

69N→EWR

By DANIELLE S. TEPPER

“OK, so you’ve done this a lot, right?” I yelled to the pilot. He flashed me a thumb’s up and we were taxiing down the runway before I could change my mind. The banana yellow and white kit plane (dubbed “The Pineapple Express” by its builder and the man now holding my life in his hands) launched into the sky. It was a brisk fall morning and the sudden view of the vibrant foliage speckling the mountains—not to mention my nerves—took my breath away.

Just three months into my first full-time job as a journalist, the day’s adventure was a quest for some beautiful aerial photography of our coverage area to show our readers. It was my initiation into hyperlocal news. It was also the day that confirmed my suspicion that I’d never really be happy living a hyperlocal life.

We flew all throughout the Lehigh Valley, passing over various landmarks: Bethlehem Steel, the Sands casino, Dorney Park, the highways where I learned to drive, the Wegmans where I had my first job. When we got to Nazareth, my hometown of 13 years, I was struck by how small it looked. The high school where I experienced my first heartbreak, attended Homecoming football games, and learned what defines true friendship—all of it seemed so insignificant from the sky.



Rural PA had never really felt like home; my roots were on the Jersey shore where my childhood memories differed vastly from those of my Nazareth classmates. I was still pining for Manhattan and always had been since my first taste of its frenetic energy. Like Didion, “I was in love with the city, the way you love the first person who ever touches you and you never love anyone quite that way again.” I felt, as many writers did, that New York was the only place to go to feel alive. After achieving the ultimate perspective on my little corner of the world, I envisioned what it might be like to leave it all behind, to just keep flying, with my sights set solely on those city lights.

I clutched my seatbelt in both hands as we landed with a hard *THUNK*.
“How’d you do?” My pilot grinned at me. “Life-changing, right?”