

Homesick Blues #3

(At Petar's House in Pleasant Prairie, WI)

E: You good?

P: Yessir!

E: Alrighty. I'll see you when I see you.

P: Sounds good.

(Petar drives to his childhood home in Pleasant Prairie, WI)
(Ethan drives to his childhood home in Kenosha, WI)

P: Alright. I think for the first stop, we'll go to the parents house.

E: Alrighty.
We're both driving to our childhood homes, so I gotta actually figure out where I'm going.
I haven't lived in Kenosha, and fucking 12? ...13 years? It's been a long time.
I have a rough idea of where the neighborhood is. I just don't exactly remember which house it is specifically, but I'm assuming that I'll figure it out once I get into the neighborhood.
Petar doesn't live too far from where I used to live. I believe it was like a five minute drive away.

...

P: I moved here when I was just a year old in 1998, and I pretty much grew up here my whole life. I moved here in '98 and stayed until adulthood. Moved out to Chicago in 2020. That was in my early 20s, but I spent most of my childhood and teenage years and upbringing years here. My parents still live in this house, so I get to visit it as often as I want. It's stayed in the family, which is nice, has a lot of memories here, a lot of Christmases and different parties and family gatherings we've had. We used to do a lot of 4th of July parties just because we're on a little lake, so we've had some good summers and fun activities. Ethan would come by usually once a year after he moved away, but when we were kids, we would play here pretty often. It's nice to come back whenever I need to. You know, it's it's not really a it's not really a memory at this point. You know, it's still active in my life, and, you know, my parents still live here, and we have a nice time when I come on by. So once a year, Ethan would come into town and, you know, we get to spend some time on the lake, and with my other friends, too. We get to go out on the lake and enjoy... kinda, water sport and having fun summers and things like that. So it was a very, very nice upbringing. I really appreciated getting to do that and and enjoyed that very much.

(Petar parks his car at his childhood home)

...

E: (singing along to Southern Culture on the Skids' rendition of "Engine Engine #9")

...

I don't recognize this road. Wonder if I'm going the wrong way. Oh! This is 76th ...or 75th. Okay. Yeah. I am going the right way. I do remember this. I do remember this. This is where my mother first moved when she became a citizen. Yeah. Yeah, that's that's Aurora. That's the hospital where I was born. That's where my mom used to work. One of her first jobs in Wisconsin. And then the neighborhood is off here to the right. That looks familiar.

...

I could not tell you which one of these houses is the house I grew up in though. My mother always said that it was... my mom always said that it was a... a hundreds street where we lived, but that never really did much narrowing down, to be honest. Lot of cul de sacs. Never lived in a cul de sac though. I'll try turning here. Oh, there's the playground, though. There's the playground where I learned how to ride a bike, actually. Much more dogs... much more dogs than there used to be, at least from my memory when I was a kid. Street signs are so faded, you can't even read the street you're on anymore. Yeah....

...

(Ethan parks his car in his childhood neighborhood)

Yeah. I haven't lived here since I was a kid, and I don't even... Yeah. I've asked my mom about it a couple of times, and she doesn't even remember what the house looked like... I... Yeah, I know for sure that it's got to be one of the dozens in this neighborhood, but I have no idea which one it is. The neighborhood doesn't even really look that similar anymore, except for the playground. So I could be in the wrong neighborhood for all I know... I wouldn't even wouldn't even know it.

(Ethan starts driving again)

(Petar is driving to La Petite Academy, Kenosha, WI)

P: So going to the preschool that I went to when I was a little kid. I started at La Petite Academy probably about 2 or 3 years old, I think, when I started there. I think two. So around the time we moved to my parents house, I started going to this preschool, which was relatively close by, just a few minutes up the road, and it was convenient, I think, for my mom, and it had nice reviews. It was considered a good place. So she picked it ...and I obviously didn't have any say in the matter. I don't think I could even talk all that much when I was in preschool, but, yeah.

P: Just some friends... made a lot of friends there actually, when I was little, and hung out with them and others. But most of them faded over the years, I would say ...you know, I don't talk to any of them except for my friend Ethan. He's the only one from preschool that I still kind of know. I think everybody moved away and just kind of lost contact. But Ethan always made a point to reach out and... and you know, us being best friends for life, we've been able to stay in touch, and this is kind of where it all began. So La Petite is a neat little place. Definitely a childhood milestone, I guess, of mine where I got to get early development and whatnot, but...

You know, the only real takeaway I have from La Petite is my lasting friendship with Ethan. I don't think, we would have met otherwise. We did end up going to elementary school together for a little bit. But he moved away pretty early on in elementary school, so I'm not 100% sure we would have interacted other than that. I think that La Petite is really what we have to credit for that. So it's kind of a special place in my heart for that reason. Just because I've, you know, made a long friendship with Ethan and, you know, and his family, and they've become a big part of my life over the years, and are special to me.

And really, a lot of that's the reason why I've gotten to travel and kind of see different places and things. You know, the Chan family has shown me different parts of the world and shown me different kind of cultural aspects and angles and viewpoints and whatnot. And I've gotten to learn a lot from them and their family. And, you know, that's credit to to me being friends with Ethan. But that's really credit to us bumping into each other here. So it's kind of special in that sense... that La Petite is a, was kind of the cornerstone of our of our friendship, you know. It's where we all all met and started out.

(Petar turns into La Petite Academy)

This is the place here. Got the old school busses and things like that.
It's probably not great for me to be trespassing here right now, but. That's okay.
I don't want to end up on any sort of list, but this is... This is it here. Yeah.
So it's like the next wave of kids is coming in, and, you know, maybe there's somebody there that'll have a friend to—

(Petar gets a phone call from Ethan)

Oh! Looks like I'm getting a phone call. Hello?

E: Hey, I... this is a random question, but do you do you remember which house mine was?

P: You know, I'm— I'm actually just down the road from you, funny enough.
I'm at La Petite right now.

E: Oh yeah?

P: I don't know exactly which one was yours. I don't know if you have the address or not. But.. yeah, I don't know.

E: No I don't. I remember the neighborhood. I know it's White Caps, but I like, I don't know the house number. I talked to mom about it a couple of times, and she doesn't remember it either.

P: I feel like it may have been an end unit or something, but I honestly, I was so little I don't remember because you guys moved away when we were so small, so I don't know exactly. Yeah. I don't know exactly which one it would be unfortunately. But... you know, you could just kind of fill that in, I'm sure.

E: Yeah. I'm driving around... I—I've just been circling the block a few times. I remember it being like, a short, like, street with like maybe 3 or 4 houses each side, and I don't see anything like that, so...

P: Yeah, that's a tough one. I mean, I just went through La Petite and I don't really recognize much of it. I mean, I vaguely remember the front doors and stuff, but, other than that, I, you know, I... it was so long ago. It's tough. It's so early on in the... in the childhood

E: I mean, we're talking like 20 years ago. So that's...

P: Yeah...

E: That's about as sentimental as I'll feel towards the neighborhood anyways. So I think I'll mosey on over to La Petite and check it out for myself then.

P: Perfect. Sounds good. I'm going to head over to 6110 now I'm thinking.

E: Nice, nice.

P: Yeah, I'll keep in touch.

E: Sounds good, sounds good. I'll talk to you.

P: All right. See you.

E: Bye...

(Phone call ends)

P: Okay... so yeah. This is a special place, childhood-wise. And definitely... Ethan and I have a lot of overlap with La Petite, so... always special to see, but, yeah.

(Ethan starts driving to La Petite Academy)

E: Pete actually went to La Petite. That's not a bad idea. I'd actually like to visit the old school. La Petite is... La petite is next to the neighborhood I grew up in. It was a really close commute for kindergarten, but it was... it was the school where Petar and I met and where our moms met, back in 99 or 2000, I think. It should be just up this road.

...

(Ethan pulls into La Petite Academy)

There's the school busses. Yeah. There it is. It's the old kindergarten is still standing. Looks like they refurbished it and stuff, too. I don't remember a whole lot of what I did here. I remember the bus rides... the bus rides specifically. I used to take the bus every morning, which now thinking about, seems a little weird, considering I lived right there. But I did used to take the bus every day, and with, Brendan and Joey... sat beside Brendan and Joey every single day on the way to La Petite. Petar was my best friend, and we met here, but his mom always picked him up from school, so I never really got to have that extra time with him commuting to and back from school, but yeah... I don't remember much of it. Looks smaller, like it looks much, much smaller than I remember. The hallways always seemed much bigger, but looking at it now, it's a really, really tiny building, which makes sense for a really, really tiny town, I guess.

(Petar is driving to his house at 6110 Green Bay Rd, Kenosha, WI)

P: The next stop off is kind of a fun one historically for me, personally, but also, still relevant to the modern day. For the first year of my life before we moved to the house I really grew up in, we lived here on Green Bay Road, which is a very busy, busy highway here in Kenosha, and is, you know, not a great... not a great place to grow up as a little baby. So my parents worked very hard to kind of move from this property, but they ended up keeping it for a little while and they rented it out. Unfortunately, the house is gone, just due to bad renters over the years... neglected quite bad. It was a 100 year old farmhouse, so, it ended up being easier and kind of safer for everybody to let it be removed. But, we still own the property itself, and we ended up getting to use the property to build a garage, which in the modern day, I'm a car enthusiast, so having a garage has been really nice, and it's kind of fun that that was built on my sort of, baby home, you know, my original home as a little kid. So there's, some kind of fun overlap there in that. You know, I don't really remember the early year of being here at 6110.

(Petar parks briefly at 6110)

...

P: And over here on the at my driver window is where the house used to be. You can kind of see some remnants of pavement. That was our backyard, and kind of where those tall grasses are, is where the house itself was. And it's a very small old farmhouse, but historically relevant to me.

And we just pulled into the driveway of the garage back there. So that's, you know, I still come here pretty much every day of my adult life to, to check it out and enjoy it. It's still fairly relevant to me. And, you know, I'm really happy that we ended up keeping it because for a long time it felt kind of like a useless piece of property in that we would never get anything done. But, kind of, after a little bit of back and forth with the city, and meeting all the building code requirements, we managed to get that garage built, and now I have a place that I can work on my vehicles, and store 'em during the winter time. And I just kind of have a... have a nice place to relax and enjoy. So... kind of neat that that came together into adulthood. But lots of great memories there... we had bonfires and other events, you know, friends would come over. We used to play card games and, and hang out, and there were a lot of crazy drunken nights, and just a lot of a lot of fun over the years at 6110, is what we call it. It's a— it's a fun, just kind of random property that serves no real purpose other than just... just kind of enjoyment. So I'm really thankful that that's been around, that's been in my life for as long as I've been alive. It was my mother's house for probably about ten years before I came around, and she's had it since then. So my dad ended up moving in with her when I was a little baby and, yeah, they worked hard to get out and move to River Oaks... so it's a special place.

(Ethan is driving to his Aunt's old house at 42nd Ave, Pleasant Prairie, WI)

E: I did just think of another house we could go visit though, because yeah, I don't... I don't remember where my actual childhood home is, but I do actually remember where my aunt's home is, which is also in Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, because she lived in that house for so long. She's my mom's older sister, and she moved to America first, and kind of brought my mom and her other younger sister to Wisconsin roughly at the same time in '95 or '96. Yeah, she kind of really originally founded Kenosha and Pleasant Prairie for us as a, like a, settling ground or at least a place for me and my cousins to be raised. She always had the biggest house though. I remember my mom and and her other sister Nermi would always live together on and off. And, I do remember growing up in a house with my aunt and my cousin, I think, I think, yeah, it was my mom, my aunt, me and my sister and my cousin Elijah. And the five of us pretty much grew up together for those first 7 or 8 years of my life in that house in White Caps, but we would always we would always go over to to Auntie Ched's house, which is where I'm going now for family gatherings and holidays and stuff. Yeah. She always had the nice big house. It was... it was three stories. Massive basement. Really nice, long staircase to an upstairs area. Green walls... super, super goofy looking house. But it was... it was the... it was this was the Sosmena place, you know, that's where all of the Sosmenas gathered together, like we did Thanksgiving there. We did Christmas there more often than not, did New Years there.

E: That was where all the extended family came to stay and hang out whenever we all happened to be in town at the same time, all family from California and family from Texas, whenever... whenever they would, on the occasion that they were visiting the rest of the family out here in the Midwest, it would it would always be a Ched's house, so I feel like that house will be nice to see. Probably a little more familiar than, well, than the childhood home that I can't seem to find.

...

Can't go too fast here. Wisconsin police... do not take kindly to speeding. Not in Kenosha anyways. Petar has been pulled over a handful of times that he's told me about it. Sounds like a massive headache to deal with, but I learned a how to drive in Los Angeles way after I moved out of Wisconsin, and by the time I was driving, there was no way that I could go fast enough in that city to ever be pulled over for any reason like that.

...

There's the Music Center. I think—I think when I was maybe 10 or 11, I think we went by to buy a violin from there once. My mother was always adamant about me learning how to play the violin like any classic Asian mom, I guess. But, I always hated it really... really hated the violin. I remember us being buying one violin here when we were coming back to visit family in Kenosha and I don't know whatever happened to it, but I believe that was the music center where I got that violin.

...

(singing along to Wilco's *Misunderstood*)

...

Okay. We're getting real south of Pleasant Prairie, now, I think, which is right where my Aunt Ched used to live. I think she always liked being closer to Illinois, and she always just thought that there was much more to do there anyways than north of the state line. Which, I mean, she's right. There isn't whole lot to do in Wisconsin, but it was always cheaper to be able to afford a house here, and this is kind of where she chose to settle down for... God, I think... I think she had that house for... I want to say 20 years. I mean, my cousin—my cousin grew up in that house and she's much older than I am. So, at the very least, her entire childhood.

(Petar is driving to the red lighthouse in Downtown Kenosha)

P: We're in downtown Kenosha now, which I spent a good amount of my teenage years coming here with friends and... and exploring a handful of different places. But, specifically, the Kenosha lighthouse is kind of an iconic spot, and we used to walk out on the pier and enjoy kind of exploring the lighthouse and kind of seeing its history. So there's a couple lighthouses here in town, but I would say the famous and iconic one is the red lighthouse down here. And we used to kind of go out on the pier and just sit by the water and enjoy it and, kind of, appreciate Lake Michigan and how vast it was. And then, yeah, there's there's just a handful of neat things.

Unfortunately there's some sad stories. It's a very dangerous swimming area, and some people that we've known over the years have passed away due to the undertow. So there's a little bit of graphic... graphic kind of history to it as well, unfortunately. But for the most part, it's it's really neat and kind of get to see a neat view of downtown Kenosha and all that has to offer, so... I spent many, many days on the road just driving through here. You know, my friends and I, when there's nothing else to do, you just kind of go for—go for a drive through downtown or go for a walk and just kind of explore and enjoy it. So this was one of those... one of those places. And like I said, I think the lighthouse is just most iconic, of that. But there's a handful of, of neat things.

And, you know, overall, Kenosha was and still is kind of a dead town. You know, not a lot to do, especially if you're young. You don't have a ton of options. Kinda once you grow up and get older, most of your options is just to go out to the bars and drink. It's a town that's part of the Rust Belt, kind of post-industrial and, you know, just unfortunately—unfortunately not a lot to do because of that, so...

...

E: There's the Pleasant Prairie water tower. God, that thing is so rusted to shit. I remember it being very, very pretty when I was a kid. It was much more bright blue green. Now it just looks brown and turned to shit. I always loved that water tower. My mom... actually, my mom and Petar's mom would drag us as kids to the outlet mall. It was one of their favorite things to do in Wisconsin, and we hated it. We were just stuck there while they spent hours shopping. And, one of the nicest things about driving to the Pleasant Prairie outlet malls, despite knowing that we were going to sign away another day of our lives as kids, was being able to see that water tower. It was about the prettiest thing in that area of Wisconsin that I can remember, and I was—I was at the very least grateful that there was something beautiful to look at while we were trapped in the outlet mall.

...

(Ethan pulls into his Aunt Ched's old neighborhood)

E: So I was texting Ched earlier today asking her for the address, and she said 42nd Ave. That's what it was on. Lot of FIB plates here, which I...I mean I guess my car's a FIB plate too so... ever since I've moved to Chicago it's had FIB plates on it. But I was always— I was always surprised about the number of Illinois plates in this specific area of Wisconsin, because it's just so close to the state line, and I'm sure a lot of people who like work in Chicago end up commuting to and from, like, burbs like this, because they're just much more affordable, more quiet, a little less dense, and I guess the urban noise, and the business, and all the people just isn't for everybody. But a lot of... I do remember there being a lot of Illinois plates specifically in this neck of the woods, despite still being north of the border.

...

Yeah, that's the house. I'm pulling over to the side because I don't want the new owners to see me and freak out while I gawk at it for a bit. Yeah, it still looks the same. Oh, I guess there's... less flowers in the front yard. Yeah. My aunt loved to garden, and it was her favorite pastime, I think, she would always be out there in the sun working on the garden, while uncle Bob would be working on his car in the garage. Great many memories in that house.

I wonder if my aunt ever misses it, or if my cousin does. I don't think my cousin does. Cousin was always very adamant about moving to Chicago the moment... the moment she was an adult. And, I mean, she did it, and... and she put that fun little thought in my head when I was a kid, and I guess I did the same thing just years later. But I don't think she's ever, nor have I, been a real fan of sticking in the suburbs in Wisconsin. Hard to imagine that she would miss it, especially if I don't. I'm sure my aunt does a lot, but it's a massive house and... I think after my cousin Ron died and after, me and my sister and my mom moved out, and there wasn't just a whole lot of family in this area, it just started to seem like too big of a house for Auntie Ched. And I— I think it was kind of tough to stay in that house and be there alone, especially after Bob passed too, but she moved out. She moved out closer to Cousin, which is nice. I think that, I think that being in Illinois is much better for her, and she's only a short drive away from whatever family remains here in this part of the Midwest... and, yeah.

Lotta memories for a lot of my family, a lot of my extended family in that specific house. It was— it was a nice home. It was a nice home. And by far my favorite basement to grow up in.

(Ethan starts driving away)

(Petar continues aimlessly driving around Downtown Kenosha)

P: We tried to make the most of it as we could growing up. And, you know, we didn't really realize that we were in a dead end town. But... but we were, and it's kind of sad, but it is what it is.

I wouldn't trade those memories, you know, they made me who I am today. And I appreciate that. That was good kind of character growth and development, and it allows me to appreciate my present day life a little bit more. But, yeah, just definitely not a place that I would have wanted to stay in long term. So even though I wouldn't trade those memories with friends for anything, I'm... I'm happy to say that I don't have to spend too much time in Kenosha anymore, and it's kind of a previous chapter of my life, more so than a present day, day to day experience. So, yeah, this is just kind of the downtown park area, and we'd come down here and enjoy some of the park space, but also skip some stones and jump across rocks, and things like that. The rock wall down here is pretty neat, so a handful of— handful of fun things to see, but it is kind of from a previous state, so... yeah.

(Ethan starts driving to Gurnee, IL)

E: Actually, since we're in really southside Wisconsin, I think it might be nice to actually drive to Illinois because we're really close to, kind of the BURB where I really grew up going to for a lot of my life, despite going to school here and and living here. My family spent a great amount of time in Gurnee, which is a Chicago suburb not too far from here, just a little past the state line. But I actually did a lot of family trips in Gurnee and pretty much hung out there for a lot of my life, if I remember correctly. Yeah, we used to... that's where we would always watch movies in the theater. We would always eat at Gurnee. There was always a restaurant at Gurnee for some reason that was just too good to pass up on for anything local or convenient to, like, just walk to, or do a short drive to. It always had to be somewhere in Gurnee, Illinois.

...

Oh that's pretty— pretty fitting considering we're heading in that direction (referencing the song *Via Chicago* coming on).

(singing along to Wilco's "Via Chicago")

...

Alright there's 41, which means we are officially en route to the land of Lincoln. You can tell because the drivers are moving faster, because they have somewhere important to be. They're not just lounging around like Wisconsinites on the road for no reason, aimlessly.

...

E: I am taking us to what was once the number one destination spot for all of my birthday parties. The Chuck E. Cheese playhouse of Gurnee, Illinois, which is where I spent a great... great deal of birthday parties here, for me and all my friends. I actually can't believe how far it is from Kenosha. We used to drive to this one specifically in Gurnee all the time. My mom hates driving and so does my aunt, actually. I can't imagine... I really can't imagine them taking us willingly so many different times. It's kind of wild to think about.

There it is. Oh yeah, I forgot they rebranded. Yeah, that's not the Charles I know. He's all... so super polite looking and very well done, actually. Very well done for like a 3D graphic mascot. I've always remembered Chuck E. Cheese to be quite a gross looking mascot. Very... very off putting and cringey kind of animatronic face. I wonder when they did that... probably better for the kids.

(Ethan parks at the Chuck E. Cheese)

...

Yeah, I remember... I can't even... it must have been my birthday, or it was Petar's, actually. I don't remember whose birthday, out of the two of us, it was, but we always used to go on this helicopter ride, and it was my favorite thing to do at Chuck E. Cheese, cause it was like this transparent, like, plexiglass helicopter that just went up and down, but it glowed like crazy, like it had, like, a million LEDs in it, and it was it was awesome and very seizure inducing, but a very, very pretty ride, if you could call it that. It was my absolute favorite thing in Chuck E. Cheese. That and the fruit punch and the pizza. But I do remember that ride really fondly. I wonder if that's still around.

...

We're actually really close to this one other place that I remember going to a lot. It's actually probably where I spent the most time, when my family was in Gurnee when I was a kid. The Gurnee Mills Mall, one of the many, many, many Mills branded malls out here.

(Petar is driving to Gurnee Mills)

P: Gonna give Ethan a quick call here. We're crossing into Illinois, so let's reach out to him, and see how he's doing.

(Petar calls Ethan)

E: Hello?

P: Hey. I just wanted to let you know that we're crossing into Illinois.

E: Oh. Very nice. I— I beat you to it. I crossed the state line about, a minute ago I think.

P: Oh, okay. Cool! Are you on the toll road or... where are you at?

E: No. I took— I took 41 to get here, but I actually went to Chuck E. Cheese, and did you know that they rebranded? It looked so... it looked like way, way nicer. It was so much more clean, and it's... the mascot's not, that creepy animatronic Charles anymore.

P: Wow. No, I— I didn't know that. I haven't been in one in years and years. But that doesn't surprise me, you know. Those were kind of terrifying when we were kids.

E: They were. Yeah. I've always wondered why people liked the mascots. I remember being terrified of him as a kid. Like, I hated approaching, like, the guy in the costume because his eyes... something about his eyes were just fuckin' freaky.

P: Yeah, I remember the whole thing just being kind of a mess, and I remember them not working very well either.

E: No... no. But I was— I was just thinking about that... I don't know if you would remember this, cause I think you and I have both had several birthday parties there, but my favorite ride was always that— that plexiglass kind of transparent helicopter with the... with, like, a million LEDs in it. It'd just go up and down, but I remember you and I being on that ride, like, a lot when we were kids.

P: Yeah, I vaguely remember that too. I mean, that and... and the slides and everything, of course. But I remember something about that... helicopter that would go up and down. That was always a good time, and we would always play the claw games and stuff like that too.

E: Yeah... yeah. That's right. We did a lot of crane games as kids. I— actually... I'm headed to Gurnee Mills right now, cause I forgot that it was really close by, and I do remember— I remember you winning this, like, one of those spiky LED balls at the Gurnee Mills, like, lobby crane game machine. I don't know if it's still around, but I remember that distinctively, for some reason.

P: No, I don't think I have it. I think I know what you're talking about. It sounds familiar. Was it one of those ones where you, like, squeezed it and it got bigger, or something along those lines?

E: Yeah. Well it was... yes. It's one of those, but it's... like it was a massive one, and you, like, threw it on the floor and up, like, glew up and everything like that. It was like a really big one.

- P: Vaguely remember that. I think that thing's long gone, sadly. But I do remember getting that in Illinois. Yeah, I remember that being a Gurnee Mills... a Gurnee Mills purchase or win of some sort. Yeah.
- E: If I remember correctly, I think you and I watched *Revenge of the Sith* together, with our parents, and after that, we went into the mall, and you won that at the crane game. I think— I think *Revenge of the Sith* was the same day that you got that. That's probably why I remember it really well?
- P: Yeah, that sounds familiar. I'm not 100% sure, but it sounds vaguely right. It would have been like the mid 2000s, and... yeah, yeah. That's— that sounds right. That would've been one of your visits. Yeah, yeah.
- E: I mean— I mean we watched... well I watched all of the movies at Gurnee Mills when I was a kid. I— I'm now realizing that it's like 20, 30 minutes away from, like, anything remotely close to where I live, and knowing how much my mom and Ched hates driving, I can't believe they drove me all the way to Gurnee Mills just to do anything.
- P: Yeah, it was always kind of a treat. I mean my mom maybe took me every maybe once a week at most, but I feel like I didn't get to go to Gurnee very often. I feel like that was like a special treat every so often to go down there.
- E: I remember it being kind of a big deal, but I do remember like whenever we wanted to do... like whenever there was an outing when we were kids, like, my— my family was always big on Gurnee or... what's the other one? Oh! Northbrook, right? Did you ever go to Northbrook a lot? Cause I always begged my mom to go cause they had the big massive Lego store there.
- P: I don't remember Northbrook as much. I used to go to Northbrook when I was a teenager, when I was able to drive myself, but my mom never liked driving on the freeway, so she stayed relatively close by, and she would always take the backroads to get to Gurnee. So getting to Northbrook would be way more, even for her, than she probably could have handled. So I don't think I ever really went there as a kid. No, I mean, I definitely remember it later in life, but I remember Gurnee Mills and I remember going to Six Flags. Did a lot of amusement parks. Had the season pass, so we would go there every... probably once a week when we had the season pass in summer. We'd probably go at least once a week with friends.
- E: Yeah, I do remember the Six Flags. I was always terrified of roller coasters as a kid. I remember you were— you were pretty good at them. I think... I think the last time I was at that Six Flags was with you, actually. I think— I think we were in high school and I was visiting, and you called it a surprise, and we went, and you took me on... I think it was the American Eagle. That old wooden roller coaster.
- P: Yeah, that was one of my favorites, cause it wasn't too scary. It didn't have any loops or anything, and it was cool. It's one of the original coasters at the park. So I always— I always like going on that one if I can, but it's really rickety because it's old. It was built in the 70s. Not really well kept up.

- E: Yeah... I just got to Gurnee Mills. I see the— I see the Rainforest Cafe. Is that where you're headed?
- P: Yeah, I'm headed to Rainforest Cafe. I should be there in just— just a couple of minutes, so I'll maybe bump into you there.
- E: Yeah, yeah, I'll probably run into you in the inside. I'm going to drive past the sign cause I forgot that there was this massive... I guess all Rainforest Cafes kind of do that massive decoration on the outside of the mall.
- P: Yeah, I'm hoping to get a shot of that, too. I'm hoping to drive past there and check that out if I can. I'll see what— I'll see what kind of works.
- E: It's quite nice. It's— it's been one of the most well-maintained things on this drive around memory lane, I have to say.
- P: Yeah. That one, I'm honestly surprised that it's still— still up and running, to be completely honest. I wouldn't have expected that to have stuck around. I honestly thought that the whole franchise went out of business, so I'm happy to hear it.
- E: No... they did it. I think they've been in process of, like, going bankrupt for years, at least. I mean, I'm surprised that that Chuck E. Cheese still exists, but that— that rebrand probably helped it a lot. No, Rainforest Cafes have been going out of business for a long time, but the Gurnee Mills one is probably one of the better looking ones, at least that I've seen in a long time.
- P: Nice. Well I'm excited to see it, and yeah, maybe I'll— maybe we'll cross paths.
- E: Yeah, yeah. Maybe I'll bump the on the inside at the— at the gift shop.
- P: Alrighty. Sounds good. Talk to you soon.
- E: Alright. I'll talk to you soon.
- P: Bye.

(Phone call ends)

E: The Rainforest Cafe was kind of a... just a convenient place to always eat, and it was good for... I guess it was always good for bringing kids around. My... me and my cousin, Elijah, used to love going to the Rainforest Cafe. I haven't been to one in years, though. I do remember the—I do remember the frog mascot though. My— my sisters always loved frogs. I think they're her favorite animal, and they always had those frog fridge magnet kind of things where you could get... where you could get your name on a fridge magnet or something like that. That was always really fun... It was always a real treat to, like, eat dinner or lunch, and then get to, like, buy something as the cherry on top of the meal experience, I guess.

(Petar pulls into Gurnee Mills)

P: So we're in front of Rainforest Cafe right now, which is kind of a fun little childhood eatery. Used to go with Ethan and his family when we were little kids and check it out, and it was always kind of fun. The scenery and decor was cool in there as a kid, and I just have kind of fond memories of getting to go there as, like a, special occasion kind of a thing with... with some of my friends. So I think it was— was a neat place and kind of the whole mall attached to it really, too. I mean, Rainforest Cafe is attached to Gurnee Mills Mall, and Gurnee Mills Mall was just, like, a big part of my childhood. It was a real treat to be able to come down just because it was a little bit far from home, but when I was a kid, my mom would bring me down here and just kind of explore the mall and get to enjoy seeing different shops, and going to different restaurants, and stuff like that. But I usually remember we would end up at Rainforest Cafe. I mean, there are a couple other places in there, but the one that really stuck with me from childhood was Rainforest Cafe, and then kind of going into adulthood, into my teenage years, you know, my friends and I would go to we'd go to the mall as well, and then once you grew up, it's like a different experience completely. You go from being with your parents and kind of watching them shop to you're now the shopper, and it's kind of a neat thing to see how that changes, and to see, kind of like, what I would do differently, but I remember as a teenager, I would go to that mall and hang out a little bit, and then I would go buy vinyl... and get records, and I bought some sunglasses there, and a handful of other kind of things in my teenage years that I really—that I really enjoy and held on to for a while.

It was always, kind of like, the closest mall for my friends and I to go to... and there's a movie theater attached to it, and I saw a lot of really great films there with friends, in my teenage years, and saw some films there as a kid, too, you know, it was— the theater was always kind of special for me, so I enjoyed that ...and it was always fun to come to this location because they had way more comfortable seats, and it was just like a much nicer experience than the movie theater in Kenosha, so it was always a treat to come here and and watch a movie in Gurnee. But yeah, this kind of area was like a fun place to hang out as a kid and as a teenager. I don't really come down here a whole lot anymore. I sometimes come down to get some Portillo's or, you know, something you can only really get in Illinois. But, otherwise, yeah. I'm not— I'm not in Gurnee as often, sadly. But... the mall's changed a lot over the years. A lot of the shops have come and gone and things are a little different, but it's still cool to see that— that the mall is kind of largely the same layout that I remember from when I was little... so it's kind of neat.

E: I think I'll head to Chicago... and I'm betting Petar is going to be driving to Chicago at some point too, so I'll probably run into him there.

...

Oh! There's the Six Flags Pete was talking about. I've— I was never one for roller coasters when I was a kid, but Petar took me that one time, and I started to really enjoy them. Haven't been to one in a really long time. Been a hot sec.

...

Always feels nice to drive back to the city of Chicago. It feels like... well not right now, because we're sitting in traffic... but normally it does— it always feels a bit like a homecoming. After a living in Los Angeles for ten years, I finally... grad school was, like, the perfect excuse to move back to Chicago once I got accepted in SAIC, and it feels like... it feels... it feels nice. It feels like coming home.

...

The next place I'm trying to go to is Al's. I am feeling a bit hungry, and I've always thought that Al's has the best Italian beef. Petar took me, one time, to... I mean, he took me to get my first Italian beef ever, when he was living in the city, and it was one of the greatest things I've ever eaten in my life, and I've been to a handful of other restaurants since to get Italian beef. I would travel very far to try it. But nothing so far that's really compared to Al's. I still think Al's is, like, the best one, and it's fast and convenient, and there's a couple of them around Chicago. It's just a really nice to know that there's always an Al's somewhat close by to wherever I am when I'm in the city.

It's actually a bit of a shame, because, we're not going to the one that I— that I'm tied to nostalgically. I... cause the first time I had Italian beef was when Petar was living in the city, and it was 2020. And there used to be an Al's closer to actually where I live now, in the city, near to the Loop, but I think it closed down in COVID, and it's not there anymore. So I actually find myself going to the one that we're headed to now, which is in River North. Just a little bit further away from— from my apartment and from school, but still very much worth the trip 100% of the time.

...

There's the stop that I get off of when I'm taking the train to go here. Brown line into that weird mall station...

...

E: Alrighty. Maybe get lucky?

(Ethan parks at Al's Beef in River North)

Oh yeah. Not bad, not bad. Yeah. This is the closest to home now, which is just... I don't quite know how to put it. It's one of my favorite things to eat in the world. It's just—it's such good beef.

(Petar parks at Cafe Beograd in Irving Park)

P: So we're in front of Cafe Beograd right now, which is a Serbian restaurant. It's kind of culturally significant to me, and my dad and I come here every so often, especially when I'm visiting in town just to get some authentic food, which I— which I like, and I get to kind of see where my ancestry is from. You know, my father's from overseas, so it's nice that he can show me his food and culture. I like to kind of try different new cuisines from his culture and from my culture, really, and learn a little bit more about it if I can. So we— we usually come at least once every time I visit, if not more ...and I try to experience something new each time that I can, but otherwise, you know, I really like some of the grilled meats and different foods that they sell. And they have a nice little attached convenience store that sells kind of products that are specific to Serbia and Montenegro. So they have certain mineral waters and, you know, snacks and things like that that you can't really get in the U.S otherwise, so it's kind of neat. It's something that's unique to Chicago, and it's something that I can't get living in California, just because there's not a very large Serbian population there. So it's cool when I'm in town to kind of get to experience that, and get to enjoy it.

E: Think I'll... I think I'll go to my apartment actually, right now. I mean, it's getting... well sun's starting to set, and like people are going back home now, but my apartment's not too far from here, and I kinda need the pisser anyways.

(Ethan starts driving to his apartment in Chicago, IL)

(Petar is driving to his old apartment in Chicago, IL)

P: So right now we're getting ready to drive past my Chicago apartment where I lived for two and a half years. This was my kind of move out location, so when I initially left my parents house, this is the place that I chose. I wanted to experience Chicago just because as a kid, I grew up coming to the city and enjoying it, and just kind of grew up with the museums and the architecture, and a bunch of other things throughout my childhood, into my teenage years, so I thought, you know, I want to try living in Chicago for a little bit and just want to, you know, experience it. So I did it, kind of checked it off my bucket list.

P: So, when I was in my early 20s, I moved to the city, and just kind of got familiar with city life, and you know, gave up the car and walked to the grocery store, and explored on foot, and by train, and just kind of kind of a different vibe than what I was used to, growing up in the suburbs. It was just refreshing and neat. It was a good learning experience.

E: Wow, there's the Chicago River. Oh, and Marina City in the distance. When I first moved to the city, I've always wanted to live in Marina City. I think those buildings are just beautiful. And I... as a big fan of Wilco, I've always loved that album, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, and I thought it would just be really cool to say that I've lived in that building. But when I moved here, I started hunting for apartments, and they were just way too out of my price range. Could not do Marina City, unfortunately.

...

I've always dreamed of moving to Chicago ever since I was a kid. Petar too, I— We always... we always grew up going a little back and forth between South Side Wisconsin and the northern burbs in Illinois, and it was just... this was *the* big city. Pete just got to do it much sooner than I did, and I feel bad cause he just kind of moved into the city at the wrong time, and when the pandemic hit, there wasn't really a lot for him to do here, and he wasn't going to school. He couldn't find a job, so I think after a year, he just called it quits, and maybe about two... three years after that, I ended up moving here anyways so...

P: Unfortunately, I moved to Chicago in February of 2020, and the whole city shut down roughly a month later due to COVID-19. So I didn't really get to experience Chicago to its fullest, cause I only really had a couple of— a couple of good weeks before everything shut down. You know, the restaurants closed down, kind of everything went by the wayside, and I didn't get to experience— I didn't really get to experience Chicago to its fullest for the couple of years that I did live here, but it was a unique experience, something... you know, kind of different than maybe what anybody else would have. So, you know, I got to experience Chicago as a ghost town. You know, nobody— nobody was visiting, everything was closed down, so the streets were empty. It was very easy to kind of get in and out of the city.

E: My mom would always tell me stories about how, when she first moved to this country and started living in the Midwest, and like, when I was like 1 or 2 and I could barely remember, she would always love taking the weekends to escape to the city all the way from Kenosha, and she would just, you know, she learned how to drive, and she would just get lost in the city and try to find something new every single trip, and with two children by her side. And... I don't know, I have a lot of— I have a lot of appreciation for how my mom loved this city, and and how it treated her back then. She's since moved to— she's since moved to California, and she would never move back to the Midwest just because it's so goddamn cold, and she hates the winters. But, I've always thought it would have been nice if she eventually got to move back here. And as an adult, It's— it's really... it's really something else to finally be able to live in the city. I mean, it's just... I've dreamed of it since I was a kid, and now I'm finally here, and so much of it has changed from what I remember as a kid, but it's still— it's still a great city.

...

E: Just remembered one of my fondest memories when I first moved to this place was that... was that I used to— I used to run into this same homeless guy who would... he was always hanging around at the park right across from my apartment door, and we'd always—he would always bum a cigarette off of me, and we would always share a smoke, but I think after about two months of doing that pretty religiously every day, he disappeared ...and I haven't seen him since. Don't know whatever happened to that guy, but it was one of my— it is one of my favorite memories of Federal Street.

P: Yeah. This is the apartment coming up here on the left hand side. This was Essex on the park. They call it Central now. They rebranded it to Central Michigan Avenue, just as I was leaving. I think a couple months before... that's it there ...I was leaving Chicago, and moving out of that apartment, they changed the name of it from Essex on the Park to Central Michigan Avenue. But overall, I enjoyed my time there. You know, I had a little studio apartment that was—that was nice. It was brand new when I moved in, nobody had lived there before, so it was super clean and super modern. You know, there was a new construction as of 2019-2020 era, so I did enjoy that. And, you know, the couple weeks I had pre-COVID were great. You know, the lockdown was tough on everybody, but overall, you know, I had a nice experience and, you know, still got to explore the city on foot just a little more carefully and, you know, didn't get to interact with people or anything like that. Just got to experience Chicago as a ghost town. But, you know, I—I wouldn't I wouldn't trade that either. You know, I wish that, things had worked out maybe a little better for me in the city, but just kind of wasn't meant to be, and overall the fact that Chicago didn't work out for me, meant that California would. In all honesty, I just really enjoy it out there. So, you know, I'm in the long run, happy with kind of the way everything turned out. You know, I still got to experience a city that I enjoy quite a bit. You know, I've always love Chicago growing up with it, but, you know, long term, I think that California is a place that I enjoy a lot more than the Midwest, and the weather and whatnot is just kind of a drag. So I, you know, I am happy that I got my couple of years, but then I ended up getting to move on from it and try something different out West. I think that overall, everything worked out for me and... while it is kind of a shame, you know, I don't have any regrets, so...

E: It's so funny... I just—I only realized it recently, but I'm literally like two blocks from where Petar used to live, like years ago when he lived in the city, and it's kind of funny to think that we just missed each other by a few years, but we could have been living in the same city again... and... not too far—not too far off from each other.

(Petar is driving to Northerly Island)

P: This is Northerly Island. It used to be an airport here, but that was shut down in the early 2000s. But the reason why we come here is because it's a really neat place to just kind of park your car and take a look at the city.

P: It's got a beautiful view of downtown Chicago. I could see my old apartment from here, and it was just kind of a fun— fun place to just relax and hang out. Similar to downtown Kenosha. Just enjoyed the views here, And sometimes I would make it a point to stop here on road trips when I was heading back to Wisconsin, and passing through Chicago, and if I wanted to just take a little bit of a stretch, I would stop here and just watch the city, and take a breather, relax at my car, take a few photos or something like that.

But yeah, it's neat. It's a park. I've never seen the park itself open before. It's always seemed to be gated— gated off and ...doing something with it, but otherwise, I just enjoy it as kind of a neat little viewpoint of the city. So this was always a neat place to stop off while driving. It's probably one of my favorite places to stop in Chicago by car, just because you can park and hang out. It doesn't really cost anything to be here. It's really quiet, considering the fact that we're in downtown. You know, you're only a mile away from the city itself here, but it's relatively quiet, which is nice. You just kind of be alone with your thoughts and— and enjoy the city. So yeah, that's— that's Northerly Island, or Meigs Field as it used to be called.

(Ethan is driving to Northerly Island)

E: The view of the city from Northerly Island is always really pretty. I remember Pete bringing me there for the first time. Yeah, I think Petar showed me that place, actually, I want to say... I want to say almost a year ago, he was coming by to visit. It was like a few months after I had just moved to the city and he was— he found himself in the city late at night and said he had something to show me, and we were just far enough to see the entirety of the skyline glow up when it was pitch black. It was— It's a killer view, and I do think it's probably one of the best views of the city.

...

Oh, there's Petar.

(Ethan waves to Petar and parks the car)