

New York City
August 20th

I was immediately excited when I heard Mom's voice, waking me. I sat up in bed: Today we're going to New York City!

It was still dark outside when we drove to the train station. My mom handed Ruby and me each a paper ticket. We boarded the long, metal train and found a compartment with seats facing each other. Ruby propped her red shoes on her little red suitcase and slept the whole way.

After about two and a half hours, my mom tapped me and woke Ruby up, "Look out the window, girls!" She said, pointing.

Beyond her finger, still miles away, the rising sun struck a mass of buildings and bridges; the city was shining, and I felt drawn to it.

At 9:15 a.m., we stopped at the underground platform and shuffled off the train with a huge crowd of seemingly tall people. Ruby and I held Mom's hands, to stay close. She told us we had arrived at Penn Station, in the heart of the city.

We took two escalators up, up, up, then stepped outside.

It smelled salty, like hotdogs, not the beach. There were so many people who all looked different from one another, and they walked past us in both directions.

The buildings had billboards and massive TV screens, with pictures and videos of people dancing, playing sports, or drinking soda, and some just had words displayed on them (I couldn't be sure, but I'm guessing each letter was taller than me).

We stood atop a huge metal grate; screeching noises and air flowed from it, but the nearby pigeons couldn't be bothered. I didn't see any rats.

I counted nine yellow taxis on the busy street in front of us and plenty of other cars, trucks, and bikers zipping between them. The strip of sky above us was bright blue, but all the buildings made our view of it narrow.

My mom hailed us a cab, and we all slid into the seats behind the driver as Mom directed him to drive to our hotel in Brooklyn. He smelled of tobacco and weaved between cars as he drove.

Mom used to live in NYC and pointed different things out to Ruby and me as we zoomed past. (I planned to take a ton of photos that day and give them to my mom in a special book for Christmas.)

Once we got to the hotel lobby, a uniformed man took our bags upstairs. I looked around at the leather furniture, plants growing along the wall, and attendants in crisp matching black and white uniforms...this place was cool!

Mom asked if we were hungry, and Ruby nodded adamantly. We walked down the street to a bakery, and it was warm, bright, and smelled like fruit, sugar, and tea.

There we had an epic breakfast: a gigantic cake-like cookie that was half chocolate, half vanilla. (Mom said these were called "Black and Whites" and were very popular here!) I took a photo of the cookies.

Once we finished our Black and Whites, we began walking uptown. We walked for almost an hour, yet the buildings never got smaller, and there were always so many people.

We walked across the Brooklyn Bridge, where we counted twenty-eight people taking selfies (and yes, we included ourselves in that number!). The water glistened below, and boats transferred large loads of factory stuff or groups of people.

On the other side of the bridge was a very festive collection of streets. Mom told us this neighborhood was called Chinatown, and she used to go there to get dumplings for lunch.

Red paper lanterns hung above each alley and street, lined with tightly packed buildings and stores. They all had metal staircases and ladders attached to the front (in case of a fire).

There were all kinds of stands on the sidewalks selling fish, fruit, nuts, desserts, you name it, and people were speaking in different languages and buying things in front of us and behind us.

Just beyond Chinatown was Little Italy, where they sold a dessert called 'cannolis' and colorful ice cream on the street. Mom showed us how to eat cannolis.

Next, we walked up Broadway and passed more clothing stores than I could count, but each had its own style. All the shops' windows were super tall and tightly packed together, and I'm convinced you could find anything there.

We paused in front of a large tan building; Mom smiled and told us this was her old office. It looked big and impressive and it felt like I learned something new about Mom's life just by looking at it. While her back was turned, I took a photo of Mom in front of her office.

We walked and walked!

We went into the LEGO store to pick a souvenir for our brothers and were amazed by all the things you could build out of those tiny little colored blocks. There I bought presents for Dad, Grant, Ty, Clare, and Ruby. I had just enough money, so I bought something for each of them.

We continued through midtown, passed karaoke bars and restaurants in Korea town, and simply marveled at the number of people in the world. Ruby's eyes lit up, and she squealed when we passed through Times Square and saw a two-story building that only sold M&Ms.

As we were walking uptown, I stopped in front of the most gorgeous art store I'd ever seen. In the window, was a beautiful box with a complete art set—it had every color of pencil and paint. I stared at it but knew I didn't have enough money to buy it. My mom crouched down to my height and said quietly, "Well, that looks very special." I nodded and decided to keep walking and try to forget about how amazing it had looked.

It was only lunchtime, and we had walked six miles! Ruby's legs were tired, and we all agreed we were hungry again. My mom bought us a cheese pizza and asked if we could make it just two more blocks.

We trekked on, and five minutes later, we entered the greatest, greenest park right in the center of the city. We sat on a boulder, ate slices of pizza, and asked my mom questions about things we had seen. I took a photo of her and Ruby, eating cheese pizza slices on a boulder.

After that, we did something quite brave. (Well, most people probably wouldn't be scared, but after what Grant had told us...Ruby and I gulped when my mom said we'd take the subway back to the hotel.)

"Here it is!" My mom announced when we approached a downward staircase that looked like a square hole in the sidewalk.

We descended to find that, unlike my nightmare, it was pretty well lit down there, with plenty of other people, and the subway cars weren't scary, though they were noisy! I had Ruby take a photo of Mom and me in the tunnel.

As we waited for ours to arrive, Ruby tugged at my sleeve. "Look, Joanie," she said with gritted teeth and wide eyes. I followed her gaze.

A light brown fur ball, a bit smaller than a guinea pig, crawled across the track. But there was only one, and he didn't look so mean or scary.

Actually, its face was kind of cute!

So, Ruby and I laughed away our fear of rats. And I took a photo of him, too.

Your Friend,
Joanie