

# **The Long Road to Here**

## **Chapter One: The First Journey**

The hum of the highway has always been a kind of music to me. Long before I understood the weight of leaving and the joy of arriving, I knew the rhythm of the road. As a child, road trips were my first taste of adventure, a glimpse beyond the familiar walls of home. My mother would pack a cooler with sandwiches, and my father would turn the key in the ignition like a ritual, the start of something unknown. I can still remember the feeling of the car pulling out of the driveway, the vibration in my chest, the way the world seemed to stretch open in front of us.

There was something magical about those early journeys, even if the destinations weren't grand. The road itself was the adventure. My siblings and I would press our faces against the windows, watching the landscape shift from suburban streets to open fields to winding country roads. I would count the mile markers, marking our progress in a way that felt tangible, as if distance itself meant something.

But it wasn't just about getting somewhere new—it was about what the road represented. Movement. Possibility. Escape.

It wasn't until much later that I understood how those early trips planted a seed in me. The need to keep moving. The idea that when things became too heavy, the road could lighten them. As I grew older, I would return to the highway in moments of change, in moments of loss, in moments when the weight of staying still felt unbearable.

One of the first journeys that truly belonged to me happened when I was eighteen. It was my first road trip without my parents, without an itinerary, without someone else dictating the way. My best friend and I had planned it for weeks—a drive across three states, just to see what was out there. We piled everything we thought we might need into the back of a beat-up car that rattled when we hit seventy, rolled down the windows, and let the summer air wrap around us.

We didn't have much money, but we had music, and that felt like enough. We took turns driving, pulling over at gas stations that smelled of asphalt and adventure. We slept in cheap motels with neon signs that buzzed outside the windows, places that felt like they belonged in a different era. It didn't matter where we ended up; the road was the point.

I remember a specific stretch of highway, somewhere in Tennessee. The sun had just begun to set, spilling gold across the hills. We had been driving for hours, the conversation dipping in and out like a radio signal. At some point, my friend

turned to me and said, “Do you ever think about just...not stopping?”

It was a question that stayed with me for years. Not stopping. Not settling. Letting the road take me wherever it wanted. There was a kind of freedom in that thought, the idea that life didn’t have to be mapped out, that I didn’t have to follow the signs that had been placed for me.

Of course, reality is different. You have to stop somewhere. But I think I spent a long time searching for the place that made stopping feel right.

That first road trip was the beginning of something. It was the first time I understood that movement itself could be a kind of healing. The miles we covered weren’t just physical—they were emotional. Each town we passed through, each small diner where we ate greasy burgers and laughed too loud, each highway exit that led to somewhere new—it all felt like a lesson in possibility.

Looking back, I think that trip was when I first fell in love with the idea of the road as a way forward. Not just in the literal sense, but in the way that travel forces you to confront yourself. When you’re in a car for hours on end, when you leave behind everything familiar, you have to sit with yourself. You have to listen to your own thoughts without distraction. The road doesn’t give you easy answers, but it does give you space to ask the right questions.

Years later, after heartbreaks and losses I couldn't have imagined back then, I would return to the highway in search of that same feeling. The sense that anything was possible, that reinvention was just a few hundred miles away. But the older I got, the more I realized that the road doesn't erase things—it just gives you the time to see them differently.

That first trip ended, like all trips do. We made it back home, back to the routines we had briefly escaped. But something had shifted in me. The road had become more than just a way to get from one place to another. It had become a part of me, a thread that would weave through the rest of my life.

Now, sitting here in Port Isabel, watching the waves crash against the shore, I think about that first journey and how much it shaped what was to come. The winding roads, the late-night gas station stops, the endless horizon—they all led here, to this moment, to this place where I finally feel like stopping makes sense.

Maybe that's the thing about the long road. It never really ends. It just keeps leading you forward until one day, you look around and realize you've arrived.

But before I truly felt settled, I took more detours. More long highways that stretched into the unknown, places where I thought I might stay but never quite fit. There was the time I packed up everything and moved to a new city, believing

reinvention was just a new zip code away. The apartment had high ceilings and large windows, but it never felt like home. I walked those streets with the same restless energy I had on that first road trip, hoping something would click into place. It never did.

The road called again, and I answered. I took solo trips, chasing open landscapes and wide skies. There was a sense of both freedom and loneliness in traveling alone—no one to share the music, no one to read road signs aloud, just me and the hum of the tires against the asphalt. But those miles shaped me, taught me how to be alone without feeling lost.

I met people along the way—travelers, dreamers, people searching for something just like me. Some became friends, some were just passing stories exchanged at diners over coffee. Each encounter was another piece of the map, another breadcrumb leading me closer to where I needed to be.

Eventually, I found myself drawn back to the coast. The ocean had always called to me, a force just as strong as the road. When I reached Port Isabel, I felt something shift. It wasn't just another stop. It was something deeper. The kind of place where you take a deep breath and realize you're exactly where you need to be.

But the journey wasn't over. Even in Port Isabel, I felt the echoes of past roads calling to me. I walked the shore and saw reflections of highways in the rolling waves, reminders that

every road I had ever traveled had led me to this moment. The miles had shaped me, and in their own way, they had prepared me to finally be still. And maybe, after all these years, the road had finally led me home.