

## ROAD TRIPS

**E**ach summer, when I was a boy, my family would take a long car trip. Because I was the oldest child, I often sat up front with my dad. We would tell stories, examine the map, and talk about the new places we would see.

Many of the rules on these trips were different from the ones at home. I could stay up as late as I wanted while my mother and siblings fell asleep in back. My dad would talk in a leisurely manner, and the ordinary world of home seemed to drift away as we drove into the night.

The sights and sounds of these trips form some of my most vivid memories of childhood. Over the years, we traveled to forty-nine states, and today I remember as much from these summer trips as I do the entire rest of the year.

One of these memories is my first trip to New York. Growing up in Wisconsin, I knew New York was the big city. I'd watched the amazing Mets, Walt Frazier, and "Broadway Joe" Namath. I knew about the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and Central Park. I knew the city would be very different than the town in which I lived, and I couldn't wait to see it.

We parked our van in a lot on Staten Island and took the ferry to Manhattan. What a spectacular way to see the city for the first time. We passed the Statue of Liberty, and from the water, it was easy to imagine immigrants staring at it. How did they feel leaving their old lives behind to come to this new world? Were they scared? Were they excited the way I was?

I remember the crowds of people on the streets, the shades of skin, the fashionable clothes, the rows of yellow taxis. I remember the screech of the subway train, and the unbelievably high up view from the top of the Empire State Building. I soaked it all in with the heightened awareness of a young traveler in a new place.

I believe travel is one of the great gifts a parent can provide a child. Travel is a key that can open many doors. It allows us to see our lives from a different perspective. It allows us to expand our conception of ways to live and what is possible. It reminds us that along with the differences of people and places, there are many similarities.

I believe that a love of books and reading is another great gift a parent can give. Reading books can provide many of the benefits travel does. It's not surprising, then, that I've always enjoyed combining these two by reading interesting books about travel, exploration, and road trips.

There are many interesting books out there. As a parent, you are the guide for your child. Happy exploring. Happy reading. Happy travels.