

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Honors Theses

Undergraduate Research

2013

Revisiting the Oregon Trail in Young Adult Fiction: Researching, Drafting, and Revising Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request: an Oregon Trail Adventure

Laurel Beedle

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/honors>

Recommended Citation

Beedle, Laurel, "Revisiting the Oregon Trail in Young Adult Fiction: Researching, Drafting, and Revising Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request: an Oregon Trail Adventure" (2013). *Honors Theses*. 78.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/honors/78>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.



Seek Knowledge. Affirm Faith. Change the World.

Thank you for your interest in the

Andrews University Digital Library

Please honor the copyright of this document by not duplicating or distributing additional copies in any form without the author's express written permission. Thanks for your cooperation.

J. N. Andrews Honors Program
Andrews University

Honors Thesis

Revisiting the Oregon Trail in Young Adult Fiction: Researching, Drafting, and Revising
Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request: An Oregon Trail Adventure

Laurel Beedle

1 April 2013

Primary Advisor: Dr. Beverly Matiko
Secondary Advisor: Dr. Bruce Closser

Primary Advisor Signature: _____

Secondary Advisor Signature: _____

Department of English

Table of Content

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Chapter One: Grandpa Jesse’s Peculiar Request.....	12
Chapter Two: The Solution.....	19
Chapter Three: Alcove Spring.....	26
Chapter Four: Greenhorns.....	30
Chapter Five: Jalapeños and Chocolate Milk.....	37
Chapter Six: Theft in the Wagon.....	45
Bibliography.....	51

Abstract

Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request: An Oregon Trail Adventure is a young adult road-travel novel. The main character of this creative writing thesis is Erin Weston, a recent high school graduate who travels from Missouri to Portland, Oregon to visit her grandfather for his 80th birthday. Her grandfather encourages Erin to travel by car with her two best friends, Hailey and Midas, and to create a photo album as a present to him. Midas, a history and Oregon Trail computer game enthusiast, convinces Erin to take the historic Oregon Trail route to Portland to see various landmarks such as Alcove Spring, Chimney Rock, Fort Laramie, and Soda Springs. The novel's first six chapters chronicle the teenagers' growth and introduce readers to Oregon Trail history. This carefully researched story uses first-person narration and in many ways mirrors the journey of the pioneers of the mid-1800s.

Introduction

Writing can be described as a journey, and every journey has a beginning. My writing journey began when I was eight years old. I was in the store with my mother and like most young children, I begged her to buy me something. For some reason, a bright blue and pink journal with a lock and key caught my attention. I pleaded with my mother, and she finally agreed to buy it for me. After that, I pretended to be a spy and write down everything I saw and observed, just like Harriet in *Harriet the Spy*. When I grew older, I continued to journal not because I wanted to be a spy but because I found enjoyment in taking note of everything happening around me.

Around age eleven, I eventually started writing stories of travel and adventure with pirates searching for buried treasure. I also challenged convention by creating a princess who rescues the prince locked in a tower. Although some of those stories may seem juvenile and trivial now, they helped put me on the road to writing fiction about adventure, friendship, and overcoming difficulties.

Inspiration for *Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request*

My journey writing *Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request: An Oregon Trail Adventure* began spring semester of 2012 in Dr. Matiko's ENGL 454: The Writing Life. In this class, we were required to work on one large writing project for an entire semester. I elected to write the beginnings of a novel where three characters – Erin Weston, Hailey James and Midas Goldberg – would take a road trip along the historic Oregon Trail.

Inspiration for *Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request* came from the classic computer game, *The Oregon Trail*. When I was a little girl, I used to play this game with my dad. Somehow, trying to overcome the various obstacles such as fording rivers, hunting for meat, curing sick

traveling companions, and fixing broken wagon wheels all caught my attention. In addition to being educational, it is also a game of strategy. The game tries to teach its players history of the Oregon Trail by placing famous historical landmarks and forts along the way such as Alcove Spring, Chimney Rock, and Fort Laramie.

I have incorporated the game into my story by making one of my main characters, Midas, obsessed with playing the game. He even plays the game during some of the long stretches on the road. Also, I wanted the contingencies my characters encounter to be a modern-day parallel to the trials that pop up in the game. For example, a broken wagon wheel would equate to a flat tire, cholera or dysentery would become food poisoning, theft in the wagon translates to someone breaking into the car, and hunting for buffalo could be hunting for a Buffalo Wild Wings. How my characters react and handle each situation is one of the driving forces for my story.

There are several different versions of *The Oregon Trail* today that can be played through the computer, Wii, and iPhone. For this writing project, I have used the 1999 version of Oregon Trail to help create my scenarios, although most versions of the game have similar problems and situations that must be resolved.

Incorporating the History of the Oregon Trail

Even though the game inspired me to write this story, I find it very important to incorporate the history of the Oregon Trail. My characters are traveling along a route similar to the one the pioneers traveled more than 150 years earlier. Although much of the landscape has changed, some of the natural landmarks, forts, and even graves of pioneers still remain. The Oregon Trail is a major part of western America's history.

One of the ways I have incorporated the history into my story is by starting each chapter with an epigraph taken from newspapers, diaries, letters, and other writings from the pioneers along the Oregon Trail. The majority of my epigraphs are taken from the two-volume set, *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail*. The purpose of the epigraphs is not only to teach the reader a little bit of history of the Oregon Trail but also to parallel in some way the situation my characters will face in that chapter. For example, I have included a diary quotation from William E. Taylor describing how the Native Americans had stolen one of the oxen from his traveling party; in the corresponding chapter of my book, the characters discover that their car has been broken into and valuables have been taken.

Another way I have embedded history into my story is through the landmarks the three friends visit. The first landmark my characters visit is Alcove Spring which is near present-day Blue Rapids, Kansas. Not only have I chosen a diary passage describing the spring but I have also included details such as information signs and a memorial grave that can be found at the actual site. Through these devices my characters, as well as the readers, learn the significance of Alcove Spring and what took place there.

Although I have not traveled the trail myself, I have spent a lot of time studying the history and the geography of the places my characters visit. In researching the history of the Oregon Trail, I have examined scholarly books and articles about the trail. The scholarly book that proved to be especially helpful for me was David Dary's *The Oregon Trail: An American Saga*. Dary's book provides not only a thorough history of the trail but also an account of how the trail has been memorialized. In addition to scholarly books and articles, I also consulted the park websites of the historical landmarks to help give me an idea of what can still be seen today at each site. Because this is a road trip, I used auto tour guides of the different landmarks along

the Oregon-California Trail put out by the United States National Park Service. The guides provide a map of the modern day trail as well as a brief description of each landmark. Google Earth has also helped me examine the geography of the various states my characters drive through.

Genre: Young Adult Travel Fiction / Realistic Fiction

As a high school student, I was exposed to young adult literature. Some of my favorite books include: *A Great and Terrible Beauty* by Libba Bray, *The Weirdo* by Theodore Taylor, *The Riddles of Epsilon* by Christine Morton-Shaw, *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini, and *Pirates!* by Celia Rees. Some of these novels are fantasy, and others are historical and realistic fiction. These books gave me hours of enjoyment, putting me into another world even for just a little while. Even now when I am in college, I still like to read for fun young adult novels such as Susan Collins's *The Hunger Games* and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. These books helped shape my understanding of how a young adult novel is put together. All of these books share similar coming-of-age themes and display the growth of the characters in creative and sympathetic ways.

My story falls under the young adult genre, specifically realistic fiction and travel fiction. Several young adult novels that I have read about young people embarking on road trips are Morgan Matson's *Amy & Roger's Epic Detour*, Jennifer E. Smith's *You Are Here*, Lauren Barnholdt's *Two-way Street*, and Antony John's *Thou Shalt Not Road Trip*. These four books have helped serve as guides for me when writing *Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request*.

A major aspect in young adult road travel novels is character development. Each character is flawed but learns to grow as the story progresses. For instance, Amy Curry in *Amy &*

Roger's Epic Detour has a fear of driving cars after being in a car accident with her father. The story chronicles Amy's growth as she finally musters the courage to drive again, thus regaining confidence not only on the road but in other areas of life. The conflicts the characters face as they travel and the ways they resolve them constitute an important part of this genre.

Another characteristic of young adult road travel novels is making memorable stops, whether is it visiting historic Gettysburg and the Lincoln Memorial as seen in *You are Here* or Graceland as in *Amy & Roger's Epic Detour*. Such stops help complement the story by providing character interaction with the location; these pauses also create space for the authors to insert interesting facts for the readers to learn. At the same time, these stops can become a symbol contributing to an overall theme. For example, Jennifer E. Smith shows how a bloody and devastating war such as the American Civil War can end in reunion. Young readers come to see that reunions and reconciliations are also possible in many areas, including family and friendship.

The Writing Process

Prewriting, drafting, and revising are three major components of my writing process. For my prewriting, I have kept a writer's journal of ideas, character sketches, interesting historical facts and places I want my characters to visit along their journey. I also used a road atlas and other maps to mark the route my characters will take. I made notes of various events that would happen to them along the way. For the most part, I have been writing to discover and avoided sticking to a strict outline. I know that my characters will end up in Portland, Oregon, but events that happen en route come to me as I write and revise. As I drafted my story, I found that other ideas for plot development came to mind that I had not planned initially.

When I first starting writing this story for ENGL 454: The Writing Life, I shared weekly about four to six pages of rough draft material with three other students and received feedback. This process helped give me ideas for how to continue. I also received constructive criticism. I continued to work on this story after the completion of that course, and I met with Dr. Matiko weekly, reading about six pages of material per session and receiving feedback. Along the way, I also shared my draft with my secondary advisor, Dr. Bruce Closser. He teaches a composition course that focuses on the American West and was able to offer advice with content as well as composition. This process has helped me identify the areas I needed to address in my writing. These conferences also helped me try out my material on another audience and helped me become a more disciplined writer by writing to a schedule.

Writer-Mentors: Guides for my Writing Journey

Many essays and books about the writing process offer advice to novice writers. From Donald Hall, I learned that true writers must find enjoyment in their craft. In the opening line of his book, *Life Work*, Hall states, “I’ve never worked a day in my life” (3). This is not to suggest that Hall is lazy; rather, he views his writing as enjoyable, as what he wants to be doing the most. This enjoyment keeps him from regarding his work as drudgery. Writing novels requires a lot of work, but a writer should take up that work if and only if she enjoys the art of writing.

Natalie Goldberg, author of *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, teaches beginning writers how to allow the creative juices to flow. She advises her readers not to worry about making every word prim and perfect in the initial drafting. Instead, she suggests not crossing out words, not worrying about logic, not worrying about grammar and punctuation, and

instead keeping the hand moving (8). Revising comes later. In the meantime, it is important for the writer to get ideas down on paper, recording something to work with.

Annie Dillard gives novice writers advice for the drafting and revision processes. She admits that cutting passages is sometimes necessary, but at least there are bricks to work with to help create the new and better. At the same time, she encourages writers to keep on writing and to “give it, give it all, give it now” (78). Writers should not be afraid to put their ideas down on paper. They should not give into the temptation to save it for a better time or a better project. “Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you,” she writes. “You open your safe and find ashes” (79).

Overall, I have learned to keep on writing. I write because I want to, because I find enjoyment in it, and because it is something that I am passionate about. Writing has taught me to be daring and adventurous. There will always be stumbling blocks and contingencies along the way, but the key is to keep on writing and to try out different avenues that might turn out to be better than the first. Writing is a journey with something new to learn and discover along the way, and it is a journey that continues to mold and shape me.

Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request: An Oregon Trail Adventure

Laurel Beedle

Chapter One: Grandpa Jesse's Peculiar Request

We learn that a company of some dozen families contemplate leaving this county in April next, for the promised land – Oregon. May success attend them in their laudable enterprise.

~ Daily Morning Missourian, April 3, 1846

“Welcome to Blue Rapids, Kansas!” declared Midas, sitting in the front seat of my tiny Dodge Neon. He held my GPS between his thighs and played games on his laptop. “Only eight miles to Alcove Spring.”

“Finally!” I breathed. We had been on the road for the last three and a half hours and it was about time we stopped. It was the first time I had driven my car for that many hours straight. We could have arrived sooner if we had taken interstate highways. But no! Midas insisted that we take the historic Oregon Trail route to Portland. In fact, the only reason why we were in Blue Rapids was because Midas wanted to visit Alcove Spring, one of the many landmarks visited by the pioneers on the Oregon Trail.

“We should stop to eat first,” said Hailey from the backseat, waking up from her nap. She had created a makeshift bed using all of our pillows and blankets. “It’s half past one. What does Blue Rapids have to offer?”

“I’ll check,” said Midas, closing his laptop so that he could search for restaurants on the GPS. It was the first time Midas had put away his laptop since we left Missouri this morning. The stand for my GPS was broken, so I had to rely on Midas to hold onto the device. Hailey wasn’t an option; she was fast asleep at the time. Because Midas didn’t like the GPS’s computer-generated voice, he muted it and promised me that he would tell me when I had to turn. Midas had proved to be a somewhat decent navigator – at least in the beginning of our journey.

We almost missed a turn when Midas got distracted by playing the Oregon Trail on his laptop. Luckily, I stole the GPS from Midas's lap one mile before I had to turn left on KS-9. I scolded him for almost getting us lost.

"But Erin," he told me, "you just got cholera. I couldn't let you die!"

"You're obsessed," I told him curtly.

For as long as we've known Midas, which was since he moved to Independence back when we were in eighth grade, he has been addicted to playing the Oregon Trail. Hailey and I met him during the first week of school. He was playing the game while the rest of us were practicing our typing skills. By the middle of the class period, Hailey and I had become bored with our typing assignment. We decided to watch him play, occasionally telling him what to do. From that day forward, Midas became our friend.

In Blue Rapids, we looked for a place to eat. Midas read off the nearest fast food chains on the GPS. "We have Subway, Tryon's Pour House and Grill, and Casey's Carry Out Pizza."

"Seriously? Is that it?" complained Hailey. "There isn't anything normal like McDonalds, Wendy's or Taco Bell?"

"There's a Taco Bell and Hardee's in Marysville, but that would require driving past Alcove Spring," Midas informed us.

"Subway sounds fine to me," I said. I was ready to stop driving and stretch my legs. I needed a break. Midas and Hailey both agreed to eat at Subway. I pulled into the nearest available parking space, and my friends quickly jumped out of the car. I didn't leave right away. I held my car keys in my hand and stared at the keychain my grandfather gave me when I first got this car. It was a simple metal keychain with an image of an ox-drawn covered wagon to represent the state of Oregon where Grandpa Jesse lived.

It was because of his request, and not Midas's abnormal obsession with his computer game, that my friends and I had embarked on a road trip to Portland, Oregon.

Our trip west had begun with a phone call two weeks before I graduated from Truman High School. I was working on my English homework when I heard my phone ring. Grandpa Jesse was not the one I expected to show up on my caller ID, but I answered, hoping to hear him promise that he would fly out to Missouri to see me graduate. After all, he had come to my older brother's graduation three years ago.

As it turned out, Grandpa Jesse couldn't make it. My heart sank. "I'm sorry, kiddo," he told me. "The knee replacement surgery I was supposed to have this Wednesday has been canceled. Now I'm on the list for the day after your graduation. I'm afraid I can't come out."

I knew I shouldn't have gotten upset, but I couldn't help but feel gyped. Jonah, my older brother, not only got to have Grandpa Jesse at his graduation but also our relatives from Colorado – and Father. Now the only family who said they would show up to my graduation were Mom and Nick, my stepdad as of last March. Even Jonah said he wouldn't be able to attend because he already promised his girlfriend that he would go to her older sister's wedding that day. Hearing that Grandpa Jesse wouldn't come put me over the edge, and I started to weep like an eight-year-old.

"I wish you could come," I cried. "I wish Jonah would come, and Uncle Paul, and..." I couldn't finish the rest.

"...and your father," said Grandpa mournfully. "I miss him too, Erin. He would be proud of you." He paused for a moment before he said, "I'll tell you what, Erin. You should bring your diploma when you visit me in Portland in a few weeks."

I was confused. “Uh...Grandpa...” I began. “We never planned a trip to see you.”

“It’s my eightieth birthday on June 21,” said Grandpa, “and I don’t plan to celebrate it alone. Now here’s my idea: come to Portland and we’ll have a joint party – my birthday and your graduation. How does that sound?”

Even though I was still disappointed Grandpa wouldn’t be coming to my graduation, I couldn’t help but get a little excited. I had never been to Portland before – let alone anywhere along the west coast. “Okay! I’ll start searching for plane tickets online!”

“Erin,” Grandpa interrupted. “I think you should *drive* to Portland, not fly.”

This took me by surprise. “But Grandpa,” I began, “it would be faster if I flew. If I drove, it would take me...” I stopped and opened my laptop to research exactly how long it would take me to drive all the way to Grandpa’s house in Oregon.

Grandpa already knew the answer. “It’s over 1800 miles,” he told me. “You could get here in about 27 hours if you only stop for food and gas. However, I’d rather you break the trip up and go camping for some of the nights.”

“I’m not driving!” I cried.

“Erin,” began Grandpa calmly, “I want you to go on a road trip – a vacation to celebrate the end of high school. It’s been over three years since you last went on a vacation. I know it won’t be the same but I want you to make new memories. Bring that redheaded friend along. She’s one smart cookie.”

“Hailey?” I questioned. “Grandpa, I highly doubt she’ll quit her job for the summer just to go on a road trip.”

After a moment of silence, Grandpa added, “Promise me that you’ll try to get her to come, okay? Bring another friend along if you like, and don’t worry about the expenses. I’ll call

your mother about all the details tomorrow. Oh, and keep your eyes peeled for a graduation present coming in the mail from me.”

I decided to allow Grandpa to be the one to break the news to Mom first. I thought about mentioning it to her after I got off the phone with Grandpa, but it still felt surreal to me. He wanted me to go on a road trip and make it a vacation. The last vacation I went on was a camping trip in the Smoky Mountains for my spring break in the ninth grade. A month before that, Dad had received the news that he only had six months left to live. Since it had been a lifelong dream of his to see the Smoky Mountains, the whole family flew out to Tennessee for spring break. After that, Mom never had the heart to go on a vacation. Well, that was until she went on her honeymoon with Nick in Florida. They did invite me to come along, but I quickly said no and made arrangements to stay with Hailey’s family.

It turned out that Mom was excited about my road trip. She chatted on the phone with Grandpa for almost two hours and kept on mentioning Hailey and me as if the trip was a sealed deal. When she got off the phone, Mom turned to me and asked, “Did you tell Hailey yet?”

“No,” I said. To be honest, I was still thinking about ways to convince Grandpa to book me a flight to Portland instead.

“You should tell her in school tomorrow,” Mom informed me. “You two will need to plan out where you’ll want to stop and camp for the night.”

“Camp?” questioned Nick. He was in the living room thumbing through the *ESPN* magazine. It shouldn’t have surprised me that Nick overheard our conversation. “Jesse wants two young ladies to travel to Oregon in Erin’s car alone? And go camping?”

“That’s right,” said Mom. “Our family used to go camping all the time.” I noticed how Mom didn’t mention my dad. “Jesse wants Erin to have new camping memories but did say that he will pay for hotel expenses if there’s bad weather.”

“I don’t like this, Sylvia,” said Nick. “Two girls barely out of high school traveling alone across the country make me nervous, but camping tops it off.”

Instantly I wanted to go on Grandpa Jesse’s road trip and go camping each night just to defy my stepfather. “I’ll tell Hailey about the trip tomorrow,” I promised Mom. I cast Nick a defiant grin and then made my way upstairs to my room. The last I heard was Mom promising Nick that she would try to convince my grandfather to cover hotel expenses regardless of the weather, but I was already planning a camping trip.

I told Hailey everything the next day during our free period in school. Hailey wanted to work on her AP Chemistry homework but suddenly became distracted when I suggested taking a road trip. After I told her all the details, Hailey asked me when we would leave.

“About a week or so after graduation,” I said. “I know you’ll need to put in vacation time at Starbucks.”

Hailey’s smile suddenly vanished. “Erin,” she began slowly, “I just got laid off yesterday.”

“What? Why?” This news took me by surprise. Hailey was one of the hardest workers I knew. She was the top of our class, and that was in addition to working twenty hours a week at Starbucks.

“They said something about falling revenue,” said Hailey. “It’s ridiculous! They should have let go of Pete. But no! He’s the manager’s son!”

“And your ex-boyfriend,” I added.

“That’s beside the point!” Hailey argued. “Pete and I have been broken up for three months now. While I show up to work every day five minutes early, Pete gets away with arriving an hour late.”

“I’m sorry,” I told her. “No more free coffee.”

“I know! That’s the worst part!”

Since Hailey no longer had a job to go to after school, she and I went to her house to start making plans for our road trip. I also wanted to get away from Nick for fear that he might end up convincing Mom that I shouldn’t go at all. As it turned out, Hailey’s father also didn’t want her to go on the road trip for the same reasons Nick raised. Together, Hailey and I both tried to convince him that we would be safe. I told him that all our expenses would be covered and that we would stay in hotels instead of camping. Hailey’s dad didn’t budge.

Undaunted, I promised Hailey that we would find a way to go.

Chapter Two: The Solution

We presume that the young men of the party – meaning the unmarried ones – the disconsolate ones, perhaps – will number from fifty to eighty, and will make the best possible kind of substitute for the Government’s “Riflemen” that were to be.

~ George L. Curry, April 23, 1846

When I reached home that night, I didn’t want to confess to Nick that he was not the only one who thought that two female high school graduates shouldn’t travel across country alone. Instead, I preceded making plans which included calling my mechanic friend, Midas, to change the oil in my car. He works with his dad at Joe’s Auto every day and told me to bring my car by after we got out of school.

Hailey decided to tag along the next day since she had nothing else better to do. In the garage at Joe’s Auto, Midas put my car on the lift and started working on the Neon. Hailey and I sat at the workbench and discussed plans for our road trip, brainstorming various places that we could visit.

“I have an aunt who lives in Idaho,” said Hailey. “She’s my dad’s sister, and I know she would let us stay for one night. She also might be able to convince Dad to let me go on this trip.”

“Yes, but that’s just one night,” I said. “If we put in about seven to eight hours a day, it will take us four or more days to get to Portland. We still have to figure out where we can stay for the other nights and have your dad approve them.”

Midas suddenly stopped what he was doing. He set down his tools and faced us with his greasy hands on his hips. “Erin, Hailey,” he began, “are you going on a road trip?”

I told Midas about Grandpa Jesse’s phone call and how he wanted me to drive to Oregon to visit him. I even mentioned that he wanted me bring along a friend or two.

“A friend or two, eh?” Midas questioned. Then he gave me the look. Both Hailey and I have seen that look many times when Midas wanted Hailey to help him with his Algebra II

homework or wanted me to play Need for Speed with him on his Xbox. Midas's lip protruded, his hands neatly folded below his face in mock prayerful supplication. I knew what was coming.

"Erin," he began slowly. "I won't charge you for this oil change...."

"I have a coupon," I interrupted him.

"But you can't beat free!" he insisted. "Besides, I know more about fixing cars. This old girl will need an expert to keep an eye on her." He patted the side of my battered 1996 Dodge Neon that was still on the lift, waiting to be fixed.

He had a point. When it comes to cars, I'm a dunce. I turned to Hailey. Her book smarts only go so far. When it comes to her driving, I can barely blink, making sure that she actually stops at a red light.

"I've always wanted to go to Oregon and see the Pacific coast," he told us. Midas grinned, and his green eyes lit up as he quickly added, "And don't you think it's cool that we would start out right here in Independence? In the Oregon Trail game, you always start out in Independence."

"You and that stupid game!" cried Hailey. "Do you still play it?"

"At least once or twice a month," Midas told her with a grin. Hailey decided not to comment. I couldn't help but laugh. "We could stop at all the classic stopping points like Alcove Spring and Chimney Rock. I bet there are some old historic forts we can tour as well. It'll be fun!"

"No way!" Hailey cried. "It's ridiculous!"

"And," he began, looking straight at Hailey with a knowing smile, "I bet I can convince your dad to let you go on the trip."

"Oh really?" challenged Hailey. "How so?"

“First, tell me what your dad’s biggest concern is.”

“He doesn’t like the fact that two young women out of high school are traveling alone on the road for so long,” said Hailey. I decided against adding that my stepdad felt the same way.

“I thought so,” continued Midas. “What you girls need is a guy – me naturally – to go with you on the trip. You know...a protector. I wouldn’t be surprised if your dad changes his mind, Hailey.”

Hailey and I both examined Midas in his dirty work clothes and tool belt. He wasn’t much to look at with his ruffled, dirty blond hair and oil-smudged face. He was also very skinny and barely taller than Hailey and me. He didn’t look like much of a protector.

“I highly doubt that you would get my dad to change his mind,” Hailey told him.

“Is that a challenge?” Midas questioned. “Right after I finish with Erin’s car, I’ll clock out and visit your dad. He’ll let you go. Your dad loves me...unlike all your ex-boyfriends!”

Hailey snorted. “Only because you know how to fix his car.”

“It’s more than that!” argued Midas. “And besides, you two know that you won’t have fun unless I’m around!”

Midas then turned to me and once again gave me that look. I sighed. “All right,” I told him. “You can come but...”

“You’re the best, Erin!” he interrupted, throwing his greasy, oily arms around me.

It turned out that Midas was right – he was the solution to our problem. Once he finished with my car, we headed off together for Hailey’s house. When we saw Hailey’s dad greet Midas as if he was an old bud of his, we knew that everything would work out after that. For a long

time, the two talked cars. Hailey and I tuned them out by turning on the TV and flipping through the channels.

Several minutes later, we could hear Hailey's dad laugh and tell Midas, "You guys are going to have such a fun trip. What places do you think you will want to visit?"

"We were thinking about following the Oregon Trail," Midas told him, and then he turned to us on the couch and winked.

"We made no such plan!" cried Hailey.

"Oregon Trail..." began Hailey's dad thoughtfully, "isn't that a computer game?"

Midas's smile vanished. "Yes," he told Hailey's dad. "It's also historical." He began to describe the different landmarks along the way but didn't go into much detail. What mattered was that Midas was going, which meant Hailey could now go.

When I got home that night, I told Mom and Nick about Midas joining us. Nick gave me a look of relief. "I'm glad," he told me. "It makes me feel better to have him along. Midas is a very bright young man. I'm sure you and Hailey will have fun camping with him around."

"Unbelievable!" I muttered. I could tell that Nick heard me, but I didn't care. I turned on my heels and made my way up the stairs to my room. First he didn't want me to go camping because it wasn't safe for just Hailey and me, and then Midas decides to come along and everything is just fine. "Sexism!" I cried and then collapsed onto my bed.

During the last week of the school year, the three of us made plans for our trip. Midas kept on insisting that we follow the historical route along the Oregon Trail. Both Hailey and I kept on telling him no. Hailey wanted to visit her aunt in Idaho. Midas insisted that we could do both.

“Come on!” Midas told us. “It’s history – the Great American West! It’ll be fun.”

Since Hailey and I couldn’t think of anywhere else, we told Midas that we would visit some of the stops. After that, Midas made plans for our first stop at Alcove Spring in Kansas. I had never seen him so excited.

Grandpa Jesse’s promised graduation gift came in the mail just one day before I donned my cap and gown. As soon as I received the package, I opened it. Inside, I found a black camera case containing a silver Olympus camera that looked barely used. That was not the only item in the package. Grandpa also included an extra memory card for the camera and a blank leather-bound book. I opened the book to find that Grandpa had written something inside.

Dear Erin,

All great adventures must be preserved. I can’t let you go on this trip without a way to record every step of the way. I’m giving you this camera, knowing that you’ll put it to good use. I haven’t forgotten the young, fifteen-year-old girl in the Smoky Mountains taking pictures of everything she sees and everyone she meets. That same girl made me a photo album that I still keep in my bedroom. I hope that you will be able to do the same thing with this book. I know it’s not a photo album but I wanted to give you the freedom to write as well, beginning with your graduation. Again, I am very sorry I can’t make it out to watch you receive your diploma. I can’t wait to see you soon in Portland.

With love,

Grandpa Jesse

P.S. I hope you don’t mind but I asked your mother for your bank account number and I put in some money. I hope it’ll be enough.

I set down the book and went upstairs to my room where I kept my laptop. Within minutes, I accessed my bank account and found that I was suddenly a whole lot richer. I expected Grandpa to give me much less, but then again I had no idea how much money I would be spending. I knew gas was not cheap. Later that day, when I told Mom and Nick how much Grandpa gave me, my stepdad let out a long whistle.

“I wish my grandpa had done something like that for me,” said Nick. “He spent most of my life wishing I wasn’t born.”

I decided that it was best not to make a cruel comment. Nick already knew that I wished he never married my mom. While he was dating Mom, Nick tried to take me to museums and plays in Kansas City, but it was just so he could get on Mom’s good side. Mom thought the world of Nick. After all, he was a successful lawyer and handsome – for a fifty-year-old. I couldn’t help but resent him. He wasn’t my father.

I tried not to think about Dad during my graduation. As I stood in line, waiting to receive my diploma, I couldn’t help but imagine him in the crowd next to Mom giving me two thumbs up and flashing me his smile. I imagined how after the ceremony, Dad would find me and pull me into a bear hug and kiss my cheek with his whiskers tickling me. But he was gone. I could feel the tears streaming down my cheeks, but I quickly wiped them away. I hated people to see me cry. It made me feel weak, and I wanted to be strong for my high school graduation.

One week later, Hailey, Midas and I packed our belongings in my Neon and began our journey to Portland. Midas had set my GPS to take us to Alcove Spring and we were off. It didn’t hit me that I was actually taking this trip until I pulled into the Subway in Blue Rapids, Kansas. My friends hurried in to order their lunch. I needed a few minutes in my car to reflect on

everything that had happened recently. I opened my purse to find the silver camera from Grandpa. He wants me to record every moment, I reminded myself.

“For Grandpa,” I told myself, heading inside to capture an image of our first lunch on the road.

Chapter Three: Alcove Spring

A shelving rock projects over this basin, from which falls a beautiful cascade of water, some ten or twelve feet. Altogether it is one of the most romantic spots I ever saw. So charmed were we with its beauties, that several hours unconsciously glided away in the enjoyment of its refreshing waters and seductive attractions. We named this Alcove Spring; and future travellers will find the name graven on the rocks, and on the trunks of the trees surrounding it.

~ Edwin Bryant, May 27, 1846

I ordered a turkey sub, but I should have skipped the mayo. I took two bites and found that the mayo tasted very questionable, which made me wonder if it was spoiled. Disgusted, I decided to wrap up my sub. Across the table, I looked at Midas who licked the sauce off his fingers. I asked him if he thought the mayo tasted funny. He only shrugged. I turned to Hailey who ate her last bite. For some odd reason, she dislikes mayo. Eager to get going, I told the others that we should hit the road again.

It took us less than ten minutes to reach Alcove Springs Park. I was thankful that my GPS knew the back roads in Kansas. Without it, I wasn't sure if any of us could find the park, let alone the spring itself.

To own the truth, I did not find Alcove Spring spectacular. I wasn't sure what to expect. During our three-hour-plus drive from Independence to Blue Rapids, Midas tried to explain to Hailey and me that Alcove Spring was one of the favorite stopping points for the travelers on the Oregon-California Trail. According to an information sign we passed, the pioneers rested at Alcove Spring because it was a good source for fresh water, and it gave them a place to rest before fording the Big Blue River.

A diarist and pioneer of the mid-1800s described Alcove Spring as one of the most romantic spots with its flowing cascades of water. When Hailey, Midas and I reached the infamous Alcove Spring, we saw nothing but a trickle of water leaking into a tiny pool.

I stared at the dripping water. There was nothing beautiful or romantic about it. I watched as Midas inched closer to the pool, standing underneath the protruding rock. He dipped one hand into the pool and then placed it underneath the small stream. After staring at his hand, mesmerized, Midas tilted his head upward, opened his mouth and allowed the water to drip onto his tongue.

“Eww!” Hailey cried out. “That’s disgusting!”

Midas shifted his head towards us and laughed. “Take a picture!” To appease him, I pulled out my camera from my purse. I took several pictures of Midas drinking the water, and then one of him and Hailey in front of the trickling waterfall. Looking at the images, I could barely see what was supposed to be the waterfall.

Just as I was about to put my camera away, Midas jogged to my side and snatched the camera from my hands. “Your turn! Get down there!”

“No,” I told him. “Let’s go.”

“Don’t be a sour puss,” said Hailey. “At least try to look like you’re having fun. It’s for your grandpa, remember?”

Of course I remembered! I sighed and walked down towards the spring. I stared at the nearby rocks and noticed strange carvings of letters and the number eight. Intrigued, I placed my fingers in the grooves of the eight. I hardly noticed Midas walking over to my side.

“They’re from the pioneers on the Oregon Trail,” he told me.

“Yeah right,” I said in disbelief.

“I’ve done my homework,” said Midas.

“That’s a first,” I teased.

Midas ignored me and continued. “I remember reading that the travelers would carve their names on nearby rocks and trees when they stopped at Alcove Spring. I bet that eight must have been a part of a date. Hard to tell, though.”

I said nothing as I brought my hand back to my side.

“Smile, Erin.”

Before I was ready, I saw Midas snap a picture of me. I grumbled and told him to delete. He only grinned as he took two more. After my photo shoot, Midas captured several images of the spring. I went to search for Hailey.

I found Hailey standing in front of what appeared to be a tomb stone. The plaque drilled into the rock informed us that it was a memorial of a woman by the name of Sarah Handley Keyes, a seventy-year-old pioneer who died of consumption in 1846. She belonged to the Donner Party, who were traveling by wagon train to California. Eventually, they became trapped in the Sierras. Sarah H. Keyes was the first recorded death in the Donner Party. Although the location of her actual grave remains unknown, her memory lives on.

“People actually died on the trail,” said Hailey thoughtfully.

“Why bother?” I found myself asking. “Why not stay in Missouri, or wherever they’re from, and add several more years to their lives?”

“Perhaps there was not much to live for if they stayed,” Hailey tried to explain. “They must have believed they had a future in Oregon – a chance at a better life. It must have been worth the risk of dying.”

I tried to think of something philosophical and clever to add to this statement, but all I could muster was, “Well, at least we’re in my Dodge Neon and not a covered wagon. The three of us should be able make it to Oregon alive.”

This made Hailey smile. “We should get going.”

It took a long time to tear Midas away from Alcove Spring. He wanted to take more pictures, and Hailey had to steal the camera. To get him into the car, Hailey and I grabbed both of his arms and dragged him. It didn't help that he was stronger than both of us combined, but Midas eventually gave in.

Chapter Four: Greenhorns

Form a circle or square with your wagons at night, by running the tongue of each hinder wagon between the hind wheel and bed of the wagon before, alternately; chain them together, and you have a secure breastwork against attack by Indians, as well as a secure place to cook, sleep, &c.

~ The Shively Guide, J.M. Shively, 1846

Using the GPS, we crossed the Kansas-Nebraska border and reached a campsite in a park right outside of a small town called Blue Springs. As I parked my car in our campsite, I surveyed my surroundings. The campground was in a wooded area, which was a nice change compared to the fields we had been driving through for the past hour.

“You know,” began Hailey as we got out of the car, “I’ve never been to Nebraska before.”

“Seriously?” Midas asked. “My family used to live in Lincoln for two years before we moved to Missouri, but I’ve never seen much of the state west of the city.”

“I keep on forgetting that you used to be a Cornhusker,” teased Hailey.

Midas nudged Hailey’s rib and told her, “Let’s start unpacking the trunk.”

We spent the next few minutes unpacking the camping gear and tents. I almost forgot about the *box* until Midas pulled it out of the trunk.

“What’s this?” he asked me, scanning the duct taped cardboard box with the words “Do Not Open” written on all the sides. He started to rip off the duct tape, but I quickly snatched the box out of his arms.

“C’mon Erin!” chided Midas. “Why did you bring that box if you don’t want it opened?”

“Long story,” I muttered.

“That’s okay,” said Midas with a grin. “We’re here all night. If you like, you can tell it to us around the campfire.”

“It’s from Nick, isn’t it,” interrupted Hailey. She looked at me with one eyebrow raised. I knew I couldn’t underestimate Hailey.

“Yes,” I confirmed. “But we’re not opening it – not unless absolutely necessary.”

“Why?” Midas asked. “What’s inside?”

“Stuff he thinks we’ll need on this trip,” I answered, “but we’re not going to touch anything.” I threw the box back in the trunk and slammed the trunk door. I knew Midas and Hailey were still curious but they decided to let it go. They both understood that Nick and I do not get along.

Nick had given me the box last night while I was packing up my duffle bag for this trip. I was in my room when Nick came in holding the cardboard box in his arms. “I brought you a road trip kit,” he told me. I didn’t bother to look up at him but instead folded another shirt and stuffed it inside my duffle bag.

“I’m still worried about you driving over 1800 miles out to Portland,” Nick continued. “Anything can happen and I want you to be prepared. Midas is good with cars, but I still want to make sure your bases are covered.” He set down the box on my bed.

“I’m a good driver,” I told Nick. “I’ve never been pulled over, got into an accident or anything like that.”

“Better safe than sorry,” said Nick. Then he pulled out a long black cord with two large clips on each end, one red and one black. “Now can you tell me what this is?”

“Jumper cables,” I said. “I’m not dumb.”

“Every *good* driver keeps a set of these in their car,” said Nick, putting the cables back in the box. “You never know when you’ll be stuck with a dead battery and need someone to jump your car.”

The way he emphasized *good* made it seem as if Nick thought I was just the opposite. I've had my own car for almost a year and my license for two. I looked at the other contents in Nick's box and pulled out a road atlas of the United States and Canada.

"I have a GPS," I told Nick. "I never had to use a roadmap."

"Ah...but would you know how to use an atlas if you had to?" Nick asked me.

I didn't want to confess to Nick that without my GPS I wouldn't know how to get back home. Instead, I told him, "Maps are not hard to read. I did pass Geography in eighth grade."

"Good," Nick told me. "I also have an extra quart of oil and windshield washer fluid. It's always good to have extra on hand. And I want you to keep this in your purse at all times." From his pant pocket he grabbed his wallet and drew out a blue and red card with three A's in the upper left corner. "I ordered an AAA card for you last week. If there is an emergency, call the number on the card. God knows how many times I've had AAA rescue me from ditches and the side of the road."

I took the card and set it on the bed between the box and duffle bag.

"Well," began Nick, "that's it for the car stuff. I also put together a CD case with some of my favorite albums and burned playlists I thought you and your friends might enjoy."

"Midas has a radio adaptor so we can play our iPods," I told him.

"I also have a card game I thought you guys might like to play," Nick continued, ignoring my last comment. He pulled out a stack of cards tied together with a rubber band with the name "Would You Rather..." printed on the back. "Your mom and I loved to ask each other these questions when we first started dating. We got a few laughs out of them. I just thought it might be fun for some of the long stretches on the road."

I couldn't help but think that I wanted nothing to do with anything Mom and Nick did while they were dating. "Is that it?" I asked him.

"One last thing," said Nick. He pulled out a small rectangular box wrapped in newspaper with a bright green sticky note on top. "I want you to give this to my best friend and college pal, Arty Quincy."

"Why don't you just mail it to him?" I asked. "It'd be faster."

"Because I want you to meet him and his family," said Nick. "I have his phone number and address written right here on this post-it note. He lives near Soda Springs, Idaho, and it's on the way to Oregon. I believe it's one of the stops along the Oregon Trail. Arty can give you a tour of the springs and offer you and your friends a place to stay for the night. His son, Hector, should be home from college. He's a fine young man, and I think he'd be a good catch for you."

I rolled my eyes. I couldn't believe that Nick would try to set me up with someone. "Thanks," I forced myself to tell him. It was the quickest way I could get him out of my room. Before he left, Nick told me that he wouldn't let me leave the house until he saw that the box was in the car.

Later that night, I took duct tape and sealed the cardboard box shut. I reached for a permanent marker and in big, bold letters inscribed on each side, "DO NOT OPEN!"

I quickly discovered that neither Midas nor Hailey had ever gone camping before. This revelation came to me when I found Hailey trying to apply her book smarts by reading the instructions that came with one of the tents. Midas played with one of the fold up poles, twisting it around into several triangles. I immediately went to work and unrolled one of the tents.

“It’s not rocket science,” I told them. “It’s a simple two-person dome.” I showed them where to weave the poles into the canvas and how to properly hammer stakes into the ground. Once we raised the two tents, I showed them how to make a campfire. Again, I was surprised that neither of them had ever done this before.

“Didn’t your families ever have bonfires?” I asked.

“Nope,” Midas told me. “I never had a s’more either.”

I could feel my eyes widen. I looked to Hailey. “What about you?”

“Do s’mores Pop-Tarts count?”

“Seriously?” I asked in disbelief. I immediately marched towards my car and opened the trunk. I pulled out a plastic bag of goodies Mom packed for us. I reached for the marshmallows, Hershey’s chocolate, and graham crackers. Skewers, however, were not included. I found three long sticks underneath a tall bur oak tree and used my pocket knife to sharpen the ends.

I gave one of the sticks to Hailey with a plump marshmallow and she stared at it with disgust. “Isn’t this unsanitary?”

“It’s camping,” I told her, as if it was supposed to make perfect sense. “It’s what campers do.”

Midas didn’t complain. He had already placed his marshmallow into the orange flames. Instantly, the marshmallow caught on fire and turned black. Midas yelped and threw both the marshmallow and the stick into the fire. For the next several minutes, I demonstrated the proper method of roasting a marshmallow until all the sides were golden brown. Hailey, once she got over the lack of sanitation, learned quickly. Midas, on the other hand, kept on torching his. I ended up roasting a marshmallow for him.

As we sat around the fire and ate our treat, I couldn't help but wonder how both Hailey and Midas lived eighteen years without going camping. When I asked them, Hailey told me that when her mom was sixteen she singed her hair during a camping trip. She cut her hair short as a result and never went camping again.

"Several months ago, Pete and I did talk about going camping this summer," said Hailey thoughtfully, "but I'd much rather go camping with you two than him."

"Me too," agreed Midas. "Pete was scum."

"You say that about all my ex-boyfriends," noted Hailey. "Before you even met Pete you told me to break up with him."

"And it turned out I was right," stated Midas.

"Anyways," I interrupted, knowing exactly where their conversation was going. "Why hasn't your family gone on camping trips, Midas?"

It turned out that his parents preferred more amenities in their vacations. "I once suggested it to them," Midas explained, "but Dad said that it was a lot of work. He likes room service. When we go on vacations, our family pays for a timeshare." He took another bite of his s'more before he added, "So far, I really like camping. What about you, Erin? Your family seems to be pretty outdoorsy."

"This is my first time camping without my family," I said thoughtfully. "We used to go camping for a week in Colorado with Uncle Paul, Aunt Tessa, and my two older cousins, but that was before...you know...Dad's cancer. Then we had our last camping trip in the Smoky Mountains three years ago." I had been friends with both Hailey and Midas during the two years Dad battled cancer. They knew about the endless doctor appointments, chemotherapy, and all the other hardships.

“What did your family do during the week when you camp?” Hailey asked.

“Oh, we would go hiking, fishing, swimming – the usual. In the evenings we had bonfires, ate hobo stew, and listened to Dad and Uncle Paul tell stories of when they were boys. Those were the good old days.” I thought about how my family slowly began to drift apart after Dad died.

“We’re making new memories now,” Hailey piped up, putting her arms around me. It was almost as if she could sense my bittersweet thoughts.

“We are,” I agreed. “Subway, Alcove Spring, and now this.”

“Next stop, Chimney Rock,” Midas announced.

Just then, Hailey jumped to her feet. “Where’s the bathroom?”

Saying nothing, I pointed towards the two large oak trees behind her. Hailey groaned and muttered about the lack of sanitation.

I laughed as she made her way towards the trees. “I was just kidding,” I told her. “There’s a bathhouse just down the road. I’ll show you.”

Chapter Five: Jalapeños and Chocolate Milk

We have good neighbors they send milk they have butter & everything that is necessary for comfort. There are plenty of pretty Girls along also.

~ Charles F. Putnam, May 11, 1846

At sundown, Midas suggested that we should play Ghost in the Graveyard. Hailey and I, who hadn't played the game since the fourth grade, agreed to play and nominated Midas as the first ghost. We used our tent for home base. Hailey and I stood behind it as we closed our eyes and chanted, "One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock." At the stroke of twelve, or 9:09 in actuality, we cried, "Midnight! Hope we see no ghosts tonight!"

Hailey and I walked around the campsite with our flashlights. The first place we searched for Midas was behind the trees that bordered our campsite. We thought we heard movement behind an oak, which made Hailey scream and hide behind my back. I could feel her long nails dig into my shoulders.

"Good grief!" I exclaimed. "It was probably just a snake or something."

"Snake!" Hailey screamed. She threw her arms around me and tightly squeezed my chest. "I hate snakes!"

We heard more movement, but this time it was followed by a series of giggles. To my relief, I could feel Hailey release her arms. "Very funny, Midas!" she called out angrily.

We heard more giggles, but they did not belong to Midas. They were much too high and childish. I turned my flashlight towards the large oak tree where I saw a mop of long curls belonging to a young boy wearing Buzz Lightyear pajama pants. "My name's not Midas," the boy told us, trying to suppress more giggles. "I'm Benny."

"Are you lost?" I asked with concern. "Where are your parents?"

“Over there,” said Benny. He pointed to the neighboring campsite with three dome tents and a white minivan. “Can I play with you? Are you playing hide and seek?”

“No, we’re looking for a ghost,” I told him.

This caught the boy’s attention. “Ooh! Can I help?”

I was about to politely tell him “no” until I heard the door of my car open followed a loud shout. “Ghost in the graveyard! Mwahahaha!”

“Run!” I told Benny. The three of us laughed and screamed as we ran around the campsite in circles while Midas chased us. He was thrown off at first when he noticed that we had an extra player, but he continued to chase us until he caught a squealing Hailey. I told Benny to touch our tent, explaining that the ghost couldn’t catch us there.

Before we started the next round, I told Benny that he needed to go back to his parents. Defiantly, he insisted that he wanted to play with us. Midas didn’t help when he tried to convince me to let him stay.

Just then, a woman holding a camping lantern emerged. “Benjamin!” she shouted, clearly upset. “Go back to your tent! It’s way past your bedtime. What did I tell you about strangers?” Benny hung his head low and walked towards his mother. At this time, two more figures emerged. One was a tall, skinny man standing well over six feet while the other was a small girl no older than five in pink onesie pajamas.

“What’s going on here?” the man asked. “I heard a lot of screaming.”

Taking the initiative, I stepped towards the family and explained our game to them. While the mother didn’t look very happy, the father smiled. “Ghost in the graveyard, eh?” he questioned. “I used to play that when I was a boy.”

“Can I play, Daddy?” Benny begged. He tugged his shirt as he cried, “Please! Please! Ice cream with a cherry on top!”

“Me too!” cried the girl. “I wanna play!”

“No,” their mother sternly told them. “Back to bed!”

“Aww... no fair!” cried Benny, clearly disappointed. “Vacations are supposed to be fun!”

“No arguing,” said the mother sternly. “Now I want you to....”

She was interrupted by her husband who faced us and asked, “Can I be the ghost?”

“Peter!” his wife shouted.

“Lighten up, Amber. We’re camping. One round won’t hurt them.”

“Yay!” cried Benny and his little sister together.

One round turned into eight. The Huntsman family loved the game, including Mrs. Huntsman. Benny kept on wanting to be the ghost, and he always hid behind the same tree. Delilah, Benny’s little sister, formed an instant attachment to Midas. She never strayed more than two feet away from him, and she insisted on holding his hand. When Midas became the ghost, Delilah proclaimed that she would be a ghost too. Midas didn’t have the heart to refuse her. All of us could tell that he adored little Delilah. When Mrs. Huntsman finally announced to her children that they should go to bed, Delilah hugged Midas’s leg.

“She’s normally shy around new people,” Mr. Huntsman told Midas. “I’m surprised that she likes you.” He then gathered Delilah in his arms who hesitantly complied. Midas had to promise that he would see her in the morning.

Since it was getting late, the rest of us agreed to go to bed. Hailey and I shared one of the dome tents and crawled into our sleeping bags. I tried to go to sleep right away, but I was kept awake by Hailey tossing and turning, complaining about the hard ground. I almost forgot that she

had never gone camping before. Hailey eventually gave up. Before sleep came to us, we could hear a loud snore coming from Midas's tent three feet away from ours.

"Great!" I muttered.

"I didn't know anyone could snore that loud," Hailey told me. She was quiet for a moment. "It was very cute to see Midas with that little girl," she said.

"Yeah," I half yawned. I could feel sleep starting to come to me, and the last thing I wanted was to talk.

"I didn't know he was good with kids," Hailey continued thoughtfully.

"Huh?"

"It's not hard to like Midas, I suppose."

"Mmmm...." My eyelids glued together. I heard Hailey say something else and another snore from Midas, but my body was too tired to respond. Within seconds, I drifted off into sleep.

The next morning, the rising sun pouring into our tent woke me up. I tried to fight it by burying my head underneath my pillow, but the ground was too hard. Next to me, I heard Hailey stir in her sleeping bag and moan. After lying awake for what felt like a half hour, I pulled out my phone to check the time. I groaned.

Next to me, Hailey sleepily asked, "What time is it?"

"6:30."

"Great!"

It took us another fifteen minutes before we could admit defeat. We couldn't get back to sleep. Hailey and I got dressed and packed up our belongings. It was as good a time as any to take down camp. In the campsite next to us, we saw Benny chase Delilah around their tent,

laughing and giggling. Mrs. Huntsman stopped them and told them to take down their tent. Instead of listening, both kids turned to face us. Within seconds, they flew in our direction.

“Benjamin! Delilah!” Mrs. Huntsman shouted with her hands on her hips.

They did not listen. Instead, we were met with Benny giving each of us a hug. Delilah ran around the camp as she cried, “Midas! Midas!”

“He’s in the tent,” I told her. I wondered how Midas could sleep through this.

Mr. and Mrs. Huntsman walked over to our campsite. Mrs. Huntsman, clearly unhappy that her children didn’t listen to her, told them to march back to their tents and pack their belongings. Benny begged to play Ghost in the Graveyard again while Delilah wailed, wanting to see Midas. In the end, both children had to listen to their mother.

Mr. Huntsman, however, stayed behind to talk. “What are you three doing for breakfast?” he asked.

I looked to my car and thought about the box of Apple Jacks in the trunk. We didn’t have milk to go with it. “Not much,” I told him.

“You should join us for breakfast. There’s a place in Wymore not far from here – Talk of the Town Diner. My sister’s a waitress there so we get discounts. We can cover your meals.”

“You don’t have to,” I told him.

“No,” Mr. Huntsman told us. “I insist. My kids love you guys.”

Within the hour, we had dismantled camp and were following the Huntsmans’ white minivan to Talk of the Town Diner. Mrs. Huntsman was right – it was small, but quaint. We were given a seat next to the window overlooking the street. I looked at the menu, trying to find

a breakfast item that looked good to me. My eyes kept resting on a short stack of chocolate chip pancakes.

Moments later, a petite girl with curly brown hair tied up into a bun approached our table with a tablet and pen in hand. She appeared to be about my age – or younger. “Auntie Emily!” cried Benny. “I want a waffle!” The girl smiled sweetly as she jotted down notes. Across the table I noticed Midas gaping at her.

“She’s your aunt?” Midas asked Benny, still not blinking.

Emily grinned. “That’s right. And who would you be?”

“Midas Goldberg,” he told her. “How old are you exactly? You look too young to be an aunt!”

“Midas!” hissed Hailey. “Never ask a woman her age!”

“Seventeen,” Emily answered coolly, clearly unoffended by Midas’s rash question.

“What would you like to order?”

Midas leaned in and asked, “What’s your favorite?”

Hailey rolled her eyes. I noticed that Emily gave Midas a malicious smile. “An omelet with lots of cheese, mushrooms, and jalapeños. Oh, I also like to put Tabasco sauce on top.”

Midas contemplated Emily’s recommendation. The thought of eggs and mushrooms repulsed me. Delilah told him not to get it. “I’ll take it!” Midas told her. With a triumphant smile, Emily jotted down his order.

“Is she really your sister?” Midas asked Mr. Huntsman after Emily took the rest of our orders and left.

“Half-sister,” said Mr. Huntsman. “We’re twelve years apart.” She was born a year after my dad remarried.” He faced Midas and gave him a mischievous grin. “A lot of boys think she’s pretty.”

Midas didn’t respond. I saw his cheeks turn a little pink. I couldn’t help but snicker a little. During all four years of high school, Midas had one girlfriend, but that lasted only a week. Since that failed relationship, Midas attempted to flirt with other girls but got nowhere.

“Is Emily single?” I asked Mr. Huntsman as I nudged Midas’s ribs.

“I believe so,” said Mr. Huntsman, “but I’d suggest you ask her yourself.” He addressed this last part to Midas. Across the table, Hailey shook her head.

As we waited for our food, Midas and I took turns telling the Huntsman family about our road trip to Portland to visit my grandpa. I briefly explained how my grandfather was funding the trip, and I allowed Midas to explain how we planned to follow the historic Oregon Trail. Mr. Huntsman became very interested in our trip and asked if Chimney Rock was on our itinerary.

We continued chatting until Emily returned with our breakfast. Midas immediately turned his attention towards Emily, watching her set down his order. “One Emily Rose special!” she said in a singsong voice. “Eat up!”

Midas took his fork, cut out a large bite, and lifted his bite of omelet to his mouth. Everyone watched as he slowly chewed. Within seconds, his cheeks turned bright red. Midas snatched three napkins, spewed his omelet and coughed. Everyone laughed while Emily leaned down to pat his back.

“Too spicy?” she asked sweetly.

Ignoring her, Midas reached for the glass of water in front of him. “It’ll only make it worse,” I warned him.

“You’re not supposed to tell him that,” Emily told me with a wink.

“You better get him a glass of milk,” Mr. Huntsman told her.

“Make it chocolate!” demanded Midas.

“Should I bring you something else to eat?” Emily asked, trying to suppress a smile.

“No,” he said determinedly. “I’ll finish it!”

Instead of watching, I turned to my chocolate chip pancakes with whipped cream on top. My mouth watered. Before I could take my first bite, I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket. My fingers unwillingly released the fork.

To my surprise, the caller ID read Uncle Paul.

Chapter Six: Theft in the Wagon

This morning we found that the Indians had taken off another one of Stanley's oxen, it was seen by following the trail that they had taken him up a steep hill and carefully Covered Evry track for the distance of a mile. He was probably taken whilst I was on guard. I do not know how he managed to affect this Roguery. It must have been very Sly.

~ William E. Taylor, September 8, 1846

The last time Uncle Paul had called me was on my birthday back in April. He called my house during my graduation and left a message, but that doesn't really count. I left the table and exited the diner to take the call.

"Hello?" I answered as soon I was outside. "Uncle Paul?"

"Hey kiddo!" greeted Uncle Paul. "Your mom says you're driving out to Oregon."

"That's right," I told him. "We're eating breakfast in Wymore, Nebraska."

"Wymore?" questioned Uncle Paul. "Where on earth is Wymore?" In the background, I could hear Uncle Paul typing. He always seems to be around a laptop or computer every time we were on the phone. "Wymore," he repeated. "Wymore...ah! I found it! Looks like you're about six hours away from my place, maybe seven. You should stop by and have some of your aunt's homemade chicken Alfredo pizza."

I could almost taste Aunt Tessa's specialty. Last time I was in Colorado, I ate nearly a whole pizza by myself. Usually, I barely manage three slices of ordinary pizza.

I explained to my Uncle that we already had plans to visit Chimney Rock, taking the historic Oregon Trail route.

"Really?" Uncle Paul asked excitedly. "I wish I could join you. You can deviate from your path a little bit and still visit Chimney Rock. Where in Nebraska is it?" I heard more typing in the background and Uncle Paul muttering Chimney Rock. I kicked a stone off the sidewalk as I waited.

“Ah! Here it is! Chimney Rock is in Bayard, Nebraska. According to MapQuest, it’s only a two-hour drive from my house. You have to come! I want to see my favorite niece again!”

I laughed. “Or you and Aunt Tessa can meet us at the KOA near Chimney Rock tonight, and you can tour the rock with us tomorrow.”

“I could!” said Uncle Paul, excitement mounting in his voice. “Tomorrow’s Saturday and I don’t have to work. We can easily drive two hours up north to meet you.”

“Really?” I questioned, not sure if Uncle Paul was being serious.

“Yeah, I’m sure!” Uncle Paul told me. “It’s been a long time since we got together, and a campout is only fitting. I’ll have your aunt bring stuff to make hobo stew tonight, and I’ll make sure your cousin comes with us. Now, when are you planning to leave this morning?”

“Soon, I hope,” I told Uncle Paul. “Midas says that the drive to Chimney Rock should only take us seven hours. If we leave at around ten, we should get there around five, maybe a bit later with stopping for gas and so forth.”

“Well, I won’t finish work until five anyways,” said Uncle Paul, “so you’ll arrive before me, I’m sure.” We said our goodbyes and hung up. I pushed my phone back into my pocket, and made my way back into the diner.

I told my friends about Uncle Paul’s plan to meet us at our next campsite. Hailey seemed excited and asked when we planned to leave. Midas, on the other hand, didn’t look very pleased, but he didn’t dare express it. Perhaps he hoped that our camping trip would only be the three of us.

“You’ll like Uncle Paul and Aunt Tessa,” I told Midas. “My cousin Radcliff might come. He’s only a year older than us.”

“Radcliff?” questioned Midas. “What kind of name is Radcliff?”

“What kind of a name is Midas?” Hailey retorted. This made the Huntsmans laugh and Midas roll his eyes.

“Wasn’t Midas some Greek king cursed with the golden touch?” questioned Mr. Huntsman. “You know, the king who turned everything he touched into gold – including his own daughter?”

“Yes,” muttered Midas.

“He got teased a lot for that in high school,” Hailey laughed.

“Anyways,” Midas interrupted. “Erin has a cousin named Radcliff.”

“Apparently Radcliff was Aunt Tessa’s maiden name,” I explained. “She was one of three daughters, and her father was disappointed that there was no one was to carry on the Radcliff name. Aunt Tessa decided to make up for marrying into the Weston family by naming her firstborn son Radcliff.”

“That’s ridiculous!” cried Midas.

“Not any more ridiculous than sharing the name of a foolish Greek king *and* an auto repair shop,” Hailey teased.

“The Radcliff name is still dead,” continued Midas, ignoring Hailey. “When this Radcliff cousin of yours has kids, they will be Westons.”

“Take that up with Aunt Tessa, not me,” I told Midas. “Personally, I think Radcliff is a cool first name.”

Midas scoffed. “That guy must’ve been badly teased in high school.”

“Actually, quite the contrary,” I told him. “Radcliff was really popular in high school *and* on the football team. At my cousin Susan’s wedding two years back, Radcliff brought his

girlfriend who happened to be a gymnast and a cheerleader. He broke up with her a month later, claiming that she was airheaded.”

“I bet she dumped him for his name,” stated Midas.

I laughed. “I doubt that. Just wait until you meet Radcliff!”

“Great! Now I have to be nice to this popular, football player cousin of yours,” said Midas.

We said our goodbyes to the Huntsman family and thanked them for breakfast. I pulled my camera from my purse so I could get a picture of us together. I was about to ask Emily to take the picture, but Midas insisted that Emily should also be in it since she’s a part of the Huntsman family. I ended up asking a different waitress. I additionally took pictures of just the Huntsman family, Midas with Delilah, Midas with Emily, and Hailey and Benny. Before we parted ways, Mr. Huntsman gave me his address, asking me if I could mail him some of the pictures from our trip. I promised him I would.

We waved as the Huntsman family left in their minivan and walked towards my car. Hailey offered to drive, so I gave her my keys and took the front seat. Midas made himself comfortable by reclining in the backseat and pulling out his laptop to play more Oregon Trail. I opened the glove compartment of my car.

“Where’s the GPS?” I asked, panic rising in my throat. I looked back in the glove compartment but there was nothing but the car manual and a copy of my auto insurance. “The GPS should be here!” I cried. “I always put it here!”

“Did you put it in your backpack?” Hailey asked. “Or maybe with some of our other camping gear?”

“No,” I told her. “I remember following the GPS to the campsite and then asking Midas to put it away.” I turned back to look at Midas. The look he gave me was not good.

“I remember putting the GPS back in the glove compartment,” he told us, “and my radio adaptor. It’s gone too! But I will search my backpack just in case.”

For the next half hour, we thoroughly ransacked my car. I unpacked and repacked all the camping gear, my backpack and duffle bag, but the GPS was not there. Long before I gave up, I knew what had happened. We had been robbed.

“But the GPS and adaptor can’t be stolen,” Hailey insisted after I had come to this conclusion. “I’m not missing any of my expensive valuables.”

“That’s because we brought our backpacks into the tents with us,” said Midas. “Now that I come to think of it, I don’t remember the car being locked last night.”

I kicked the tire of my car and cursed.

“Who do you think did it?” Hailey asked. “You don’t think it was the Huntsmans....”

Midas shook his head. “No. There were other campers aside from us and the Huntsmans.”

I thought about it more. I remembered hearing someone open the car door after we had gone to bed. I had brushed it off, assuming it was Midas trying to get something in the middle of the night. I looked at the car and tried to stay calm.

“Should we go out and buy a new GPS?” Hailey asked.

“Do you want to buy it?” I asked her, frustrated. I thought about the money Grandpa had put on my card. A good GPS costs well over a hundred dollars, but I needed to use the money on gas, food, and emergencies.

“We don’t need a GPS,” Midas told us. “Let’s just use a roadmap.” He faced me as he asked, “You do keep an atlas in your car, right?”

“Of course,” I told him sheepishly.

Midas raised his eyebrow and looked at me suspiciously. “Show it to me.”

Muttering curses underneath my breath, I opened the trunk of my car and dug out the box Nick had given me. I took my car keys from Hailey and ripped open the duct tape. I couldn’t believe I was doing this. I should have gone to the nearest gas station and purchased one instead, but it was already too late.

Hailey and Midas looked over my shoulder to see what was inside the box. I pulled out the atlas, handed it to Midas, and then quickly shut the box.

“Let me get this straight,” began Midas. “You only have an atlas because your stepdad gave you one?”

“I don’t want to talk about this,” I argued. “It’s already bad enough that I’m using this, and it’s barely been a whole day since we left Missouri.”

“He’s just trying to look out for you,” said Hailey.

“Let’s just study the map and get out of here,” I said as I opened the car door.

Bibliography

Books on Writing

Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper, 1989. Print.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Boston: Shambhala, 1986. Print.

Grumbach, Doris. *Life in a Day*. Boston: Beacon, 1996. Print.

Hall, Donald. *Life Work*. Boston: Beacon, 1993. Print.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor, 1995. Print.

Young Adult Novels on Road Travel

Barnholdt, Lauren. *Two-way Street*. New York: Simon, 2007. Print.

John, Antony. *Thou Shalt Not Road Trip*. New York: Dial, 2012. Print.

Matson, Morgan. *Amy & Roger's Epic Detour*. New York: Simon, 2010. Print.

Smith, Jennifer E. *You Are Here*. New York: Simon, 2009. Print.

Oregon Trail History

Dary, David. *The Oregon Trail: An American Saga*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. Print.

Gibbons, Boyd. "The Itch to Move West: Life and Death on the Oregon Trail." *National Geographic* 170.2 (1986): 146-77. Print.

Lee, Mary, and Sidney Nolan. "Along the Oregon Trail." *Pioneer America* 7.1 (1975): 20-35. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Sep. 2012.

Morgan, Dale L. *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail*. 2 vols.
Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993. Print.

Additional Resources

Oregon Trail II. Cambridge, MA: Learning Co, 1999. Computer file.

United States National Park Service Department of the Interior. *National Historic Trails: Auto
Tour Route Interpretive Guide*. Salt Lake City, UT: National Park Service, 2005-2010.