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Roadside America: First Year Seminar

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## **Creative Nonfiction Road Narrative**

Ever since moving to Texas in 2021, my family and I have taken multiple road trips to the Houston area. Every trip was different and had its own meaningful memories, however, the second one I went to in 2022 was very unique. My family woke up early and were prepared to get on the road at about 7 a.m., my oldest sister decided to drive. Later on, my father realized he forgot something important back home, and since we were only about 15 minutes away, we headed back and retrieved the item, then started moving again. At this time, I was barely awake and my eyelids felt heavy. My parents on the other hand, often started their day early, so they had no complaints with simply getting up and getting ready. My family was planning on staying two nights, so we had all packed the night before to get more sleep in the morning. Once everything was loaded into the car, we each took our seats in my fathers car. My parents enjoy listening to traditional music and talking to the family when we are on the road, limiting screen time and our ability to sleep. We had many good moments in the car, filled with joy and laughter. We had conversations that ranged from other family members to what we were planning to do once we got there.

About 45 minutes into the drive, I started feeling more awake and looked outside the car window. I remember seeing many farm animals on the way, and towns that looked old or almost abandoned. The route we went on was more through the

country/farm side, avoiding major highways until we actually got closer to Houston. I felt excited for what was to come once we actually arrived and couldn't wait for the new memories we were about to make.

About one hour into the drive, we stopped for gas and to stretch, I decided to go down to the gas station to get some snacks. As I was looking around, a short woman who had brown and gray hair, and looked to be in her late 50s gently tapped my shoulder and asked me where I was from. She seemed genuinely curious and I didn't mind telling her. She mentioned how she has been living in this area/town her whole life and hasn't seen me before. I explained to her that my family and I are just passing through on a road trip, then she began to ask more questions that eventually led to a full-on conversation. She started telling me about her family, her kids and her childhood. She has never been outside of Texas and felt like she has missed out on many important life experiences. I found it interesting how she's never been anywhere else. She informed me how her kids live closer to the border of Texas and she visits them from time to time. As we continued to talk, she cracked some jokes that made me laugh. She started telling me to live my life while I am still young, take all the opportunities given to me and travel. We continued talking for about 10 minutes when my older sister came in and told me we were ready to hit the road again. I told the woman it was nice meeting her and I hope to see her again somehow. She had a big smile on her face and waved goodbye. As I got back to my seat in the vehicle, I realized the importance of the moments you have with your family truly are, whether big or small. When I thought more about what she told me about her family, I realized she probably feels very alone at her age, since her kids barely visited and her husband passed away a few years ago. This

small encounter made me think more about my life, my surroundings, and where I was headed. I realized how this trip and engaging in automobility/transportation allowed me to not only meet a new person, but also learn from them and reflect back on my own life. At this moment, I felt grateful for what I had, in terms of family and opportunities.

I spent the rest of the way there, listening to my own music through headphones and looking out the window. I felt a different type of calm, where nothing that stressed me out, such as school or other people came to my mind. My mind was quiet and didn't feel heavy. This small act of automobility and deciding to take a trip a few hours away made me realize how many opportunities come with it. I was able to talk to someone that affected the way I viewed some things in life, including the things around me, the way I should be appreciative for what I have and to make sure I use my time on earth wisely.

As we were getting closer, I saw many different colored sports cars driving together on the highway. Many of them had designs and when looking at the driver, I feel they described/portrayed each other well. One of the drivers was wearing a cowboy hat and had similar designs on his car, while another, who appeared to be into rock music, had long black hair, and had guitars and different instruments designed onto his vehicle. American car culture has allowed drivers to express themselves through what they drive, and the automobility aspect gets them to where they are headed.

Automobility plays an important role in many American peoples' lives, sometimes without the person even noticing. My road trip to Houston was already an adventure before I even reached my destination. I made many new memories from simply talking to my family, listening to music, seeing different cars, and talking to new people. I

remember thinking how important it is for me to get my drivers license while sitting in the back of the car. This trip was taken before I earned my license, at the time I was still practicing. It made me more motivated to keep going and ensure I get my license without waiting longer. I wanted to be able to do this on my own in the future, even if there is no reason. To simply just drive around and see what I get to experience, see, and feel.

By the time we had reached our destination, I felt the trip had already ended. I was able to gain many memories and learned from my experiences, from just being on the road, before even reaching for where I was headed. Being there was a whole different experience from the trip to getting there, and the trip to get back home. All this taught me to not take things for granted when given the opportunity to engage in automobility and physically see American car culture in front of my eyes. Its (automobility) ability to bring me many benefits and experiences allowed me to further realize its importance in one's life, both in the short and long run.