

THE ROAD TRIP STORY

By Antu Yacob

I have taken many road trips over the course of my life. When I think about conversations that were had during these trips, it's all a bit fuzzy. What is clear to me are who the trips were with, what point in my life they happened and how I felt about the trip. My first major road trip was when I was a kid, and we were living in San Francisco. It was the summer after 5th grade. My mother, stepfather, siblings and I drove down to Los Angeles and then onto Anaheim to visit Disneyland for the first time. We shared this adventure with another family, who also had kids. I didn't talk much. I was taught to be that way. But boy was I excited! Not so much Disneyland, although that hit me when we got there...but LA! Los Angeles! The place where all of the people who I watched on television actually lived! The thought of accidentally bumping into Kirk Cameron or Janet Jackson or Debbie Gibson, OMG! It was all so thrilling to me!

The actual six-hour drive was also a new experience for me. I never fell asleep in the car like my younger siblings. I couldn't. I read, listened to the adults talking in Amharic about work, food, and life in the U.S. versus life back home. Back home meant Ethiopia, where we'd moved from five years before. Every now and then when the adults perused the radio stations, I'd ask sweetly if they could let the oldies station play. I knew that was the only station they would allow in the car. I had learned long ago to listen to KMEL and KSOL, the R & B and Hip-Hop stations, late at night in my room after everyone had fallen asleep. But also on those late late nights when I couldn't sleep, KMEL played the oldies too. Yeah they were the R & B oldies like The Manhattans, Minnie Riperton, Deniece Williams, Rick James and Teena Marie, and not the "mainstream" oldies like The Monkees, The Righteous Brothers, The Mamas and the Papas that were playing in the car station on the trip, but I did not care. I watched a lot of *Nick at Nite* back then, so I was digging them too. With Rosie & The Originals' *Angel Baby* playing in the background, and my parents and their friends chopping it up in the front, I fantasized about what I might say to Kirk if I ran into him in a store in LA. Would I tell him how amazing of an actor I think he is on *Growing Pains* and ask him why he doesn't do more film and TV? That I think he should be everywhere? Would it be memorable to Janet if I told her that my family were Jehovah's Witnesses too? Might she have some encouraging words for me, a closet actress? I went on like this for some time.

Then it happened. We got to Los Angeles. There was a restaurant that my parents wanted to get lunch at. As we were navigating the city's roads, pre-GPS days...my mother said to me, "Antu, look! Look who is in the car to your left! She is driving, see her! She is on that show you like, the Facts...the Truth...the Something...see her!" So I did. I looked. And there she was... Mindy Cohn, who I knew affectionately as Natalie from *The Facts of Life*! My mom was right! Natalie was driving her car, just like us. She was minding her own business, living life in the left lane, doing the speed limit. My 10 year old self was in complete and thorough awe. I watched her car for as long as I could. Right up until we turned into the mall lot where the restaurant sat.

