



How my sister and I were actually able to sleep next to each other, crammed for hours in the front seat of the pickup, was beyond my understanding. I awoke just in time to see us arrive at a Burger King. Daddy had his usual coffee and Laura and I shared a large Coca-Cola. We were close to approaching the Peace Bridge, where we would need to stop again and get our Passports before entering our new home, the United States of America.

When we did arrive, we were all pretty drowsy. It wasn't quite dawn yet. I had no idea my picture was going to be taken for the Passport, and wondered how drowsy I would look. When I saw my photo, I gagged. "Oh, no!" I squealed. "This is the worst photo ever taken of me in my whole, entire life!"

"Can't be worse than mine," Laura groaned. She showed me. Laura's sleek hair helped prevent any mess, but her eyes were half closed in the photo, looking quite dopey.

"Well, at least your hair isn't messed up," I said. "Look at me!" I shoved my new Passport in her face. "I look like I stuck my finger in a light socket!"

Laura started to laugh. "We look like a couple of zombies!" Our laughter heightened until we

were almost keeling over.

Daddy came over with his stamped Passport, confused. "What are you two laughing at?"

"Our Passport photos!" I squealed. "Look at mine!"

Daddy squinted behind his glasses. "Looks like you've been sleeping all night in the front seat of a pickup truck!"

Laura lost it, holding her middle.

"Well don't feel bad," he said, opening his Passport to show me. "See here. I look like a *Mexican!*"

"Ho! Ho!" I chortled and pointed. "You *do!*" He was right. His darkish complexion was emphasized in the photo, and his black hair and moustache added the perfect accent.

"And that's not all," he said. "Read this." He held the Passport open to show me. His design looked different from ours. "Right there..." He pointed to the words.

I read out loud. "Resident Alien." I squinted. "*Resident Alien?* What does *that* mean?"

"I guess it means the ole Chevy disguise didn't fool 'em after all." He put on his Mork voice. "Na-Nu Na-Nu!"

I laughed myself silly.

In the wee hours of the morning, what would normally seem funny turns downright hilarious. All of us a little slap happy, we climbed back into our UFO (cloaked as a Chevy pickup) and resumed our Resident Alien invasion across the Peace Bridge.

It was always important to me to pay attention to this part of the trip. I crossed this bridge many times before on my trips to Florida with Nana and Soupy (my Canadian grandma and great-grandma). The transition between countries was marked with Canadian and American flags. I knew it was something to pay attention to, so I silenced myself to experience the moment.

Daddy knew he had to play the role of announcer as we approached the American side. "Here we go!" He said. "Girls, this is your first time crossing the bridge as American citizens!"

"Wow, really?" I braced myself, happy that Daddy made me realize this was a special crossing to remember.

As we crossed over the Niagara River, I looked out over the water as I always did, admiring the view.

"A-a-and...." I realized Daddy had his hand cued at the tape player. When we crossed past the American flag, on came our theme song of the trip, James Brown's "Living in America!" We cheered and clapped.

Laura piped up. "What, no balloons? No fireworks? I'm so bummed."

I smiled. "Yeah, right! We should have fireworks to mark this momentous occasion!"

Daddy shrugged. "Hey, guys, I tried, but the darned Mounties confiscated my explosives."

The drive to North Carolina, our new home, was familiar now since we'd already made the trip

down to hunt for houses. This trip felt different, though. As Daddy announced, it was our first trip driving through the States as US citizens. I certainly didn't feel like we were driving "home," though. Home, to me, was still behind us. I wondered how long it would take for me to really feel at home in the States. Even the money seemed foreign to me. I was so used to the color-coded paper money in Canada. Here in the US, every dollar looked the same. And the Canadian dollar bill was beginning to phase out, replaced with a coin people were calling the Loony.

I transferred my attention back to the scenery. It was always interesting to notice the road signs. Kilometers per hour changed to miles per hour. No more Queen Elizabeth Way, which seemed to last forever, driving through Ontario. And then there was the difference in fast food restaurants. Tim Hortons became Dunkin Donuts. Wendy's restaurants no longer had the Canadian leaf used as the apostrophe. Harvey's became Burger King. And there were no Swiss Chalet Chicken restaurants to be seen anywhere in the States. Tragedy. Swiss Chalet has the most amazing dipping sauce. Yum!

Every welcome sign we saw on the road we celebrated with cheers.

"Welcome to Ohio!" Daddy read.

"Yaaaay!!!!" Laura and I answered.

Getting through the state of Ohio seemed to take forever.

"Welcome to West Virginia!"

"Yaaaay!!!!"

At least West Virginia had some awesome scenery. Lush green-covered mountains all the way through.

"Welcome to Virginia!"

"Yaaay!!!"

Virginia was personally my favorite state, because it was the shortest distance to travel through, and driving on Interstate 77, it also greeted us with tunnels. I did get a tad claustrophobic through those tunnels, but at least it was something different to experience, and it also was a reminder we were getting much closer to our final destination.

As we approached the North Carolina border, we were able to get a sneak peek at it on our way down a mountain. The view from the highway was magnificent. Trees parted and you could see the landscape far below. It was a country landscape, but you could also see the form of a southern town down there. The view reminded me of E.T.'s view, the scene right before he was abandoned by his spaceship. E.T. sat on that hill, looking down at the suburban lights, in admiration. I felt much like E.T. at this moment as we approached our new home state. It was indeed beautiful. I didn't realize just how alien I would end up feeling in this new country.

"Welcome to North Carolina!" Daddy announced.

"Yaaaay!!!!" We cheered.

“Darn those Mounties for stealing our fireworks, eh!” Laura added.

“Yep, another fireworks moment,” I had to agree.

“Next time.” Daddy nodded.

After a couple more hours of driving, we pulled into our new driveway at 8:00pm. It was the *exact* same time we left Horseshoe Lake, in Canada, I pointed out to everyone... but I was the only one who seemed to think that was interesting. I couldn't believe we had ridden in the truck for twenty-four hours straight.

Mummy greeted us outside. Laura was so happy to see her, she cried. I felt a little bad for not having the same reaction, but it didn't mean I was any less happy to see our mother. Mum had to stay in North Carolina to begin her new job - the job which was the whole reason our family moved to the States in the first place. While Mum ventured ahead to begin her new career, Daddy worked with a friend to move our belongings to our new house, and Laura and I spent the summer with Nana and Soupy at their cottage in Canada. I didn't realize how much I missed Mummy until I saw her, arms up and waving, smiling big, and ready for hugs. It was indeed a hug and kiss fest, greeting her. I squeezed her tightly to make up for my lack of tears.

I was simply too happy and excited for tears. I gazed at our new home: A ranch with four pillars in front, a plethora of land and trees, and a pool in the backyard. Unbelievable. A huge contrast from our closely stacked suburban neighborhood in Newmarket.

Our dog, Elizabeth, greeted us with happy barks. Mum let her out of the fenced-in backyard. Laura knelt down to hug her, and I joined in. I wondered if Elizabeth missed her doggie-mom, Louise. Louise had been put down by the vet months ago, before the move. Surely Elizabeth did miss Louise, but at least she also had a brand new home to get used to, so hopefully that helped keep her doggy-mind preoccupied. My thoughts of our lost dog, Louise, reminded me that our cat Bingo had also been abandoned behind in Canada. I shook my head. *No. No.* Don't start thinking about that again, I told myself. Can't you just allow yourself to be happy for one minute?

Mum led us inside to rest our sore bottoms. It felt good to stretch our legs. Long car trips can be quite exhausting. This one had been a doozy.

I was so excited to see the inside of the house. Mum had been working hard to unpack so we would have some good space to live. And that wasn't all. Right there in the middle of the living room was one of those triangle-shaped couches – the kind made for a corner. Somehow it worked being set up right in the middle of the room, which was where the TV was set up anyway.

“Ta-da!” My dad spread his arms out, gesturing to the couch. “What do you think, girls?” Laura and I were quite impressed. It was much fancier than the tri-fold couch we had back in Newmarket. Of course that couch we used to have was barely a couch at all after being torn up by the pets and peed on by Louise (poor old dog). Laura and I raced each other to the couch. I grabbed the corner

spot right away, sinking into the cushions. I could so easily fall asleep right there and then. Daddy flopped down on the sofa. “Aaaahh...” he sighed. He let his head fall back and he grinned ear to ear. “Only in Am-a-a-rica!”

As comfortable as I was, I just had to get up and check out my new room, down the hall. It was pretty empty. My old dresser was in there with clothes all ready for me (Thanks, Mum!), and my twin size bed was there to invite me. I laid down, flat on my back, and stared up at the ceiling fan above. How cool, I thought. I have a ceiling fan! My new room was a little smaller than my room back in Newmarket, I realized, but oh, well. It was still my room. I had plush blood-red carpet too. Mum wanted to change it, but I asked, “Please no – I love the color red.” It certainly made my room stand out as different, too, which I liked. Besides, I thought, just like the bold red color of my carpet, I secretly hoped I would soon become the bold, fun person I always wanted to be, here in my new home. With a new room came a new me, I hoped. An adventurous, courageous me. A me ready to express myself. Maybe I'd be popular in this new school. Maybe I'd start to feel pretty. Maybe I'd even be cool.

Yeab, right! HA! A familiar voice inside my head started to laugh, and I pushed it away.

Enjoying the comfort and novelty of this new space, I closed my eyes, enjoying the moment, lost in new hopeful thoughts.

"My new life," I whispered to myself. "My brand new life."