

## The Road Home

By Sandy Westin

Rural Route 3, Brush Prairie, Washington, stretches from the town of that name to another small (population 900) Clark County town four miles from my childhood home nestled in the elbow of the Columbia River's bend northward. The school bus took me to Battle Ground and back again on that road five days a week for eleven years after we moved to our 60 acre farm.

When I turned twelve, Route 3 became a significant part of my life in a new way. At last I was given permission to ride my shiny blue Schwinn on its shoulders to and from adventures and explorations. My neighboring girlfriends' farmhouses were within sight of my home, but still it was a real freedom to be able to ride my bike for occasional visits. They may have horses, but at least I had my bike.

Four years later, Route 3 was the site of my first experiments in driving the family car, all hurks and jerks at first, but with growing confidence. The road was an arrow pointing me further and further away from the nest where I had grown up with my parents and older sisters. "Freedom", it seemed to beckon, pulling me towards all things yet unknown. At 18 it took me off to college on the far side of the state. At 20 I rode down it with my parents towards Vancouver, 30 miles away, to my wedding with my college sweetheart.

Many years later, I sought out Route 3 on Google Maps to plan my prodigal return. The farm was now 3000 miles from where I now made my home in North Carolina. Somehow its new designation as 196<sup>th</sup> Street just could not conger up images from my childhood like Rural Route 3 had.

When my rental car found its way down that road, however, the hills were still the same and my girlfriends' family homes seemed untouched by half a century. Even though my parents' house was now only a memory, replaced by a tidy suburb of a half dozen brick homes, the road had still helped me find my way. "This place," I decided in the moment, "is where I want my ashes to be scattered when the day comes that I must go all the way back home."+++