

COLUMN

On The Road: A step along the byway

// BY ALEXANDER MEDEL

Roads rarely begin dramatically. From my experience, beginnings are marked by lonely intersections, faded highway shields and wistful traffic lights. No fanfare. No fuss. Just asphalt. But Utah’s Scenic Byway 12 was different.

I was traveling north from Hatch on U.S. Route 89 with hopes of turning into the byway a few miles east of Panguitch. The day was dark and dismal. It bore a strange resemblance to the day when I took my Math 115 final two years ago. Unlike that day, however, I was wrapped with the feeling that all was right in the world.

The pastures that animated my car windows were brown and barren. Every now and then I sighted growing patches of grass fed by the water of melted snow that had, until recently, covered this valley in a blanket of white. The mountains to the east retained vestiges of winter with its snow-capped peaks. The sky was cloudy enough to inspire a torch song.

But nestled in the eastern mountains — in a landscape of brown, beige and gray — was a canyon of fiery red. It emitted a glow so passionate and amorous it beguiled every car and beckoned my own. This was Red Canyon. It was also the welcome to Scenic Byway 12.

Spires of rock raced toward the heavens. Pine trees dotted the landscape, climbing cliff sides and dancing with the rocks to which they clung. Arches jetted onto the byway as my car coursed through its serpentine paths. Trading canyons for verdant pastures, I found myself standing atop Inspiration Point at Bryce Canyon National Park.

Bryce Canyon is iconic for its hoodoos, spires of rock eroded over millions of years by the forces of wind and weather — each pointed skyward in neat rows, one descending from another toward the canyon floor. The hoodoos were arranged like bottles of vintage wine at a market. And just like wine, each hoodoo had a story to tell, a composition unique to itself and a life defined by aging gracefully. For a landscape so jagged, it pierced my eyes with a beauty of its own. I stayed the night in a comfortable hotel and continued my journey the next morning.

The rain pattered an errant melody on the window



as I grabbed my breakfast. It was of no concern. It was gentle and kind, a stark detour in disposition from the torrents of a New Haven winter. My breakfast was a simple affair, consisting of scrambled eggs, bacon, a biscuit and a scone. It was good, and so was the coffee. Not because it was strong, but because it was free.

If I were dining in a room of fellow Yalies, I would feel no judgment in scrolling through my Instagram feed. But given that I was the only one in the restaurant younger than 60, I felt an indescribable need to be precocious, or at least look the part. So I drank my coffee black, turned on my phone and read the latest headlines from Politico. I had never felt so young and so old at the same time.

Raindrops dotted my windshield as I continued on Scenic Byway 12. It stopped as I parked my car at Kodachrome Basin, a state park just south of the byway at Henrieville. Named for a brand of Kodak film, the park is known for its monolithic spires of rock known as pipes. It seemed to be that this part of Utah has a fascination — indeed, an obsession — with rocky towers. I blamed the wind and rain.

The rain gave the monoliths a richer shade of orange. On a dry day, these pipes sport a hue reminiscent of marigolds. On this day, their colors transformed into a shade of brown as sweet as the caramel squares I used to eat when I was a little boy.

Unlike the crowds I encountered at Bryce Canyon the previous day, Kodachrome Basin was empty. I followed a short trail into a small canyon with my mother and retrieved my father from following a dry riverbed that led to nowhere before leaving the park.

The byway continued to impress me with its beauty. The scenery was partly to blame. The rocks here were of a different design to many others I have seen. Some resembled croissants in the flakiness of their layers. Others resembled soufflés in the softness and smoothness of their surfaces.

Every now and then, a breeze would pull back the branches of a cottonwood tree to reveal a canyon obscured by a verdant canopy. Its shades of orange, as bright as a jar of freshly made marmalade, had the power to enchant any observant traveler like me. Canyons soon gave way to mountains. Cottonwoods soon gave way to aspens. The closer I approached the end of the byway at



Torrey, the more the road became one with the earth to the point that the two became inseparable.

The beauty of Scenic Byway 12 is evinced by its landscape but more so by the land’s profound ability to slow someone down. I forgot what that feeling was like, and it took two days along 123 miles in Utah from Panguitch to Torrey to rediscover it.

Life at Yale is life in the fast lane. We follow an unforgiving circuit of coursework, professional aspirations and social pressures that erode our tire treads and eat at our mileage. Slowness is approached with suspicion. Stillness is mistaken for slothfulness. We dare not stop, fearing judgment and failure from an unforgiving world that we believe would pass us by when we do. Our speedometers turn towards only one direction: rightward. Our engines are powered by bitter oil and ambition, and ambition can be such a shallow fuel.

My father tells me constantly that a good driver knows when to speed up and slow down. By this measure, Yalies have become bad drivers. Not because we know how to drive fast, but because we have forgotten how to drive slow.

Driving on Scenic Byway 12 reminded me of the beauty to be found on a journey in the slow lane. Every minute felt like an hour, every hour felt like a day and every day felt like a year. If Yale succeeds in speeding time, Utah succeeds in suspending it. I was grounded and freed by the byway. And for the first time in a good long while, I felt like I was living my life instead of surviving it.

Easing my foot on the pedal did not cost me anything in my race with the world. Truthfully, the world moves slowly outside Yale. And the best part about it? If you blink, you won’t miss it. You will see it, enjoy it and maybe even fall in love with it.

Sometimes you really need to slow down. Ease your foot on the pedal. Let the needle move leftward. Roll your windows down and let the air be a breeze, not a right hook. Look for peeking canyons. Watch aspens dance. Count mountaintops. And like that Frank Sinatra song, enjoy every step along the byway.

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PERSONAL ESSAY

Seniors, the odds aren’t in our favor

// BY CASSIE WATT

Talking to my high school friends, I get the sense that at other colleges, senior spring is breakup season. Not at Yale. Here, everyone’s third capstone project seems to be securing a relationship and locking down a “Yusband” before graduation. It’s romantic whack-a-mole: couples popping up, breaking down and reappearing with someone new. As with any impending deadline, procrastination only heightens the frenzy.

For single seniors, the Valentine’s weekend bender is like “The Hunger Games.” Too many good tributes are falling, and nobody really wins the games.

Tributes are rated before they even step into the arena. The season begins with our very own Caesar Flickeman, AJ Nakash ’26, declaring Yale’s 50 most beautiful people in the Rumpus.

With that, Feb Club lights the torch, and the opening cannon fires Thursday night.

The Careers, those who just broke off two-to-three year relationships from first year, are the first ones running to the bloodbath at the cornucopia. Their friends and families watch in horror as they get stabbed lunging for the nearest weapon: their ex.

Seeing couples up against the walls at the Wolf’s Head’s Estate party, I have the urge to channel my inner Effie Trinket on the train to the Capitol and scold them, “THAT IS MAHOGANY!” But something tells me they don’t particularly care for the quality of the woodwork.

Fire is catching, and when your other perpetually single friend gets cuffed, you may suddenly be volunteering as tribute.

You may be saying, “Single Today, Single Tomorrow, Single Forever.” You may try to pull a Peeta Mellark and

paint yourself like grass to wait it out, but the Gamemakers are relentless. Just when you think you’re safe, Friday’s Dinosaurs & Cupids beckons you out of hiding.

The desperate ones start hunting for fresh meat (freshmen) and slam into the force field of judgement. But, there’s always a Beetee who has figured out how to de-bug the system for his own amusement.

You hear a cannon go off in the distance, a vague Valentine’s Instagram story, but can’t tell if they’re really out of the game. Gay or Galentine’s? Real or not real?

And, we all have our Rue of a would-be relationship, gone too soon. You lay down the flowers. Sing a little song. Try to abstain from the hunger games of senior spring in peaceful rebellion. But that resistance is brief. Without warning, your society will deploy hundreds of tracker jackers; wing-manned setups, wine-and-crimes and “you’d love him” texts, swarming your vision. One sting can be a fun trip. But too many, and you’ll end up like Glimmer: swollen, delirious and eliminated by Saturday.

By Sunday night, the arena starts whispering: Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. And you remember who the real enemy is: the looming terror of post grad.

At this point in the game, even your long standing alliances turn fickle. Watch out, or you may feel compelled to do a joint nightlock berry death with your closet ally.

But, fear not, standing tributes. The Quarter Quell is coming.

See you at Masquerade.

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