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Journal Entry (Module 5)

Delightful Memories of Nature

Due to the fact that I am a convicted felon locked up in one of the State of California's prisons, I have almost no contact with nature. Nonetheless, as a result of my mother's love of nature, my sister, Cindy, and I were given the gift of exposure to gardening along with Sunday drives in the undeveloped areas of Southeastern Pennsylvania in the Greater Philadelphia area.

I thoroughly enjoy reminiscing about my childhood and teenage years; doing so enables me to escape from the steel and concrete world that is the penitentiary. After my dad passed away in 1973 just before he would have turned fifty, and just before my twelfth birthday and Cindy's eleventh, my mom purchased a brand new 1975 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme. It was forest green with a tan interior, not unlike much of Eastern Pennsylvania. It had a three hundred fifty cubic inch "Rocket" V8 engine (certainly not ecologically friendly). It tickled my mom to take us on a drive in the country on a twisty little two-lane road where she would push that car right up to the limit of its grip on the macadam, causing my heart to skip a beat or two as she giggled with glee. Or, if we were near Lancaster, in the heart of the Pennsylvania Dutch farmland¹, where the roads between the small family farms were much straighter and populated with horse-and-buggies, she'd say, "Smell that? That's the smell of good, fresh, country air!" We'd respond, "Mom, that's the smell of cow manure!" "That's right," she'd declare, "Good, fresh, country air." I can remember that aroma clearly any time I choose. I am transported to the corn-lined roads, the fields filled with stalks in perfect rank and file, the colorful hex paintings² on the barns, and all of these scenes in my head cause a wave of happiness to wash over me. Whether the Sunday drive took place on Route 100 between Chadds Ford and Exton, winding along beside the Brandywine River rolling over round rocks under a canopy of lush, full trees, or instead, on the perimeters of the rich Pennsylvania farms dotted with dairy cows – either way – it gave me a treasure I can cherish and rely on no matter where I find myself.

1. I highly recommend James Michener's book, *The Novel* (1991)

2. Emblem painted on a barn, especially in Pennsylvania Dutch country, an agricultural region in southeastern Pennsylvania largely settled by German immigrants who have preserved ethnic custom and identification to a high degree (see Pennsylvania German). Hex designs, usually round, with colourful, simple floral and geometric motifs, are said to protect farm animals from disease and other misfortunes resulting from witches' spells and especially the evil eye. (Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica 2009 Student and Home Edition. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009.)