

Eric Gordon

### New Move, New Start

Late night drives with friends and no final destination. Richmond, McHenry, Spring Grove, driving from town to town taking any backroad we could find. Talking about life, new relationships, our mental health. Walking through the school halls, knowing everyone by name, the teachers who I had grown friendships with, the people who I had grown up with. How about the Friday night football games, I didn't care about being in the student section but instead being on the field with a camera and having a chance to capture so many emotions and different faces. Coming home to my family: my dad who taught me the life lessons I carry with me, my mother who supports my every decision and repeatedly reminds me to enjoy the little things in life, my brother who I aspire to be and at the end of the day has always been my best friend. What the hell am I doing leaving all of this. "Grayson, are you listening to me? Help me bring this box down." My parents are helping me finish packing my car. I move to Phoenix tomorrow, 1,700 miles away from everything I know.

I leave at 6:00am, with three days of driving ahead of me. I'm excited, hopeful, anxious, but most of all, terrified. The final goodbye is the hardest part. My whole family is here, everyone is teary eyed, the hugs long, emotions all over the place. My own father tears up, something I've only ever seen a few times. I get in my car, ready to drive off and my brother runs up to hug me once more through the car window, this is the hardest hug to let go of. "Love you buddy, be safe" I wave once more, tears running down my face, and I pull away. I'm on my own.

The first hour is hard, my heart sinks realizing this is the last time I'm going to be driving down the familiar streets. "What am I doing?" I keep asking myself as I fly down the highway driving further and further from everything I know. I enjoy my time driving and reflecting on my past and to what led me here as an adult moving across the country. It's crazy to think just a few years ago I was starting my first day of high school and now preparing to start my first days of college. The longer I drive, the more the landscapes change. Goodbye cornfields, backroads, farms. Eventually the ground turns orange, I'm driving up mountains, and I can see miles ahead of me. The horizon consists of desert canyons and mountaintops. It's all new to me. I can't help myself from staring off into the distance for periods of time thinking to myself "this is my life now".

I'm moving to a new city where I get to meet my new roommate, Daniel, and start my first year of college. I was supposed to start school in dorms but the virus going meant we're forced to do school online. I didn't want to wait any longer to move and start my new life so I reached out to Daniel, who was supposed to be my roommate in the dorms. We came up with the idea to rent a house and do school online together instead of holding off on moving. I've only ever met Daniel once briefly during a school visit at Arizona State University. He's from California and I'm from Illinois so it's safe to say we were raised differently but we're both interested in cars so the common interest will give us something to bond over and hopefully form a friendship. Having a house will also give us space to work on our cars and whatever other interests we find in the area. So here I am driving to a new city to meet my new roommate, new house, and new life.

Pulling up to the house, I'm nervous yet excited. I pull into the driveway, park, and sit reconsidering what I had just done to get to this point. Three days of driving, leaving everything

I know behind, and here I am. I knock on the door and Daniel opens up for me. “What’s up dude!” We shake hands and make small talk about my trip and he gives me the lowdown on the house. “The kitchen is already pretty stocked with food, you’re welcome to anything in the pantry.” “This is your room, my room is down the hall.” Wow, this is it. My own house, my own room, my own rules. It all seems so sudden. I have no idea who this kid is and yet now I live with him. Other than meeting once and some very basic texting, I’ve barely gotten to know him. He could kill me in my sleep for all I know.

Over the course of the following few months, things start well. I start school online and I’m doing well. Daniel and I have become buddies, but I’ve found that we have significant differences that lead to constant arguments. He drinks a lot, expects to spend every living moment with me, and takes every moment he can to flaunt his money.

Daniel finds a few people to throw a party with and has it at our house. It’s supposed to be a small party but three people quickly turns into eight. Who the hell are these people in my house? I don’t know any of them and yet they’re all here acting like the house is their own. Some skateboarders try tricks in one room, some play beer pong in the kitchen, others in the pool. It’s two in the morning and we live in a community with a bunch of older folks. I tell them to turn the music down, they don’t. Some of the skaters go off drunk skating around the neighborhood being loud and reckless. I chase them down and get them back to the house before the neighbors start complaining. I don’t let myself drink, I need to be sober and watch over the house and ensure the police don’t get called on us. “Daniel we need to turn the music down and stop being so loud, the neighbors are already out to get us and this won’t help the situation,” I tell him hoping he’ll realize it’s getting out of hand. “No, don’t even worry about it dude, it’s not that

loud, it'll be fine". The police never get called but only because I spend the night running around keeping everyone under control.

One party turns to two, two turns to three, and it keeps going. I have a friend from high school, Tyler, who lives nearby so I go to his house anytime Daniel decides to throw a party. I lock my room and leave just hoping that none of the random people in my house try to get in. I can feel myself slowly growing less and less happy. I sit in my house all day, stare at a computer completing classes, my roommate is drunk and throwing parties all the time, and I struggle to find any passion in my normal hobbies. I've begun confronting Daniel about the parties and the drinking but it always ends up being turned back on me and turns into a guilt trip. No matter what I say or do, things won't change. The confrontations turn into arguments and pettiness and at this point I hardly talk to him. I miss my family, I miss my town, I miss everything that I know.

It's been about eight months and I decide it's time to move out. I've been talking to Tyler about the idea of moving in with him. His apartment is small but we get along way better than Daniel and I have in the past eight months. We agree on some terms and splitting rent and agree to move in together. I pack up my things, Daniel snickering behind my back giving me a hard time. He clearly isn't fond of me moving out but at this point I feel so out of place in this house. It never really felt like home to me. Tyler helps me pack my last few things into my car and say bye to Daniel. "I'll see you soon man, we still need to hangout and work on our cars together," I tell him, hoping to lift the tension and leave on good terms. "Yeah, whatever dude, I guess I'll see you around," He snickers as he walks back inside the house.

The last eight months have been a lot. Leaving everything I know, starting a new life, struggling to meet new people. I unpack my things into Tyler's apartment and I feel an instant

weight off my shoulders. “I can relax now,” I tell myself. It’s time to focus on school and *really* start my new life.