

Ace Dowling

Roadside America FYS

Professor Bednar

A Mini Adventure with My Dad

My older brother attends Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina. He has been driving our Mini Cooper which we both have used to learn to drive. For him to have a car in college, he and my dad would have to drive the car from Austin, to Davidson. On their first trip, they drove north towards Tyler, Texas, through Jackson, Mississippi, Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia. Then my dad flew back from Charlotte, N. C. After that tiring journey, they both realized that the drive was long and boring, and they didn't want to go that way again. After a little research, my dad learned he could go through New Orleans and Houston, instead, which he thought was more scenic, required less stops, and bonus, they both had NBA teams. This is definitely a plus because my dad, brothers and I are basketball fanatics. My dad liked this route enough that he thought it would be fun for me to go with him on the next trip. I have since been able to do this trip multiple times, but for me, the first time I went on this trip was my favorite. It was my first real road trip through America. I got to see cities and states I hadn't been to before, and I gained a closer connection with my dad.

November 18, 2022, was the first Friday of my Thanksgiving break. My dad and I took a flight to Charlotte, spent the night, and ubered to Davidson the next day to pick up the green hybrid Mini Cooper which we would be driving back to Austin. We have had our Mini Cooper Countryman since 2019, and both my brother and I have learned to drive with this car. One thing my family has always had is an electric or hybrid car. Initially, we had one of the first Tesla models, but my parents did not want that to be our first car. It was too nice for new drivers. So they found a good sized (safe) car for us. Since it's a hybrid, when we go on road trips and go to

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places that don't have electric stations, we have to stop more for gas because it can't travel as far between stops. But we all love the Mini.

We started our way towards Georgia Saturday morning. This would be a 4 hour drive, and our shortest day of driving during the whole trip. It was my first time driving through South Carolina and being in the state of Georgia. The pine trees were beautiful. We seemed to be surrounded by a blanket of green. The first night, we stayed in a hotel in the Atlanta area but not downtown, because that was not in the direct path, and we didn't want to deal with the city traffic. We found a nice restaurant and took an uber there because my dad didn't want to drive more than he had to. When we were approaching the restaurant which was in a strip mall, our uber driver told us that there had just been a shooting on the other side of the mall. We thought that was pretty weird, but we were hungry so we had dinner anyway. We made it back to the hotel unscathed, fed and tired.

The next morning we woke up early because we had planned to see an NBA game in New Orleans on our way back. We started our 7 hour drive through Alabama and Mississippi, which are two states I had never been to. My Dad did not want to stop in those states unless we had to eat or go to the bathroom because there weren't any places of interest on the way and we had a game to get to. So we pretty much drove the 7 hours straight through. By this time, my dad had been getting fed up with doing all the driving, and I couldn't help because I hadn't gotten my license yet. He felt drowsy and would start to fall asleep if he wasn't being stimulated by something else. I shared my Spotify playlist with him and then listened to his. A lot of my songs are old school, like Bruce Springsteen and the Stones, which he liked well enough. He shared some songs that he grew up listening to like, The Clash and Elvis Costello, which I appreciated

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but did not add to my own playlist. We also listened to some podcasts about basketball to prepare us for our game that night. There is always some new perspective to consider about that amazing sport.

When we were tired of podcasts, we had long conversations about whatever we were thinking or saw on the road. I remember one lengthy discussion about all the roadside attorney billboards. There was a different one in each state like the Thomas J. Henry one in Texas. We actually started looking for them and every time we saw one, we would add it to our list and see what competition they had. As we started getting closer to New Orleans, the scenery became more swampy. The highways were like elevated bridges snaking over the dark waters. We made our way into downtown New Orleans to a hotel that was walking distance from the Arena in the city. It felt like an ancient city with colorful buildings framed in ornate ironwork. We walked through the neighborhoods and were both really excited for the game; it was the Pelicans, who were the home team and were young and exciting, versus the Warriors, who had won the championship the year before. They had all star players like Stephen Curry. When we saw a notification pop up that the entire Warriors starting five players would be sitting out because they had played the previous night, we were pretty disappointed. But we had the tickets so we made our way to the arena and grabbed some quick food. I was feeling adventurous and actually had alligator sausage for dinner. I hate to say it, but it tasted like chicken, but better! It was the best meat I have ever had. Shortly after the game started, we realized it was going to be very lopsided. The Pelicans had gained a huge lead by the 3rd quarter. We knew who was going to win, so we left early and went back to the hotel.

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The next morning we started out early again as it would take 8 hours all the way back to Austin. As we started to drive away from New Orleans, my dad and I discussed our stay and agreed that it was the best place on the trip and that we definitely wanted to go back. The swamps seemed to fade away as the familiar dry, flat lands came back into view. 5 hours later, we made it to Houston and stopped at my parents' Indoor Cycling studio called Ride so we could get some exercise. It had been a long journey of mostly sitting, and we were in need of some movement. After the class we made our final leg to Austin. It had been a fun trip, but we were really relieved when we saw the Austin Skyline. We got closer to our neighborhood and saw the roads and buildings we were used to, and pulled the Mini Cooper into its Austin home.

That November trip with my dad is one I will probably always remember. We had flown together on a plane to start our trip and while my dad napped, I watched a movie, but it was the road trip back that was memorable. I saw new places, landscapes, and people. The whole 3 days felt like an adventure. From hotels, inner-city dangers, interesting foods and of course, basketball, the trip seemed like it lasted much longer. Maybe I didn't fully realize it at the time, but one of the best parts of the trip was spending quality time with my dad. We were "stuck" together in a little green box just traveling down the highway really getting to know each other. I learned that road trips allow for bonding in ways that other modes of travel do not.

I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not.

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