

## **Traveling to Boone**

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Lately, I have decided to give in completely to my addiction to chocolate. My husband and I are traveling to Boone, North Carolina, for a Saturday diversion. My main interest is antiques. His is making me happy.

We browse in the Antique Mart in Mountain City, Tennessee, where I admire a table that costs only a hundred dollars. Dana, the carpenter, says I should build the room before buying a table for it. That's part of the distance between us. He used to live in the past, but he's making progress. Now, at least, he is in the present, but I am way ahead. I always live in the future.

I remember in high school I couldn't wait to graduate. And then when it was time to graduate, I felt too young to get a job. Mama said she didn't see any way she and Daddy could afford to send me to college. I cried like I'd always done when I wanted my way. A child can do that when she lives with four adults. Daddy was 44 when I was born, Mama was 36, my sister June was 14 and Inez, my middle sister, was 16. My oldest sister Juanita was married and never understood why everyone in my household tried to let me have my way.

Now I am 57 with a job I love, but I can't wait to retire so I can start another career. I dream about opening a restaurant and having people stand in line for my oil and vinegar slaw, Dana's baked Cornish hens with cornbread stuffing, and other specialties of our kitchen. I may even use the Gobble family name so I can name the restaurant *The Turkey Platter*.

On other days, I think my establishment will be a collector's paradise. Recently, I found, stashed away in a box in the basement, a diagram of my quaint shop. It will be called *The House*

*of Lovely Things*, and I will have a huge broadside of Sara Teasdale's poem "Barter" on the wall. Every time I want to buy some lovely thing, I remember her lines: "Spend all you have for loveliness / Buy it and never count the cost." How can customers who come in to browse resist the urge to buy with these compelling words on the wall?

Once, when I first met Dana, I asked him, "Dana, what are your goals?" His answer was "to get my boys through high school." Just recently, I have come to realize why he never learned to dream. He never had the luxury of long, lazy afternoons on the porch swing. His life has been a daily struggle for survival – survival against poverty, rejection, and financial stress.

While I was playing dolls and watching June and Inez try on beautiful dresses at the Diana Shop in Bristol, Dana's small blond figure cast a shadow in a field where he was cutting thistles to earn money for his family. While my sister Juanita was sewing me adorable dresses out of Dan River cloth my aunts had sent from the Dan River Cotton Mill where they weaved *made in USA* material, and my sister Inez was sorting through the little girl dresses at Parks Belk in Bristol where she worked as a saleslady, fifty miles away on top of Clinch Mountain a slip of a boy and his smaller twin brother dug Mayapple and ginseng to take to Nunley's mountain store to trade for school clothes.

Now we are together, on our way to Boone, the rain pelting the windshield of the '95 Chrysler, our eyes scanning the mountain roads and our thoughts as far away as they were those summers we were in grade school.

I see a sign announcing *The Red Barn, Antiques and Crafts – two miles ahead*. "Can we stop?" I ask. "Sure," he answers.

He makes a quick walk through the shop and then takes his seat on the porch. I stop at each booth, fingering Sandwich glass and Depression glass, making a mental note of glass worth buying and never counting the cost. Dana comes in to check on me. He really wants to get back on the road, but I prolong the stay. Finally, I choose a porcelain cup and saucer with wide blue and white stripes, delicate red roses accenting the white stripes.

When I do to the counter to pay for my purchase, my eyes glance again at the first item that caught my eye when I came into the shop – chocolate fudge -- \$7.99 a pound. I know I have gained fifty pounds in the last ten years. I need to think of the cost of this chocolate to both my figure and my pocketbook, but I give in. “I’ll take a quarter pound of the double layer chocolate and peanut butter fudge,” I say. The salesclerk cuts a slice, weighs it, and wraps it in wax paper. She protects the cup and saucer with bubble wrap, and I meet Dana on the porch, carrying both fudge and porcelain like priceless treasures.

Once inside the car, I give in to my addiction. I take a bite of the fudge and offer one to Dana, who always declines chocolate except at midnight or at Christmas. I blame my addiction to chocolate on my mother. I always say that she weaned me from the breast by giving me chocolate milk. Now, I remember that Daddy may also be a little to blame, for he used to surprise me with a chocolate soda in the carton of Cokes that June and Inez sent for when a girlfriend was spending the night or they were having a special date at home. When Daddy came home from Sam Rock’s Store, I could count on a strawberry or cherry or chocolate soda just for me. For such a drink, I would go back to being six years old and suffer all those years of growing up again.

Dana's favorite drink is Busch beer. This, I believe, is the reason he doesn't indulge in chocolate. He gets the same rush from Busch that I get from Hersey. When I fuss at him about drinking and about hiding his beer cans in the shrubbery, he looks at my bulging hips and thighs and reminds me of my addiction.

Since a doctor once told me Dana and his twin brother should have the same genetic tendency toward alcoholism, I asked his brother Danny why he doesn't drink. Danny related the story of one night when he and Dana had been drinking in the little town of Lebanon, Virginia. They were around 17 or 18 years old, and Danny said something offensive to a black guy twice Danny's size. My brother-in-law said the big guy picked him up and threw him down on the sidewalk like a bundle of laundry. At that point Danny decided never to drink again. Dana, however, having tasted the pungent liquid, found himself reaching again and again just as I am still reaching for chocolate. Perhaps if the large guy had thrown Dana on the sidewalk instead of his brother, Dana would have not kept reaching for Busch.

Maybe somewhere in my husband's veins, some ancestral urge will not let him stop buying the Busch in spite of liver damage, high blood pressure, and fatigue. Perhaps, the desire is more distant than the streets of Lebanon, Virginia. Can it be traced to his uncles on his mother's side? Or is he trying to find his way back to the German pubs before his ancestors changed the name Gable to the Americanized Gobble?

Last Sunday, his mother, who was a Gobble and married a Gobble, visited us. I put scrambled eggs on her plate, and she said, "Hand me the pepper. I put pepper on almost everything I eat." Is this taste for hot and sour, bubble and beer something far more remote than

Hidden Valley in Washington County, Virginia, where my husband's family has lived for several generations?

I once wrote, "Proper taste has little to do with ingredients. Memories, not taste buds, determine which taste satisfies." But from what cauldron – what continent – what century do those memories spring?

Dana and I curve back and forth over the crooked roads from Boone to Bristol, talking about antiques that aren't really antiques. I savor my sweet chocolate fudge while Dana dreams of home, Busch beer, and contentment.