The Sun Rises in the East

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A freshly single mom embarked on a journey toting six suitcases, five kids, two coolers, one truck, and a partridge in a pear tree. The destination: Virginia Beach, Virginia. The summer of 2007 bloomed a promising new beginning; as the truck roared to life, we pulled out of Iowa without a backward glance. We had eyes only for the sun shining from the East coast. My mom told us all to buckle up as she gripped the steering wheel determinedly of our shiny red Ford F150. Her eyes were brimming with this chance to prove herself, but there was a little furrow between her brows, that one hint of uncertainty and fear of failing. This was her first time flying solo. What had once been “Mom and Dad,” was now just “Mom.” However, my mother was not the kind of person to let any obstacle stop her; she merely said, “I am woman. Hear me roar!” The divorce may have taken a few hard blows on her, and on us, but we were resolved to forge a new beginning as we remolded our family, and this trip was the first step to healing a broken home.

The ride down began with the high from the excitement of taking off and eventually became dull and uneventful. We were stacked on top of one another, but thankfully my family reads, so potential fights never happened because everyone’s nose was buried in a book. I slept through Illinois and Indiana on my little brother’s shoulder, while singing the Rolling Stones’ “Ruby Tuesday” in my sleep; apparently, I wasn’t too shabby. Ohio was a state I wish to forget driving through because it was so boring, and did once we spent the night in the mountains in Pennsylvania. This was the kind of place I would imagine Maria to sing a rendition of the “Sound of Music.” The hotel perched on a mountain side and overlooked the rest of the valley like a proud billy goat. Green grew in abundance; life grew here. It lived and nourished, vibrant and bright, somewhere monks could settle and dedicate their lives. The sun rose over the mountains, and warmed our faces. It called us towards the East coast. We all piled into the truck, one sleepy child after another, climbing over each other and stacks of books.

We had no plans, no idea what we were doing. MapQuest was our guide and money our only limit. We stopped in Gettysburg. The hush of such a powerful place sounds in such a silence through the folds of time that it demands respect. Those who fought with every ounce of courage and strength now lied quietly under shady green trees. The somber willows hung in sorrows while oaks stood fifty feet high guarding the dead. I could
not help but recall the battles in my house during previous months. The
carnage of divorce left scars upon my family that are slow to heal, but we
had become stronger individuals and a unit as a whole from it.

During this time at Gettysburg, I was standing next to a cannon,
as a soldier in uniform walked by. It was as if a ghost had picked itself up
and walked through his fallen comrades. My mom quickly told me to get
my camera out and take a picture of him. I scrambled for my camera and
clicked. The pictures were printed weeks later, and this one was blurry. The
layers of time were too thick to peel back enough for me to clearly capture
this moment of the soldier paying homage to Gettysburg; they were too
thick.

The first day at Virginia Beach dawned with rainy, misty weather, as
did the next day, and the one after that. But that did not matter to us. This
was the first vacation we had taken in years. It was sunny in our liberated
world. We stayed in a Hilton hotel, a place that should have been off-limits
to my family, but we were splurging. We still had to arrive in the typical
fashion however, only a few in at a time so they never can count how many
of us there were in one room. Anyone with a large family and low income
can attest to this routine. We have duped several Super 8s and Holiday Inns
on moving treks across the country.

We had to let my mom go first, then we dashed out to the ocean,
which was right outside our balcony, but we had to let my mom go first. She
said, “I want to see the younger kids’ faces when they see the ocean for the
first time.”

So we waited impatiently for her to walk ahead of us, tapping our
feet and scampering around. Then she gave us the go ahead, and we were
off like a stampede that did not stop until the cold, dark water of the
Atlantic Ocean wet our feet. The water washed away all the dirt and grime
of a twenty hour drive, the agitations of being cramped together, and the
hurt from the last year.

Mom and I lounged on the beach while the rest of the kids played
in the ocean. They giggled and shrieked as they ran and jumped into each
oncoming wave. She leaned back in the sand and let out a contented sigh,
one I had not heard from her in a long time. The wind blew away the stress
and the sound of the kids and waves crashing eased the tension from her
eyes.

“We did it, didn’t we?” she said. I nodded in agreement. It had been
a grueling road, but the end of the journey wiped away all memory of how
we got there.

The week blurred into one hazy span of time, because time does not matter when you are on vacation. The only day that matters is the day you wake up and know this will be the last time you will see the sun peeking over the ocean in a mass of golden sparkles. We went down on the beach one last time and stood side by side overlooking the ocean. The sun painted a long, dark orange splash across the sea, like yellow brick road leading back to it. This comfort of always knowing the way back to this healing paradise, gave us enough strength to turn and face a new journey.

With the sun at our backs, we said goodbye, and piled into the truck one by one into another journey. My mom kept longingly glancing in the rearview mirror as the ocean faded from sight. We were comfortable in our sanctuary, but that is why we have each other, to hold one another up when we fall. This journey of healing was over. Now we headed home. But the sun rises no matter where you are.

Twenty hours later we stumbled into the house, said hello to the cat and dog, and slept for a full day. The sunrise greeted me like an old friend, familiar and warm, the next morning as I cracked open one eye. “Ruby Tuesday” was playing in my head again singing, “There’s no time to lose, I heard her say, catch your dreams before they slip away, dying all the time. Lose your dreams, and you will lose your mind.”

My mom took this to heart, and leapt without precisely knowing where the bottom was. She had a dream of a happier life for herself, and a better life for her children. Her determination brought us through the storm and into sunny days.

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**Rachel Routier** is a junior in English Education with hopes of an MFA eventually in creative writing. She is originally from Manchester, Iowa and has a family of seven, and cat and dog. She loves to write in the early hours of the morning and read anytime. She hates seafood, tomato sauce, and making her bed when the blankets are still warm. But she loves anything purple, yellow, or sparkly.