

Nonfiction

If I Could

by Megan Gentry

“Good Morning, Birmingham! It’s 7:00 and here’s your morning commute...,” the car radio greets me as the pinkish yellow burn from the morning sun commands my windshield and obstructs my view no matter how I adjust the visor. I’ve been driving a good eight hours straight, with at least three more to go. My best friend is about to get on a plane bound for Spain and I’m going to be there to see her off. Tomorrow I’ll turn right back and head westward home.

My parents think I’m crazy. I suppose it’s not that usual for college girls to head out for whirlwind road trips, especially ones that begin at 11:00 at night. But I’d do it every other weekend if I could. Actually, if I really could I’d just not come home. I’d just drive.

My mother jokes that my grandfather must have had some gypsy blood in him. The man knew his way across the United States highway system just like he knew the right time for planting, when one of his cows would calf, or how to take apart an old clunky engine and put it back together to hear it purr. He’d trek coast to coast, his wife and five daughters in tow, never looking at a map to gauge his direction. He just knew.

When I was small I loved hearing my grandmother tell me stories about how she and Grandpa would travel across country for weeks at a time, him driving the whole way. When he’d get sleepy, they’d pull off to some campground and my Grandpa would climb up on a picnic table to take a quick nap while my Granny would prepare some lunch for him and the

girls.

"I want to sleep on a picnic table," I would remark, awestruck at the sheer quirkiness and carefree way that my now fading grandparents used to live.

"No. You most certainly will not," interjects my mother, cutting her eyes at me.

"It was a different time, sweetheart," my Granny tries to console me, "People was different back then."

My Grandpa died when I was a senior in high school. The gypsy spirit he seemed to breathe didn't, though. My mom has it. But responsible adulthood nearly snuffs it out, sometimes. She's tied down with a job and a family. She can't drive 1,000 miles in a weekend just on a whim. I'm not tied down—not as much as my mom is, anyway. But even I can't just pick up and go anytime I want.

There are papers to write. Tests to study for. Money to save.

But if I could. If I could, I'd take a big deep breath of my Grandpa's gypsy spirit. I'd pack a few changes of clothes. A loaf of bread. A jar of peanut butter. I'd fill the gas tank.

I'd throw a map in the glovebox, just in case.

"Good morning, Birmingham!" I'll say as I head eastward, or northward, or southward, or westward, once again.