Pearl Jam or Soundgarden, whoever was driving at the time would suddenly pick up speed and the previous smoothness of the road and the view would disappear into sharper images and grooves in the road. Led Zepelin had a pace all their own. It was like that road was listening to us.

Oftentimes, back in Fort Wayne, if nothing was going on, my friends and I would simply drive around trying to find something different to do in the town we thought we knew so well. One of my friends had a convertible which was more like a limousine to us. Some
who would ride with us would worry about their hair and try to hold it back. But the rest of us knew that there was nothing like the feeling of the wind running its fingers though your hair as the whole town became an open book. We usually ended up finding a party or some people worth stopping for, but even if we didn’t, we were content just driving. No matter how far we went, the moon was always a constant distance from us, reminding us how we are all insignificant from its point of reference.

Sometimes, when I was having trouble sleeping, I would get out my father’s Atlas and plan routes I would take to the various places with intriguing names and shapes that caught my attention. There are at least twenty bodies of water that I have promised I would get to see someday. There are countless towns that I have sworn to visit as well. One of my dreams is to leave the map behind completely and just go wherever the signs take me. I’ve experimented with this sort of thing before, but it was never long term and it never covered great distances.

One time in particular comes to mind. When the plane I spoke of earlier actually touched the ground, we had a vacation in Sedona, Arizona. We stayed in a resort called the Villas of Poco Diablo which was much too sheltered and secluded for my taste. One afternoon, my cousin and I took the car out to see what the Arizona highways had to offer. We stopped many places along the road, mostly just to hike up the hills and rocks to observe the wildlife. On our way back to the resort we passed a structure that rested on top of the red rocks. We stopped the car and walked up its path. The building at the end of the path was the Chapel of the Holy Cross. It was not a chapel where regular services were held, but rather, it was an independent place of worship and meditation. I was ready to abandon my social church services at home forever the second I saw the view from this chapel. A large cross serves as the pane for an even larger window at one end of the chapel. I can’t describe exactly how the setting sun touched the red rocks and made them blush as the sky darkened. All I can really say is that through that glass you can see God’s country.

The thing that gives me such passion for riding the open road is not necessarily the hope that I will always come to places such as these. The things that make it so liberating to me is the fact that you are free to stop wherever you feel you should. There is always a place worth stopping for. Every ten miles or so seems to tell its own story. When you are taking all of this history in at such speed, it is as though you have built upon your own history and your own identity. You get the feeling that any part of this land would welcome you to make it your home.

My parents and friends know that I have a tendency to get lost while trying to follow directions to an unfamiliar place. In fact, sometimes I get lost on my way to places that I know well. It is not that my sense of direction is lacking. I simply like to try different ways to get to the same places. Driving one stretch of road day in and day out makes you feel as though your car were on rails. Driving without destination makes you feel like a bird sailing aimlessly from treetop to treetop, resting only to take in the scenery.
One of my favorite movies is *Pulp Fiction*. At the end of this movie, one of the main characters gives up his life of crime to "walk the earth" upon receiving inspiration from what he felt was divine intervention. Taking road trips is like walking, or rather, riding the earth to me. It is something that I will always do because, like the character from *Pulp Fiction*, it is how I find sense of self. It is how I put my life into perspective. It is also a way to see a new part of myself with every turn. Most of all, it is a way for me to get a feeling for my home outside the bounds of my every day life. I know that there is so much more out there to be seen and done. What better way to do it than being your own tour guide? The road never sleeps, it is always beckoning its travelers. Millions of people drive great distances without ever really leaving. They have never seen the open road. Mileage means nothing if it cannot tell you something.

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**LEARNING THE REAL MEANING**

by

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My favorite part of each summer was the Fourth of July. My parents were teachers, so our summers were spent traveling to new places and learning new things. But no matter what my family was doing each summer, the Fourth of July never changed. There was always a parade in the morning, with the loud marching bands and Uncle Sam on stilts. We always went to the carnival in the afternoon; I liked the wild rides, but had trouble finding anyone to ride with me. Dinner was cooked on the grill and we never missed the fireworks. We would sit in the grass on our blankets, and gasp and applaud as the thousands of exploding lights would ignite with a BOOM! Rain or shine, if the fireworks were on, we were there.

The summer before my freshman year in high school I got the opportunity of a lifetime. The problem was I didn't know that at the time. My parents had saved and planned and were taking my brother and me to Europe and England. We would spend one glorious month traveling abroad, and all I could worry about was leaving my boyfriend! Not to mention the fact that we would be gone for the Fourth of July. Who wants to spend the Fourth in a place where it is just like any other day?