

*The Generation's Beat: My Journey
Cross Country*

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OS24



For my final project, I began by researching the Beat Generation. Throughout this research I cultivated a strong interest in both prominent and underground writers and artists from this era. I was particularly inspired by the works of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, specifically, Howl and On The Road. The following essay is my personal version of On The Road. In an attempt to find my inner Beat, I adapted similar circumstances under which Kerouac wrote his famous novel—one long paragraph written over three week time period—to create a chronicle of my own journey across the country.

I moved to this place right when I was feeling at my worst. It might have been hard to leave home since everything and everyone were being so nice right when I was getting ready to leave. But then all I had were my daydreams floating me to the airport escaping the past and carrying me into the future. I forced back the tears on the plane that took me farther and farther from home, flying me over valleys and plains and cities and snow-covered mountains. My youth, the only entity separating me from what was ahead the sunny green fields of California, far away from the dark cloudy sky of New York. My mother with her short brown hair and glazed green eyes hugged me and I felt her wet tears roll down my cheek as she embraced me like she'd never embraced me before. She let go fearful and abandoned. I watched as she prayed to a god she'd never believed in, whispered sweet prayers to the wind for my safety for my health. My independence scares her. She fears I cannot take care of myself, yet it's only in my dreams where she feeds me clothes me bathes me when prior to my departure she was the one who left not me. I landed at the airport feeling bluer than the sky overhead San Francisco and gathered my things. My journey ahead floated around my body like a halo a dauntingly long pilgrimage starting here right now. I cautiously took steps further, further down the endless hallway the revolving platform gliding me closer, closer to defeat. My sister with her shocking artificially colored red hair and her bargain black pumps waited for me at the baggage claim. I embraced her, encased in her big warm arms with curiosity about her life as a newly separated single mother. She was married to the greatest guy, my brother, my friend. He laughed and loved with all his big belly could offer but recently their marriage fell apart and she forced the separation, divorcing him from herself, their kids, and me. Her kids were gleaming, happy to see me as they jumped into my arms, making my sadness seem to disappear as if it had never been looming overhead, hesitantly carving my grey shadow into the walls into the ground.

We collected my bags from the conveyor belt and followed the kids as they hurried off to the parking garage. The car they stopped at was not their normal car but instead a fancy black SUV that seemed to glisten next to the ordinary cars. I walked around and investigated the monstrosity that to me seemed to have single-handedly guided our population to consumerism mass production that suffocated the poor and glorified the rich. Maybe this was a strong reaction but I resented my sister's beaming face as she explained she had borrowed it from a "man-friend" her smile stretching to either side of her face, her eyes twinkling with lust. Nevertheless I was grateful to have been picked up so I smiled, threw my bags in the trunk, and hopped into the front seat, even allowing my self a sliver of delight in the soft smooth tan leather seats. I threw my head back, closed my eyes, and when I opened them again forty-five minutes later we had arrived at her humble abode on the island of Alameda. Her house was newly painted in shades of blue and green and I remember missing the rustic look of the peeling paint and the overgrown garden in the front yard. Up to this point my life has been a web of disconnected temporary homes, keeping me warm for the interim of my stays, always ending too soon, those few short

months drifted by as if I had never fulfilled their existence. With each move my habitation seems to dwindle in time. Hours escaped from me, sentimental connections choke from the dust as my boots ride me away with speed. I arrived somewhere safe albeit short lived but my time spent there was never in vain nor laid out to waste. I spent the next four days lazing around her house, dragging my feet counting the minutes until I would venture north into the wild, the untravelled vineyards and grapevines of Napa. Each morning I woke to the smell of bacon and grits, the heavy aroma wafted from room to room. My jet-lag in conspiracy against me, I struggled to get out of bed. My sister would bounce between rooms, getting herself and her kids ready for the day. The kids were then hurried off to school while my sister and I jetted off to San Francisco to the Business District where she performed her daily slaving while I ventured off in the concrete, discovering museums and food and people. At the end of this sweet recess I finally arrived in Napa, the unexplored territory exposed my flesh to the sun, the air, and the heat of the day as all the new students sat on the deck nervously playing name games every state represented from New Jersey to Minnesota to Georgia to New Mexico. I sat with one I found comfort in, the one being who made this great leap almost 3,000 miles West with me. We watched these great games unfold and listened to the squeals of the younger girls and laughed when all the other states laughed and listened and watched. To us, it seemed like a circus, a synthesis of wild beasts all yelling in our native tongues but none of us were bilingual. After the first day we rested our sad pretty heads but our brains wouldn't let us; they kept on circulating exploring dipping in and out of the minds of the others at the table in the kitchen when we joined for our daily bread. We all felt the same energized, dazed, confused, nervous to present our projects about a genius's dreams and learn what was to come. The faculty presented the next projects while I idly pretended to draw in my sketchbook as that's what everyone else seemed to be doing. I sat with those whom I thought looked the most like me, but in the end we're all the same creatures gnawing at this earth, looking for the same things to fill our voracious minds. My nostalgia held my hand at my side, sat down with the others first, yet later in the next few months he was to simultaneously separate from and grow closer to my heart. That first week the faculty told us what was to come as they laid our next few months out on the wall, stretching, dilating our pupils with information. We watched some gloomily grudgingly, some jubilated intoxicated. That first week at Oxbow was filled with introductory sessions experimenting I still did not know everyone's names and at that point it seemed my memory would fail me forever. I tried hard and true to belong until I found a tribe all huddled together in the commonalities of vast urban culture, art and literature, body modifications, flesh and blood. We began our friendships at one end creating a link between us keeping conversations light, heavy, and always laughing. Our plates piled high with food we stayed in what we found to be comfortable. With each passing day our places stood still always saved with a napkin knife and fork our plates slamming down once we collected our grub. In a way our places at the table during meal times kept us still too. We were stuck in these positions and would soon learn we had made these incisions too quickly. Each night was spent with legs tangled fingers entwined in someone's common room. We began in one and as the days weeks months passed we were kicked out of each. At first, temperatures rose, hysteric hearts pounded, and we made so much noise and never regretted a word or a shriek of laughter. We spent days there in at one common room until the grumpiest loneliest girls in the world had a fit and kicked us out. This was almost fitting as the room as a whole seemed to drift away from us as well. A few words of despair and we moved on to the next one. The next room of suitemates was more accepting—friendlier, laughter, louder, squealing, The Owner of New York it was all there. We stayed here many nights weekends weekdays writing essays or studying

worms or propaganda, sometimes wasting our time watching videos of all things relative. At this time my relic of home escaped from me, as he latched on to the ankles of another. Moving here to Napa from New York together had stitched our beating hearts, woven them together in what seemed to be unbreakable yarn. But a few months in, and the yarn began to fade, dissolving into our bodies and pumping through our blood. At first there was jealousy, but that quickly passed as I remained in close connection with both. And soon enough my relic would find himself experimenting in more, escaping and starting from me to her and then finally landing safely in the open arms of other boys like and unlike him. Before he slipped away from me, breaking the skin that held us so tightly together in its womb, I found myself quietly drifting away. I was always tired and envious of the tall giraffe with the skinny legs and beautiful spotted fur coat. She stuck out in a crowd and roared and roared for all to hear. I often felt small and insignificant next to her and after a few weeks I strayed from beneath her nook. These were the beginning of the best days. I no longer woke feeling lonely and removed from my birthplace. I cultivated strong relationships with the other girls living with me. One was big, strong, and beautiful, and when she walked she left crushed gold fairy dust in the shape of footprints, everyone fawned over her and especially me. I raved about her to anyone who would listen, described her goddess aura and sensitive core. She had the most beautiful energy that illuminated a tough exterior, but I knew deep down she was soft and sweet like caramel just waiting to be tasted. And another—dimwitted and flat-worlded—I never took interest in her like she took interest in me. Nevertheless, we lived together and therefore loved each other for all we were worth. And one was mountainous and bubbly. She cried a lot and had mood swings but these were only a product of her sad self-esteem. She was self-victimizing and oftentimes I became restless with her antics and had to separate myself. I often thought she looked up to me, thought of me as a guiding sisterly figure, even though she was sprung from the womb a year ahead of me. She always asked me what I thought, said I was so smart—a mind filled with intelligence waiting to burst out and educate the world. While I enjoyed the compliments I felt disheartened that she was the only person who would ever feel that way about me. I spent many nights feeding her advice to motivate her to fill her to break through the rubbery skin wrapped around her brain, and while it seemed to penetrate at the time, the excitement would die inside her just before it inflicted her heart, slowly fading away leaving her as respiration. One night most recently she could sense my self-inflicted separation and called a meeting for all of us to convene in her nook by her bed. We sat on the bed, anxious to return to our sketching and watercoloring, while two sensitive ones began a hesitant conversation about our “family.” They complained we were falling apart, that something seemed off, something was not in its place. This only aggravated me more. I just wanted to go back to painting my fish in my journal that I made with paper string and an old book cover. I huffed and puffed until the conversation slowly died, mostly covered by nervous laughter, quick explanations of our apprehensive behavior. We slid out of the nook to continue our sketching and watercoloring until I was too tired, too weak. I went back to my room and fell into a deep sleep that would warp my mind to mystical mysterious dreams. That night I dreamt of the future, my mind always focusing on the idea, the long bowling alley leading me too the bright white light of salvation. Each night after that, before my roommates and I retired to our separate chambers, we huddled, crowded around the bed to listen to our manic exploits—each of us tossing our stories into a melting pot of disillusioned dreams and advances. Most of the anecdotes were of fears, past present and future betrayals, a loss of hope and whatever else delved into our innermost thoughts. Each of us struggled to be heard as we ripped out our hearts and passed them around the circle to be twisted plucked and torn apart in layers of uncertainty

and regret. We watched as the layers oozed into the carpet spreading the juice and grime, the love and affection across the floor. One stood up, battling with herself and everyone else to be heard, her voice growing louder with each syllable as she paced around the room to end on her bed where she rests for hours under the comforts of her blankets wrapped up to her chin. She typed away furiously at her computer, her cell phone begging for someone, anyone! to listen. Always in a bad mood, she was scared, fearful, of the future? No one knows we only know nothing but if we did I'm not sure what we would say. It is all the same, one whispered secret passed through our ears on to the next willing and eager soul. I grew closer to them and farther from my urban reminders but never too far and soon enough I would rejoin them in their exploits of salvation, their protests, their cries for help, their longing for home. By this point the girls who had worried me before, forced me to walk around cautiously as I tiptoed through the halls, had finally disappeared from my consciousness which we all agreed was for the best. And yet the friendliness still remained along with some awkwardness but it was better, I was happier and craved connections with the others. We grew so close. Doing anything and everything together. We watched and read countless amounts of media, poured through books and gorged ourselves full of burritos, quesadillas, pad thai, chinese. I started studying the art of writing and reading all the while falling in love with Jonathan Safran Foer and writing three page essays every night—personal memoirs, narratives. I deleted every social networking site and transferred my Internet time to browsing books. I read so much everyday for hours letting my time slip away with the turn of each page. I dreamt, thought, spoke, in my books, my mind escaped, tossed and turned and when each book ended I started another and another. I let myself fall into a separate world and released emotionally, investing in something else, scary, stupid in a way as I was detached, declaimed from myself, my world. What brought me back to sanity I credit my teacher Mo. I was inspired in the studies in the words he preached to us, I wanted to learn about the United States, the government, the world in conflict. And then I copied the drawings, the learnings, the words of my peers, I wanted to learn about animals, plants, fish, reptiles, amphibians, the earth's and the body's natural cycles. I dreamed of stretching my brain—feeding it fuel, prepping it for regurgitation, and soon enough, I would do just that. One weekend before, when I felt separated from my friends, pushed away by the one girl's existence, two girls took their free-weekends escaping away to the City of Angels leaving alone me with my suitemates, my relic, my friend. All just in that one weekend we grew so close—the three of us exploring the town, the fire museum, the bistro with the savor, the Japanese horror films of incest, sex, blood, tears. We were all so happy, overwhelmed with ecstasy, our smiles stretched from ear to ear as we sat on the couch flipping through magazines memorizing every word, every smirk, intent on each other's faces. But soon enough the weekend was over and our bodies were abruptly jolted back to reality. We grimly went back to class, our books on our hips, makeup under our eyes, covering up the dark circles that lifted the veil of our late weekend nights of mysteries, secrets and stories. To me, it seemed I would never return to those moments of euphoria as I was quickly and once again laid under the wing of that girl, feeling smaller than ever, pushed aside and neglected. Now it was I who was doing the self-victimizing and it did not take me long to realize this. I busied myself once again, immersing myself in a world of books, movies, music, fashion, but it was not long until I was finally able to reel myself in, in, to find a place where I felt comfortable, where I could laugh. When Kira left everyone was disheveled, she was the first of three students to leave, and she was such a prominent member, so dramatically leaving the community, leaving us to pick up the pieces, and in the interim I grew stronger wiser, confident independent, as people I followed around before began to tie the knots with her suitemates, drawing them in while

simultaneously pushing me out. While Kira's absence was a difficult transition for me, it also marked the time when I placed my heels firmly in this earth's moist brown soil and plunged into the ground, not coming up for air but staying down there in the sticky layers, fully immersed in my art, my writing, and finally my friends. I was left alone by the kingdom, not leaving me out but instead trying to get me back in, trying to get me so she could convince herself and maybe everyone else of her own attention, power, vanity. I was beginning to feel as I did that one weekend where the three of us gleefully pranced through fields in flowing skirts made of lace and cashmere. And right when I was at my highest point the absences occurred again, this time sending home two more. It was their own fault, their own poor choices that led to their fate, but right then everyone fell back in the pattern of sadness and depression, dragging me down with them. The poor tender hearts who were viciously unzipped from this place did not hold a place so close to me. One girl one boy, the boy often made rude remarks smirks of superiority when I made a joke, laughing at me rather than with me. He wrote in our study of the English language that he often found it difficult to communicate, a glitch I find myself identifying with but he never gave me the chance. The girl with her teal green hair grown out so her glossy brown roots shined against the sun, her light eyes glazed from the drugs slowing her down. She mix-matched patterns—flowers, stripes, solid colors, diamonds, everything out of sync, even her brain seemed to be. It stalled, muttering, puttering out information as it came to it no chronology, no sequence of events or logic, just thoughts plain, tried, true. After they were gone my friends and I were reduced to yet again more depression and worry, feeling pressured and distrusted by the faculty and in return not trusting them. The people closest to me dragged their feet heavy on the ground, mixing concrete and earth at their heels, never bothering to look back, they carry their bags on their back drooping heavy with despair, the fabric stretching, mutating. It continued like this for the next week, dwindling on to the second, and finally recovering at the third. I was happy again and my peers were catching up to me. The faculty presented the final project, everyone worried, scared there wasn't enough time, my one friend breaking down at the table in the dining hall, at the table in the library. I pressed her head against my shoulder and wrapped my arm around hers as she wept silent tears they slid down her face, sweetly, gently, they curled over her nose, her chin and slowly dropped to her dress, instantly absorbed and lost forever. We walked around to markets and bakeries to get some air, they were all telling us so much, filling our bodies to explosion with information, yet we felt like we didn't have enough. We walked around town, them and I, arms linked, humming out of tune, the sun beating down our backs and suddenly the tears were all dried up and we forgot why we were ever sad in the first place. When we got back to campus the sun was hiding away, escaping our world and heading on to the next, the night washed over the sky painting the land black, releasing the fumes of burnt wood and the yawns of the baby chicks in the garden. I crawled the steps up to my room, exhaustion drawing me closer to my bed. That week was spent mostly researching, writing, reading. Everyone scrambled for the best books, conversations with teachers for guidance as a wave of uncertainty hung over me. I was scared of my project, daunted by the time constraint. As people began cultivating ideas my two guides, my muses, were in constant dialogue, swapping ideas, words of encouragement, while I remained quiet, shoving my own headless body into a corner, separation, isolation, myself, their conversations, their minds not wondering about mine, or mine just wondering about their wondering. I drove myself into a frenzy, crazy jumble of words and rhymes, inappropriate, enigmatic. I felt inadequate, timid, shy, even my friends and family from home could not bring out the words I had in me, the nonsensical syntax diction, not even making sense inside my head, my hard rotten skull that held me prisoner, held me up in chains, tied against the wall to my bed

post, to the bars on the windows, in the shower the door locked, the water burned my skin until it bubbled, I banged on the glass doors, screaming crying for help, anyone, please, but no words came out, no one could hear me, and I had nothing to show, just the burns on my back and the scars on my wrist, the dried bloody tissues and gauze tape holding my sad sorrowful skin together. I am reminded of last year when I was weak, even more weak than now dreaded, tired, sad, sulking cross-legged on the square blue tiles covering the walls the floor, but the ceiling remained white until it was splashed, sprayed, stained with the red paint. Salvation was far, at a poker game that night uptown, all that was left was my sad weeping body, barely breathing, listening, hearing each sound inside my head, the creak of the paneled floors, I crawled back to my bed, hid under the covers, buried my face with the soft moon sheets and closed my eyes, hoping tomorrow would never come. But of course it did and I'm grateful it has as it led me here today, exploring the vineyards, the people, the river, meeting new faces I'd never meet otherwise, the Angels of Cities, jet black and platinum white, me with my mix neither brown nor blonde, in the middle in between, loving them more than I could ever love myself and here I am trying to get to them, trying to make it, to speak, to communicate, realize, my voice and share it, yet for some reason my genetics, my life, a jumble of mixed people and places have stopped me from doing so, from finding this voice that I could call my own, one I could be proud of and yell off of rooftops, in gardens, on the paved streets and concrete sidewalks. As the week ended we gleefully put our books and journals on the shelves and planned for the weekend ahead. Saturday morning as early as we woke we began the trek, the long mountainous walk traveling over a paved desert with only one thing to bring that made it worth it, made the heat feel less on our backs, the bags lighter on our shoulders. We arrived at the plaza, society gazing our way, staring into our eyes, searching for secrets, striving to strip us bear naked, laying for all to see scrutinizing our tribe, some envious, some full of contempt. Our trip took longer and the return back to the fortress, hot and sweaty, fast-paced, our legs aching, our feet sore, hair sticking to our shoulders, foreheads, and when we got back I felt the same, the weekends, boredom, my own fault as I spend time less occupied, eating, gorging my body with chips cookies calories energy Mexican, Thai, anything to fill my body with time, my hands busy, moving, my nails bloody, bitten, my lips cracked, chapped, furiously sucking, biting at the water bottle, the nipple of the cap ripped and torn. During these journeys I often wondered about time, how, why it passes. Where we go from here, how to make it go faster. I worried and worried, concerned, convinced, depleted, hoping, praying time would move faster, I would soon be home again, and eventually I would but for me eventually was not soon enough. And then we left for break, I returned home comfortable, natural, but then quickly to go to Texas, visiting family, my mother and my sister by my side. And then I noticed, I saw, I held her hands, trembling, as my mother, this tiny little bird, approached its father, old weary and wrinkled, clutching his daughter, my mother, tightly, then pushing her aside, not quite ready to fly. Now I see, I can't speak for this reason, my mouth sewn tight by the mechanical genetics that tie me to this bird. That weekend, the first weekend of break I never fought with her, asking if she needed help setting the table clearing the table preparing the food cleaning the kitchen, everything, every time she said no she could do it on her own, yet secretly, silently, slowly, dying, her own self-imposed solitary confinement encasing her in a barrier, walls of distrust, monsters, grudges, and guilt. This world I stand on the cusp of, of familiar life-long bitterness, I have a choice, my life could unfold perfectly, quietly, slipping in to the clutches of this world, her world, this prison of the mind, gluing the lips, the eyes, the ears, sending off the soul. Or I go stomping loudly, my feet making marks, my own footprints,

proof of my escape into the earth, the stones, gravel, dirt, move aside, shape my shoes, making my path clearer.