

Long-Distance Travel

Anna MacHamml

"Our bodies and minds are best adapted to a hunting and gathering way of life," I had recently told my introductory anthropology class. I had gone on to explain that the evolution of man represented an increasing adaptation to this way of life. A few students had looked up at me curiously.

"You're wondering what this has to do with you?" I asked, trying to kindle their slight flicker of interest. Several students nodded, and I launched into my discourse about how the stress-related diseases that plague modern man are rare among hunters and gatherers.

"Hunters and gatherers devote maybe 15 hours a week to subsistence, which is a far cry from our hectic 40-hour week. Violence is minimal in these societies, because the people live, not in crowded cities, but in close-knit groups averaging 25 members." I took a deep breath and gazing intently at my audience delivered my final plea. "If ever we are to solve our problems, we must examine not only the life we're leading now, but also the type of life for which we were designed."

I dismissed the class. Would the lecture have any impact on their lives? I wondered. That was last semester. Today after several terrifying weeks my words

¹ A pseudonym.

finally drove home. What had started out as a pleasant spring drive to Massachusetts turned into a small nightmare—all because I hadn't fully comprehended my own message.

The winter term had just ended at the university where my husband and I taught anthropology. Although there was only a week before classes resumed, I was eager to take a trip. I had scarcely been out of the house since Jennifer's birth two months before. Also, there were practical reasons for such a journey. I still had 400 books stored in New York City at the apartment of a former boyfriend, and my father-in-law, who lives in Massachusetts, was anxious to see his first grandchild. I appealed to my husband.

"I guess we could do that," he said reluctantly, "but it will have to be a quick trip."

Saturday morning we loaded our red pickup truck with suitcases, buckled Jennifer into her car seat and headed north. The sky was overcast, and it was drizzling rain as we drove to the outskirts of the city. Stores and stoplights finally turned into fields and farms. Then suddenly the sun burst forth from behind a cloud, electrifying the whole countryside. I blinked at the brightness. The day was going to be dazzling.

"Look at that farm," my husband said. "How would you like to have a place like that?"

I quickly glanced out the window. A bright green meadow flew by followed by a house, a pond, a barn, and then another pasture. A continuous panorama of greens and browns and blues flowed past my eyes. I sat glued to the window, my mind mesmerized by the kaleidoscope of constantly shifting shapes and colors. Four hours and several hundred miles later we finally stopped. It was nearly 1 p.m., I was hungry, and my husband looked weary. He parked the truck in front of a restaurant which advertised "Tennessee Country Cooking."

"I'll nurse the baby while you go in and eat," I told him.

When he returned a half hour later, I handed him the baby and started toward the restaurant, feeling slightly dizzy. I sat down at a small table, grateful for the cup of coffee which the waitress brought me. I had a second cup of coffee, wolfed down a bowl of soup, and dashed back out to the truck. We had to hurry if we were going to make 600 miles today.

It was late in the evening when we finally stopped again. The ride had been beautiful, breathtakingly so in places, for the interstate had skirted the Smokies and Blue Ridge Mountains. But somehow I felt drained rather than exhilarated. We checked into a motel in Virginia and made it to the dining room minutes before it closed. Maybe a cup of coffee would perk me up. I slowly sipped the steaming beverage, when Jennifer began to cry. My husband lifted her out of the infant seat and held her, while I nervously bolted down a tasteless pile of French fries and scallops.

By the time we went upstairs to our room, I was feeling edgy and irritable. I choked down my vitamin pills, which I had forgotten to take that morning, and lay down exhausted on the bed. But sleep would not come. Wild thoughts raged madly through my head, and every muscle felt raw and tense. Suddenly a dull rhythm accompanied by shrill laughter penetrated my ears.

"Those people next door better turn down their record player," my husband muttered angrily. But the pulsating beat only grew louder. "I'll be right back," he said, storming out of the room.

My nerves prickled up and down my body like a heat rash. I wanted to get up and dash the stereo against the wall. I wanted to take each record and smash it to smithereens between my fingers. But instead I closed my eyes and crawled back inside the jungle of my mind. Cool and quiet was all I wanted to be—like a deep pool in a dark green forest. A voice suddenly rippled through my consciousness, shattering my vision into a thousand fragments.

"Let's go!" My husband was standing impatiently by the bed. "I got us another room." "No," I moaned. "I just want to sleep."

"But you can't sleep here with all this racket," he argued. "And besides, I won't be able to sleep without you."

I raised myself out of bed, bundled the baby in my arms, and like a sleepwalker followed him out the door. The new room was quiet, but laughter and voices still echoed in my brain. I tossed, turned, bit my lip raw, and watched as the dark shadows grew lighter and lighter. It was time to get up.

We were on the road by 9 a.m. After French toast and two cups of coffee, I felt somewhat revived. But the feeling didn't last long. Around noon we pulled into a self-service gas station. My husband parked the truck and got out to fill the tank, while I glanced lazily at the row of pumps embedded on the narrow cement island. They were swaying dizzily in the sunlight. My heart vaulted to my throat. We must be moving! I looked wildly around for my husband. He was standing by the truck looking totally unconcerned. What was happening? I blinked my eyes and shook my head. The mirage of motion suddenly vanished, leaving only a slight giddy feeling in my head. I must be hungry, that was it.

We ate lunch at a nearby restaurant and soon were on the road again. The

character of the countryside had changed remarkably since this morning. The forlorn ghost homes of Virginia had been replaced by the prosperous farms of the Pennsylvania Dutch.

"Look at the hex signs," I exclaimed as we passed a barn painted with colorful circles. My voice sounded loud and harsh.

"What did you think of those?" my husband asked as we passed another gaily decorated barn. What did I think of them? Pretty, ugly, dull, fascinating . . . the words grated across my nerves like sandpaper.

"They're nice," I blurted out, trying to stop the rampaging torrent of thoughts.

We sat in silence for a few minutes, each mile bringing us closer and closer to New York and Phil. Phil—a tidal wave of anxiety crashed against my rib cage, and up from the depths bubbled memories of that desperate summer three years ago. A musty odor filled my nostrils as I pictured Phil's squalid little apartment and the tiny cluttered desk where I had struggled to write my dissertation. The panic which I felt when the ideas did not come was vivid in my mind, as was the sense of dread which had begun to engulf me. At first I had lashed out at the gentle young man who loved me, but later I turned my fury inward. I grew weaker and weaker as my weight plunged from 110 to 93 pounds. Depressed and totally exhausted, I finally left the city. In three months I had written only 10 pages.

"Welcome to New Jersey," my husband suddenly announced. I looked up, startled to find that the sunny country highway had become a dismal city street choked with traffic. The sun was hidden by a monotonous layer of thick gray clouds, as though the fog which obscured my feelings had spread to the universe. I lifted Jennifer from her car seat and held her tightly, trying desperately to check the numbing terror which was oozing through my body. But it was too late. She had already become a stranger, like the man sitting next to her. I was rapidly sinking to the bottom of a deep, dark well from which nobody would rescue me, because

nobody knew I was there.

A few hours later we arrived in New York City. My husband's forehead was dotted with perspiration as he steered the truck through the heavy torrent of traffic. I directed him to the familiar tree-lined street where Phil lived. We rang the doorbell, and Phil ushered us into his small, dark apartment. I timidly sat down on a faded red sofa, took a deep breath, and watched as the two men exchanged pleasantries. They seemed remote and far away, as though separated by a thick glass wall. Suddenly they stood up. My husband mumbled something, and then they were gone. Jennifer stirred restlessly in my arms.

"Soon little girl," I whispered, trying to reassure myself as well. A few minutes later they returned and began carrying boxes out to the truck. I silently watched them, unable to respond even to the occasional remarks they tossed my way. Gradually the mountain of dusty boxes grew smaller and smaller until at last it disappeared.

"Well, that didn't take long," my husband said as he entered the room.

"Are you finished?" I asked, hating the hollow sound of my voice. I stood up, muttered a shaky thank you to Phil, and followed my husband out into the anonymous chill of a New York evening.

It was late when we finally stopped for the night. We checked into a motel in Connecticut, the urban sprawl of New York City well behind us now. My husband unlocked the door, and I followed him into a small room and began getting Jennifer ready for bed. Only a few more minutes, and I could slip between cool white sheets and be lost to oblivion.

"Would you like to go get something to eat?" My husband's voice shattered the shroud of silence I had woven around myself.

"No," I said sharply, trying desperately to tune him out. Half-digested words, thoughts, and images swirled madly around in my mind.

"You've got to eat something," he

pleaded. I could feel the pressure swelling against my skull.

"I'm very tired. Go ahead without me," I screamed. The words tumbled down around him like an avalanche. He gave me a wounded look, and then suddenly left the room. I hurriedly pulled on my nightgown, climbed into the big double bed, and shut my eyes. I never wanted to wake up.

It was nearly noon by the time we left the motel the next day. I felt more relaxed for a night's rest, a hot bath, and a leisurely breakfast had dissipated some of yesterday's tension. I sat in the truck, lazily watching the gentle hills of New England roll by. The day was sunny, but cold, and traces of a recent snowfall still clung to the rocks and bushes.

"We'll be at my grandmother's house soon," my husband announced, minutes after we crossed the Massachusetts line. I had been so preoccupied with New York that I hadn't thought much about this part of the trip. But all of a sudden I realized that I would soon be meeting a host of in-laws, some for the first time. A twinge of anxiety shot through my body, and the earlier feeling of well-being began to fade away.

We spent several hours at the home of Grandma Kay, a tiny, wrinkled Polish woman. She greeted us warmly and ushered us into a small, dimly lit parlor. Prints of the Christ child and Virgin Mary, now yellow with age, adorned the walls, while lifeless faces peered out from faded photographs atop a small table. The air was thick with the pungent-sweet odor of gently decaying life. I glanced nervously at my husband. We were interlopers from another century.

We chatted awhile, ate a light lunch, and finally left. I could still see her small, sad face framed in the doorway as we got into the truck and drove away. Had I tried too hard to please? Had I seemed insincere? I quickly pushed the doubts from my mind. This was no time for introspection for soon we would be at the Peterson's home. My husband considered them his second family, and I wanted to make a good

impression. We arrived at their home in the late afternoon. The visit was mercifully short, and I spent most of it nursing Jennifer in the back bedroom.

The sun had already set by the time we arrived at our final destination, the small Boston suburb where my father-in-law and his 13-year-old daughter shared an apartment. A short, middle-aged man with blue eyes and a slender young girl with long blonde hair answered the door and swept us into a spacious living room. They inquired about our trip and then quickly forgot us in their enthusiasm for Jennifer.

"Oh, you doll," cooed her grandfather, while the young aunt kissed her cheeks until they glistened. Their love for Jennifer flowed through the room like a high-voltage current until the whole apartment radiated with its glow. One by one the knots in my stomach slipped away, and for a few brief hours I experienced a strange and wonderful peace.

My husband and I spent two and a half days at their home. Tuesday we visited another sister, met her husband, explored the small town where they lived, and treated his father to a lobster dinner. It was snowing heavily by the time we left the restaurant that night. I carefully picked my way along the slippery sidewalk, feeling stiff and awkward in high heels. After we returned to the apartment, I sat down in the living room and slipped off my shoes, but the feeling of awkwardness remained.

My father-in-law pulled up a chair and began telling me about his mother, who lay dying in a nearby hospital.

"I wish she could have seen Jennifer," I said, trying to be sympathetic, but sounding harsh and insincere instead. An almost irresistible urge to escape from the room swept through me.

"Stay where you are," I commanded myself.

I sat in the living room for several more hours, fending the words that came at me with an invisible shield, making responses that were always too loud or too late. Finally I excused myself and

went to the room which I shared with my husband. I quickly got ready for bed, crawled beneath the covers, and closed my eyes, but the day's events, now twisted and distorted, paraded relentlessly through my mind. Hour after hour I lay there exhausted, a captive audience of one. At last, with dawn hovering on the horizon, the curtain mercifully lowered and all was deep, dark, and quiet.

It was nearly 9 a.m. when Jennifer's hungry cry jarred me awake. I nursed her and then groggily stumbled to the bathroom. My muscles were stiff and sore, and everything seemed slightly out of focus. Maybe a shower would revive me. I stepped into the stall and turned on the faucet. Hot water pelted out of the nozzle and thundered down my back. I quickly turned it off and stood there for a moment in the hot, steamy room. Why was I so tense, so desperately anxious? I toweled myself dry, put on my robe, and hurried back to the bedroom. My husband was sitting on the edge of the bed, playing with the baby.

"Good morning," he said brightly, as I entered the room. "What would you like to do today?"

My heart started to pound. The adrenaline began to pump. Every muscle was ready for action.

"Let's go somewhere," I blurted out and quickly turned my head away so he couldn't read the panic on my face.

We spent the day in Salem, a town I had always wanted to visit. Jennifer, my husband, his sister, and I drove up to the infamous little seaport later that morning. The thick gray sky and last night's snow cast a deathly pallor over the already somber landscape as we neared our destination. We parked the truck by a sinister, Gothic-looking church, which bore the appropriate sign, "Salem Witch Museum." We entered the door, and a young woman ushered us into a room that was pitch black except for a glowing red object on the floor. My heart fluttered with excitement. It was a pentacle! A devil, its eyes flashing fire, suddenly loomed menacingly over our heads, and the recorded talk

began. One by one a series of dioramas lit up around the room, each depicting a scene from the witchcraft hysteria of 1692. I stood there spellbound, until the diorama of Gallows Hill faded from view and the lights went on.

"Well, what did you think of that?" my husband asked as we stepped back out into the cold blustery daylight. I looked at him, and the feeling of excitement evaporated.

"I liked it a lot," I said, turning my head away in embarrassment. My words sounded stiff and rigid, as though the chill in the air had also frozen my feelings. The old anxiety had returned.

We visited the shipping museum, toured the House of Seven Gables, grabbed a sandwich, and finally headed back to the apartment. I sat in the truck, my eyes focused on the scenery, but seeing nothing but my own thoughts. Hawthorne, I would read him when I got home, and Thoreau and Emily Dickinson, too. I would delve deeper and deeper into the mind of early New England. I would explore every ridge and convolution, so that when the outside world finally slipped away, I would have a place to take refuge.

"Do you mind if we stop at the Petersons?" my husband suddenly asked. I looked up just as we entered the town where they lived. "I'd like to say goodbye to them before we leave."

"Okay," I said meekly. I was a leaf in the autumn air, and a gust of wind had just blown in my direction.

We visited with the middle-aged couple for half an hour and then returned to the apartment. Jennifer started to whimper the moment we entered the door. I took her to the back bedroom and had just begun to nurse her when my father-in-law summoned us to dinner.

"I'll be there in a minute," I yelled through the closed door. "I'm feeding the baby."

"You just started feeding her now?" he asked. The annoyance in his voice lingered long after his words had faded and grew to menacing proportions.

"I didn't mean to do it! I didn't mean to

offend!" I screamed, but the cry never reached my lips.

Dinner was still warm by the time I sat down at the table. My father-in-law gave me a bright smile and handed me a steaming cup of coffee. I timidly returned his grin and bent nervously over my plate. Why was everyone staring at me?

"I heard you went to Salem today," he said, looking in my direction. I quickly sifted through the mental debris for a coherent thought.

"We visited the Witch Museum," I said at last, pouncing on a group of words and forcing them into a sentence. Had the statement made sense? Were the words in the right order? I quickly lowered my eyes so I couldn't read the answer in his face.

Shortly after dinner I excused myself and escaped to the comforting solitude of the bedroom. We were leaving for home in the morning, and I wanted to get a good night's rest. I closed my eyes, exhausted from the day's events, but sleep would not come. I said the names of the 50 states, recited the state capitals in alphabetical order, and thought of 26 cities beginning with "A", but sleep still eluded me. Finally, as the first rays of morning light filtered through the window, I dozed off, only to be awakened moments later by a cheerful voice.

"Goodbye. I'm going to work now and I just wanted to wish you a pleasant trip home." It was my father-in-law. I tried to rouse myself but my muscles clung to the bed as though they were glued there.

"Goodbye, and thank you," I finally replied, despising my lack of courtesy, but it was the best I could do. By mid-morning we were on the road again, this time headed south.

We arrived home late Friday evening. My husband carried our suitcases into the apartment, while I quickly fed Jennifer and put her to sleep. Then I slipped into my nightgown and stumbled into bed, my head still spinning from the long, exhausting drive. We had traveled 1,300 miles in less than two days.

I still felt dazed when I awoke the next morning. I got dressed and mechanically set about my chores. I unpacked the suitcases, bathed the baby, made the bed, and cooked dinner, but the dizziness still remained. In fact, the whole day drifted by as though it were not quite real. I went to bed early, hoping that a good night's sleep would restore me, but the feeling of unreality persisted through the next day.

By Monday it had begun to eat away at my strength. I dragged myself through the day, preparing a syllabus for class and shopping for groceries with Jennifer. Cans of food vibrated dizzily on the shelves as I pushed the cart down the aisles of the large supermarket. By the time I got to the checkout counter, my whole body was fused with an unpleasant tingling sensation, as though a million sparklers had just entered my bloodstream. I drove home and had just begun preparing dinner when I heard the key turn in the lock. My husband entered the living room, a briefcase in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

"Well, how was your day?" he asked brightly. The sound of his words sent tiny electrical shocks coursing through my veins. I was a sponge soaking up every sound and sight I encountered.

"Fine," I said abruptly and turned away. I had reached the point of saturation.

For two days I struggled desperately to keep from drowning in the torrent of evil thoughts that flooded my mind. I visited friends, cleaned the house, prepared for class; but the river was too swift, too powerful to be stopped by such feeble distractions. By Thursday the little branch I had been clinging to broke and I was swept headlong into the current. Now there was only one way to destroy the malevolent thing that had taken over my body. I toyed with the idea that evening after returning home late from a meeting. How would I do it? I wondered, as I took off my coat and tossed it on the sofa. Suddenly a voice penetrated my thoughts.

"What's wrong? You've been so quiet

lately?" I looked up and saw my husband standing in front of me.

"Nothing," I replied sharply, trying to push him away with my brusqueness.

"Come on. Something's bothering you and I want to know what it is." His words descended on my brain like a lit match.

"Leave me alone. I'm tired of all this!" I screamed and raced into the bedroom.

My heart was pounding wildly. My face was flushed, as though a thousand furnaces were belching fire. Pressure was building against my skull. Any minute I would burst into a million pieces. I sat down on the bed, cradled my head with my arms, and waited for the explosion. The storm slowly spiraled upwards from the depths of my being and burst through my lips in a series of loud, violent sobs that shook my body. I collapsed on the bed, crying and screaming, until the spread was saturated with tears.

In the midst of my agony, however, I gradually became aware that I was no longer completely alone. I looked up through a thick veil of tears and saw my husband standing by the bed. He gently enfolded me in his arms and held me until at last my tears ran dry. That night when I went to bed, my head ached and my eyes were sore, but for the first time in days a faint ray of light penetrated the fog.

By the afternoon of the following day, however, the feeling of relief began to fade away. My introductory class met for the first time that night, and the thought of it made me shiver with anxiety. "First days" always made me nervous. I tried to eat a good dinner that evening, but the food was bland and tasteless. After a few mouthfuls, I shoved the plate away and got ready for class. By the time I got to school, skyrockets were going off, one after another, in my stomach. I nervously entered the small auditorium where my class was scheduled to meet, took a deep breath, and delivered a hasty 30-minute talk to a faceless crowd of students.

After class I drove back to my office and waited for my husband to call. He was attending

a faculty dinner and had asked me to meet him afterwards for a

drink. The minutes crawled by slowly— 9:00, 9:10, 9:20. The hum of the water cooler and the whirr of electric clocks echoed through the corridors of the deserted building. The sounds grew louder and louder, as though a thousand crickets were descending on the office. I abruptly got up, grabbed a book from the shelf, and began to read. Suddenly the emptiness of the room was shattered by the harsh ring of the telephone. I pounced on the receiver.

"Hello," I said nervously. It was my husband apologizing for being so late. "I'll be right there," I said, and hung up the phone.

He was standing on the corner when I pulled into the shopping center where the restaurant was located.

"Sorry I'm late," he said again, as he climbed into the driver's seat. "Would you like to have a drink here, or would you rather go somewhere else?"

My body stiffened at the sound of his voice, and volatile thoughts stirred dangerously in my mind.

"Take me home," I said quietly. "I'm tired."

We drove back to the apartment in icy silence. He took the baby sitter home while I got ready for bed. A half hour later he joined me.

"How about a little kiss?" he asked, as he lay down next to me. His words jarred the already overloaded circuits in my mind.

"No," I replied coldly and turned the other way. I lay there quietly, waiting for sleep to transport me to painless oblivion. My husband stirred restlessly beside me.

"Is something bothering you?" he finally asked.

"No," I muttered, holding tightly to my Pandora's box of thoughts.

"Please tell me. Maybe I can help you." My defenses buckled beneath his persistence, and the venom gushed from my mind in a stream of ugly words and accusations.

"I just want to be alone. I'm tired of all this—of you, of everything. I'm going to leave." The words slithered from my

mouth like poisonous snakes, crawled across the bedsheets, and stung the man next to me. He whimpered like a wounded animal.

"I'm so sad," he said, his voice choked with emotion. The magnitude of my words suddenly struck home, and I began to tremble violently.

"I didn't mean it. I love you." I collapsed in his arms, sobbing uncontrollably, until the last drop of tension had drained from my body.

"Are you feeling any better?" my husband asked the next morning as I stumbled into the kitchen. I smiled sheepishly and nodded my head.

"Just think," he continued, "you won't have to cook dinner tonight." I stared at him. "The party is tonight, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, I guess it is," I replied at last. I was hoping he had forgotten about it. I sometimes enjoyed parties, but I never looked forward to them. And when I didn't feel good, I actually dreaded them. But my husband wanted to go, so I said nothing.

We arrived at the Henderson's a half hour late. Louise, a colleague of ours, ushered us into her living room and introduced us to the assembled guests. A sea of unfamiliar faces swam before my eyes. I nervously cleared my throat.

"Hi," I said, and looked down at Jennifer, who was starting to cry. "I, I guess I better feed her," I stammered, grateful for an excuse to escape from the roomful of strangers. I took her into a back bedroom, nursed her for 20 minutes, and put her to sleep. Maybe I could stay in here all night, I thought, when suddenly a knock sounded on the door.

"Aren't you finished yet?" my husband asked as he entered the room. "Everybody's eating."

I timidly followed him into the dining room, grabbed a plate, and helped myself to what was left of the buffet dinner. I entered the living room just as one of the guests was expounding on his recent trip to Russia. I sat down unnoticed and tried to concentrate on what he was saying, but the words were meaningless. Finally the gathering broke up into smaller groups. The people sitting

next to me turned to talk to the people on the other side of them, and I was left alone. I nervously looked around the room, wishing someone would rescue me, but nobody did. Even my husband, who had been quiet for most of the evening, was now engrossed in a conversation. Finally I stood up and walked over to a blonde woman who was telling a young, dark-haired man about her job as a reporter.

"I used to work on a newspaper, too," I chimed in.

She looked at me for a moment and then went on talking to the young man. A wave of hostility swept through me. They weren't interested in me. Nobody was. I stumbled back to my chair and sat down, dazed by the fragments of conversation that drifted in and out of my ears. I felt myself grow smaller and smaller, as though my flesh were dissolving into the chair. Finally, I could take no more. I got up, went over to my husband, and frantically whispered: "Let's go."

"All right," he said reluctantly. I retrieved Jennifer, stiffly thanked the hostess, and followed my husband out to the truck.

"Did you have a good time?" he asked when we arrived home. I ignored his question and proceeded to get ready for bed. "You've been so quiet. Please say something," he pleaded. I could feel the tension rising. I started to hang up my clothes, but some tiny source of strength made me turn around.

"I had a horrible time," I blurted out. "Nobody would talk to me." I braced myself for a barrage of criticism, but instead he looked at me gently and said: "I felt pretty uncomfortable myself. We didn't exactly fit in, but it's nothing to get upset about."

"But," I began.

"Just don't think about it. Think about me," he urged.

I wanted to run, but instead I gave him a small smile and then suddenly threw my arms around his neck. The warmth of

his embrace slowly spread through my body and gradually melted the huge knot of tension in my stomach. I shuddered with relief, and my body went limp. I was in control at last.

Although the feeling of unreality persisted for another week, the depression had finally lifted. But I lived in constant fear that it would return. The thought was so frightening that Monday I made an appointment to see Dr. H. O. Wednesday afternoon I was sitting in his office.

"I just don't understand what happened," I said after describing my two weeks of agony. "I've always loved to travel."

"But you haven't traveled much since your illness," he pointed out, referring to the perceptual disturbances and depression I had experienced last year after finishing my dissertation. "Schizophrenia" had been the diagnosis, but I had never accepted it. I had never understood what the abstract descriptions in psychiatry books had to do with me. Nevertheless, I had complied with the megavitamin therapy and program of exercise that had been prescribed for me. Gradually the depression had lifted, and I was restored to my former health.

"How do you feel now?" he asked. The room seemed dim and not quite real, and my eyes had trouble focusing.

"Better, but still a little dizzy," I replied. "But last week I was so nasty and mean to my husband. I didn't want to be, but I just couldn't help it." I could feel the tears welling in my eyes. "What's wrong with me?" I asked.

"You probably became overstimulated on your trip," he said. "It's no wonder you were bad tempered." I looked at him questioningly, and he proceeded to give me a lecture which sounded strangely familiar.

"Man's brain hasn't changed much in the past 50,000 years, right?" I nodded my head, and he continued. "That means that your brain, like all human brains, was evolved to move through the world at speeds from three to 20 miles per hour, not 60 miles per hour. A journey from here to Boston, which you squeezed into two days,

would have taken our ancestors four months." He paused for a moment and then proceeded to answer my unspoken question.

"Long-distance, high-speed highway travel affects the brain by flooding it with a tremendous amount of information which must be processed and filtered by higher levels of awareness. In the case of people like yourself, whose control-filtering systems are damaged, this can pose a real problem."

As he talked, I was slowly struck by a realization of overwhelming importance. The periodic tingling sensation in my body, the occasional feeling of unreality, the world that sometimes looked too bright or too dim, the objects that danced before my eyes—this was schizophrenia. These perceptions, which I had always taken for granted, were symptoms of a disease, which somehow triggered my attacks of depression.

"What was the weather like when you were driving?" he asked.

"It was sunny most of the way up and back," I replied, "and although it didn't snow much when we were there, there was always snow on the ground."

"Strong sunshine and snow cause an even greater bombardment of the senses, so your sensory overloading was probably even greater than if you had traveled at a different time of the year. Did you wear dark glasses?"

"No" I admitted.

"How about food. Did you eat well?"

"I wasn't very hungry," I replied, "but I drank lots of coffee."

"And you probably didn't get much exercise either." I nodded my head. "What about vitamins? Did you increase your dosage?" he asked.

"No," I admitted. "I kept forgetting to take my pills so I took them less often than usual."

"So on top of all this exhausting stimulation, against which you didn't even take your usual precautions, you were confronted with several very stressful social situations. You saw a former boyfriend, visited your in-laws, and attended a party where you knew very

few people. Under such circumstances it's perfectly understandable that you would feel tense, irritable, and frightened."

"What should I do?" I asked, hoping he would suggest some miracle cure.

"Learn how to prevent such disasters from happening again," he said. "The next time you take a trip, wear dark glasses and periodically lie down in the back seat of the car. This will help reduce the sensory stimulation. Increase your nicotinamide and ascorbic acid intake, and avoid drinking coffee or soda for stimulants like these will only aggravate your condition. Get as much rest as possible and try to limit the amount of social contact you have."

"And remember," he added as I got ready to leave, "humans did not evolve in large, fast-paced societies such as ours, but in small, close-knit hunting and gathering communities, whose members traveled leisurely on foot."

Postscript

Three months later my husband and I took a 700-mile trip to a small town in the Ozarks. He had accepted a teaching position there, and we were hoping to buy a house somewhere in the vicinity before we moved in August. For the first time in my life I dreaded a trip. It wasn't only the househunting that worried me. I would be meeting a host of new people, and the last trip was still vivid in my mind.

Fearing a relapse, I bought a pair of dark

glasses and persuaded my husband to put a mattress in the back of our camper. We made the journey in two days. I sat in the front of the truck for a few hours, my eyes protected by dark glasses. Then I climbed into the camper and lay down on the mattress for a while. I carefully watched my diet, substituting milk and lemonade for coffee and soda, and diligently took my vitamin pills. When we arrived late Sunday afternoon, I felt rested and eager to explore our future home. The days that followed, however, were far from relaxing. In between househunting, I attended three parties, toured the university, and conferred with the department chairman about an adjunct appointment.

Wednesday morning I awoke feeling tired and a little dizzy. This time, however, I decided to fight the unpleasant sensation. I took an extra dose of vitamin pills, relaxed in a hot bath, took an hour nap, and went for a short walk. By that evening, the fatigue and dizziness had disappeared. We went to a colleague's home for dinner, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

We arrived home late Saturday night after a long day's drive. I spent the whole day Sunday reading and relaxing in bed. Monday morning I awoke feeling thoroughly rested and ready to begin a new week. The trip had been a success. We had bought a house, I had met his colleagues, and my perceptions had remained stable. A potential mini-disaster had been averted.