

Eggs, Doppelgangers, and Extra Credit: A Summer Road Trip Adventure

by Mariah Orchid Kelley

My entire junior year of high school, especially during the last quarter, there was one thing that was on everyone's mind: colleges. Not just one, but dozens.

Mail had been coming since the end of sophomore year to the point where my name on an envelope was no longer met with the exhilarated thrill like when I was ten years old.

Counselors and teachers all told us the same thing: "This Summer is the most important." "This Summer is the ideal time to go and visit; to see what you like and what you don't."

Of course it all started with figuring out what I wanted to do with my life, which was relatively simple for me. I've known since the 5th grade that I've wanted to write.

Per my father's request I've been looking into schools that offer English or writing with a concentration in journalism because he tells me I "have to eat while writing that novel."

But if I become a journalist, I wouldn't want to write about anything. I'd want to write about people.

I'd want to travel and be able to write about people and how they function in today's world, to experience all sorts of different ways of life and share it with the world. So, anthropology or sociology also went on the list of potential academic focuses.

I wasn't sure if touring only two colleges would be helpful in my decision process. At the start of the summer, I'd had this dream of taking a road trip with my father and best friend to an entire slew of colleges and universities. My original plan would have taken us places like New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

But of course, not everything can happen perfectly. Since my father wasn't able to take the entire week off from his job, I picked two local colleges and planned a one-day trip.

My mother took the day off from work, and my best friend Leah spent the night in order to be up by 5 a.m. the following day, so we could be out of the house by 5:30. Per request of my father, I'd created an itinerary with ample time for getting lost and coffee breaks.

By 9 a.m. the three of us arrived at Westfield State College. Leah and I had already been once before with another friend of ours, during our April vacation. Most of the school had been closed for the break, so we'd walked around without direction or information on anything. My first impression of Westfield State was that it's small and easily navigable.

For someone like me with zero sense of direction or location, a small college - not to mention a GPS for my car - is a must.

The April visit to Westfield had equipped Leah and I with some sense of where everything was on the campus, so we were able to find our way to the information session quickly.

As I.B. English students, we've been taught to look for symbolism so deeply that sometimes, we can find it off the written page as well. Directly above the door of the Horace Mann Center - where the info session was being held - in large gold letters, was a message that let us know just what kind of door it was: "Door of Opportunity" it read.

Leah and I exchanged a knowing look while my father had a good chuckle. Opening the door, I already had a good feeling in my gut.

The info session was held in the Garden Room, although "there is no garden anywhere near here," Leah was quick to note. The young man directing the session was a graduate of Westfield who'd come back to assist in the admissions process.

Each prospective student was given an information packet, which housed a view book, a book of academic offerings, an application, as well as a pamphlet on financing a Westfield education - don't worry,

that was the first packet that I handed to my father.

As we learned about the school, I began to feel more and more at ease. My GPA and SAT scores were on the slightly higher end of Westfield's requirements, and they offered each academic focus that I had been looking for. Though I don't play any sort of mainstream sport like soccer, basketball or softball, I've recently discovered equestrian riding, and was thrilled to discover that Westfield would have an outlet for my hobby as well.

A program known as Urban Education was also discussed, which allows first-generation college students to become familiar with college campus, courses, and life. Basically, it's a blessing for someone like me who is the first on either side of her family to ever attend college.

By the time the actual tour began, I had already made up my mind that Westfield was where I wanted to spend some of the most important years of my life.

This was only strengthened when Leah, my father and I walked out of the room and were greeted by older versions of ourselves standing there in Westfield tee shirts, as excited to show us the campus as we were to learn about it.

A Dunkin' Donuts and a Subway shop on the campus basically took care of my dietary needs; not to mention that everything - including the library - remains open until 2 a.m. The dorms - like all dorms, I assumed - seemed cramped, but it won't be anything I'm not used to already.

Our tour guides told us all about the most exciting event in college towards the end of our tour: receiving mail.

"There's nothing like getting a big package," one of them said with a smile. "If your parents really love you, they'll send you a nice big box. You'll get to walk around campus and be totally awesome because you have a package and no one else got one."

I nudged my father, "What will you send me?" I asked in a whisper as we continued walking. My father looked down at me and scoffed. "Brownie mix," he answered. "With milk and eggs and everything. But the time you get it, it will be a big glob of disgusting goop. Or maybe, just the eggs." I rolled my eyes.

As we neared the end of our tour, one of the guides asked me, "So? What do you think?"

"Yes, please," was my immediate answer. "I love it."

She asked me what I was interested in studying, so I told her. "That's great," she offered, "you can double major here, too, if you want." That last sentence sealed the deal.

"Do we even need to see the other one?" my father asked me as we walked to the car. Blushing, I shook my head. "Well, let's go anyways," he offered. We climbed in the car, and after a lunch of identical chicken Caesar salad wraps, we backtracked the way that we had come until we reached Brandeis University.

The first thing that we noticed was the size.

It was behemoth.

It seemed that in every direction I looked, there loomed a building. Large and aesthetically up-to-date, the buildings made me gulp. Somehow, we found our way to the information session, and although Leah discovered a place where her preferred type of men tend to flock, nothing else seemed to resonate with me.

My SAT and GPA were below what they were asking for, and their policy towards the I.B. curriculum was nowhere near as generous as Westfield's. Although Brandeis did offer courses slightly more geared towards what I wanted to do with my life, like a major in Creative Writing, and one in Anthropology rather than Sociology, I found the place slightly overwhelming for my usually simple existence.

We didn't stay for the tour of Brandeis, and instead headed home slightly early. As we merged back onto the highway, I thanked my father for taking us to see the colleges, and notified him that he would definitely be driving me back to Westfield in a year's time with as much of my stuff as I could fit in the back of my car. Keeping his eyes on the road, he smiled.

"You're welcome," he answered. "I'll send you eggs, too."





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