

Mar7

## Off We Go!

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After months of packing and preparation, one morning in the early fall of 1978, my daughters and I piled in to the car and headed north. Our departure was based on the school schedule, as my oldest daughter would be starting First Grade on Beaver Island. My husband would wrap some things up in Lapeer, and join us before the month was out.

We'd had good-bye dinners with family and friends and last minute visits and phone calls. We'd made promises to write regularly, and to come home for Christmas. My husband gave out hugs and kisses, told the girls to behave and me to be careful, then stood on the front porch, waving us off as we headed out of Charbridge and on to our new life.

"This is it!" I enthused, "We're on our way to Beaver Island!" My daughters giggled and cheered, but then settled in sleepily for the long ride.

Out to M21, east for a mile, then south on M24 to get on the freeway. When I passed my sister Brenda's house, just before the entrance ramp, I tapped out a rhythm on the horn, then burst into tears. I had pulled myself together by the time I reached Lake Nepessing Road. Mom and Dad's house was a short distance from that exit. I had to talk myself out of stopping for one last good-bye. The Irish Road exit would have brought me to my friend Linda's place, and I reminded myself again that we had a boat to catch. Then the Belsey Road exit, that became so familiar when it had led to Brenda's first house. Flint brought me past the exit that I'd take to Mott Community College – not this year – and all the pubs and shops that had entertained us between classes. I spent time thinking about how much I'd learned, in the classroom and out, since starting college. Pierson Road would lead to the home of our friends, Dave and Sue, but we continued north.

Once Lapeer, Davison and Flint were behind us, my melancholic mood lifted, and I could imagine our exciting future. Past Saginaw, the freeway traffic abated and it was just a matter of the long drive.

Terry and I had a store of songs and games to entertain the girls while going places in the car. We'd search for letters, A through Z, on billboards, road signs and license plates. We'd set a goal, "Let's find them all before we get to Gaylord," and keep watch while singing or playing other games. There were books and dolls in the back seat, too, and my girls were good travelers. This trip was no exception.

We got off the freeway at Gaylord. The Big Boy restaurant was our usual stop on this trip, but the girls were dozing. I decided to push right through to Charlevoix. M32 would take us almost all the way there. My daughters called it "the roller coaster road" for all of its curves and hills and dips. They always squealed and giggled appropriately. A short time on M66 finished the trip.

We made it to the ferry dock in time to check in our car (one hour before departure) and purchase our tickets. Then we walked up the hill to get something to eat. A long line, a wait for the meals, and we *almost* missed our boat! They were pulling up the gangplank as I ran down the hill, with a tight hold on Jen's hand and Kate in my arms. A little scramble on the car deck to allow us to board, and the ferry blasted its horn and began to move. The bridge rose up to let us pass out of Lake Charlevoix and into Lake Michigan. We were on our way to Beaver Island!