



# The Roads that Made Us

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**B**EING ON THE ROAD IS ITS own kind of aphrodisiac. Your senses are on full alert. You're faced with uncertainty, but forward you go.

There had been so many chances to get to know the golden-haired boy with the gray-blue eyes in the university neighborhood where we met, but it wasn't until we got on I90 that sparks began to fly. That our relationship was forged in motion, tracks.

We met in the spring of my senior year at a campus music festival. He was a year ahead, in graduate school at a nearby university, but had returned to see friends. A few weeks later, we exchanged words at a house party. When I moved in with a mutual friend, he'd stop by to chat and the three of us made good friends. I didn't see him as boyfriend material because I was

recovering from a break up; my search lights were turned off.

By Labor Day weekend, he, our mutual friend, and I decided to get out of the city. We were on post-graduate budgets. He had the car, tent, and camping experience. She and I had just enough money for gas and snacks. So we headed north from Chicago in his Toyota to Devil's Lake State Park in Wisconsin. We pitched the tent and walked the paved road that took us to a steep mountain trail. Our friend walked ahead, taking pictures. The golden-haired boy said something—I wish I could remember what—and I thought: *I like the way this guy's mind works.*

Though I'd known him some months by then, it was on that road that I saw him for what felt like the first time. I hadn't noticed the twinkle



in his eyes. His pinked cheeks. The hop in his step.

Fit and in our twenties, it took little time and effort to climb those immense quartzite boulders. When we reached the plateau overlooking the bluffs and the lake, we sat on the rocky cliff and absorbed the view. My roommate wandered off to take more photographs, capturing a moment between him and me confirming that something had just changed.

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All of these memories came flooding back during a recent return to that state park. I was determined to find that spot and mark it using the photograph and a good map to guide us. This time, however, it was one cautious step at a time, stopping frequently to catch our breath. What had taken minutes to summit decades before took three times as long. The view overlooking the bluffs was just as spectacular, but the bushes had become trees and the lake line, like our hairlines, had receded. It was late winter and the lake was frozen. Forty years before, the vista was in full summer bloom. Neither the trail, nor we, were the same. It felt like we were there for the first time. It felt odd, given that the life we'd made together began here. We just had a few more miles on us.

We carefully lowered ourselves on that rock formation. As one of our

companions searched for the right angle to take the shot, I looked into the still blue-gray eyes of that boy's face and thought: *I still like the way his mind works but also, now, his heart.*

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Driving, walking, biking, or skiing with someone on the road separates you from your original context, putting you in the center of each other's attention, outside of attachments and familiar surroundings. Like making—or falling in—love, you enter a liminal space, separate from anywhere else that allows whatever relationship is destined to take shape. All told, it took three roads—an expressway, a paved road, and a mountain trail—to shift what was revving up between us into a life together, each of those roads contributing a unique surface, sound, and sightline.

The roads brought us here and they keep us here too. When we can, we get into a car, on a bike or skis, or in sneakers, boots, or sandals. Whether it's on asphalt, concrete, grass, sand, dirt, stone, or snow—road, street, path, or trail—getting on the road brings us back to one another.

Three Labor Day weekends after that trip, we began a journey of an entirely different kind as we stood before a rabbi, family, and friends in my parent's backyard at the end of a long gravel road. ✱

