

Car Talk

Alone with you at last in the coppertone Chevy --

After months away from home,
I had lost my certainty,
 at age 18, was not sure,
 needed you to make things right.

You had always been there for the answers:
 first skate on double blades,
 hitting the ball farther,
 tough math problems,
 unusual word meanings.

“I’m not so sure, Dad, about this religious dogma
 or that, not so sure we Catholics
 have all the truth,
 nor we Americans.

Can you put me back where I was,
 lift me back to my comfortable seat
 in the car, heading toward the future,
 show me which route to take?”

“Thank God,” I heard. “You are beginning
 to grow up now. So bright, and yet
 I questioned would you ever learn
 to navigate the roads of life.”

“But I’ve lost my destination.”

“No, you have just changed to a map
 of another scale.
Now you will steer
 beyond the black and white
 of well-posted highways.”

Looking back from this crossroads,
I wonder why

I was taken aback to hear
you too had doubts,
doubts were OK.

I wonder how

many times before
you had tried to get me
to turn on the lights.

I wonder how

you knew to idle
later on when my doubts
led to Vietnam protests,
views crashing with your own.

And I wonder how I knew --

Driving on,
I would find direction
from moment to moment,
my compass set true
by this talk
in the car.

Ellen B. Ryan 2006

In P. Papky (Ed.) (2006), *The berries are sweeter here: Older women writing together. Writing Down Our Years Series No. 5.* Hamilton: McMaster Centre for Gerontological Studies.