

A Simple Car Ride

Memories from the road in Ulster County.

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I remember sitting in the backseat of the white, four-door Ford Maverick my mother had in the mid-1970s, with the windows cranked down all the way, my father driving, Mommy in the front passenger seat, and my sister on her side of the dividing line of the black, leather-like upholstery.

"Where are we going?" I would ask.

"For a ride," was the answer.

A ride. We might go for ice cream at the custard stand in Pine Bush on the corners of Routes 52 and 302. I mentally went through the menu but knew all along I would simply ask for a small dish of vanilla. It would come in a sturdy cardboard dish with a red spoon. Maybe sprinkles? Maybe not. I always admired my dad's ability to eat an entire banana split, which would be served in a blue boat with pineapple, chocolate, and strawberry toppings and a pillow of rich, whipped cream topped with bleeding maraschino cherries.

The clue to our destination would be if we drove toward or away from Pine Bush. I was blissfully unaware of things like east and west; I only knew if my father drove in the opposite direction from the custard stand we would watch the golden sun set, passing through streaks of hot pink and red clouds, before dipping down below the horizon and the tops of the cornstalks on the way to Ellenville.

If Ellenville was the choice, we would pull over, and simply take in the scenery. The Nevele would always be pointed out as a landmark though I had never been there. The twinkle of headlights and glow of red rear lights from the cars in the distance were mesmerizing. Although I had no real concept of miles or feet, it certainly felt majestic to be looking down from such a high elevation.

I also remember stopping here on weekends to watch the hang-gliders in motion, imagining what it must feel like to run to the end of a ledge then leap off, trusting the apparatus would indeed allow you to float gently back to earth.

We would start the drive back home once the sun had set; the breeze was cooler, and it no longer felt like the skin of my legs was sticking to the seat. The gentle motion of the car swaying through the many turns as we headed back down to our side of the mountain was calming. My father asked if we would want to ride a bicycle down the steep, curvy hills, and we all wondered how fast we could actually go on two wheels, if we would fall, and if the experience would be thrilling or scary.

No photos exist of these moments, but those memories are deeply engraved and bring me back to the glory days of childhood with my family — on a simple car ride.

Sharon MacGregor has lived in the Hudson Valley her entire life, where she raised a family with her husband, and developed a passion for writing, eating, and writing about eating.