

京大過去問 2000年 第2問

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On my second day, I drove along Route 5, which follows closely along Lake Erie, and which, mile after mile, is absolutely gorgeous. Even a fruit stand I stopped at overwhelmed me with its earthy grandeur: dark purple Concord grapes set out in brown baskets, blushing peaches crowding each other on wooden tables, green apples in bushel baskets, all smelling of fall.

I drove through the morning, before taking a break at a boat-launch site where I brought out a piece of my cinnamon bread to feed a lone seagull I saw. (1)But within seconds, there were a good 20, squawking loudly, hanging suspended in the air like live mobiles. I took several photographs that failed miserably at capturing the beauty of my time at the edge of that vast body of water. You had to be there, as they say. You had to smell the air so clean it seemed bleached, feel the perfect warmth of the day against your bare arms, hear the shrill cries of those greedy, greedy birds, see the sun sparkle in the glassy curls of the waves. You had to stand still with your eyes closed, and feel with your feet on the face of the earth.

When you drive so many miles, you get in a lot of good thinking time. (2)I experienced the rich kind of meditation that occurs only when you reach a nearly selfless state of relaxation. I felt as though my life spread out on either side of me, airing itself out so that it could come back into me, refreshed.

When I saw the red sun hanging low in the sky, I knew I had to get back on the highway and make better time. I gulped more coffee, got more gas, turned the radio up loud. And the next time I got out of the car, I was home in Boston.

“How was your trip?” my daughters asked.

“I got a quilt,” I said as though it were an answer.

Here’s the real answer:

It can be incredibly time-consuming and uncomfortable to drive a long distance. But it’s worth it, for the way your imagination gets off the leash. You drive past a house in a small town, and you wonder: Who lives there? What do they do for a living? Who’s in their family, and what do they call their dog? You see a stranger walking down a random sidewalk, and you wonder what he dreams at night. You drive past a farmhouse and think, What is it like to eat breakfast in that kitchen? To walk in those fields? To fall asleep in that bedroom so close to that maple?

(3)In the beginning, we humans did not settle away from each other. We did not keep to ourselves or to lonely, outer borders. We were curious, drawn to one another, comforted by our similarities and inspired by our differences. We are still that way, I think. This trip showed me that. It also showed me that the America I remembered still exists. I drove for more than a thousand miles in a car smelling of cinnamon, my heart filled to the stretching point by the beauty of the land and the people who live here. That is why this is a love story. And that is why I believe everyone should, at least once, forget about airports and enjoy a close-up look at what is still here in this country, and free for the taking, if only we will slow down and look.