

Board Again?

There's never really much to do when you grow up in a small town. I live in a neighborhood with about 60 houses. Picture a lollipop. The stick is Ehmer Drive and it connects to the candy part which is Memory Trail and Heritage Lane. In the middle, instead of finding yummy gum to chew, there's a pond which is yucky and gross and has snapping turtles in it. I live on Heritage Lane. All three roads have an exit to leave the neighborhood and at each exit there's a farm. No matter how you try to leave, you get stinky cows or smelly hemp. I'm not sure if this helps you picture the kind of small town I live in, but to reiterate it, I went to a high school that consisted of ten different towns because each town was too small to have their own high school. My best friends live anywhere from ten minutes to a half hour away from me. Some people drove forty minutes just to get to school and had to take the parkway to get there.

We pretty much were used to driving around in order to entertain ourselves. One by one, I would hop from Lagrangeville to Hopewell Junction to Wappingers Falls to Pleasant Valley slowly picking up my best friends along the way. We'd jam out to our latest musical obsession which half of the time was *Dear Evan Hansen* and the other half *Mean Girls*. Nothing beats screaming out the lyrics to "Good for You" or "Revenge Party" while trying to harmonize even though three of the five of us lack the vocally talented gene. Our endgame was always either the mall or a restaurant, with our final stop at my house. We'd pile out of my car with our stomachs full and looking for something to do. Of course, we could go bowling, or roller skating, or hiking, or swimming, but how many times can you do those things at the same places over and over for five years? You need something new, something exciting to help the days go by. My friends and I discovered that if we didn't want to blow through our savings traveling, we were going to have to find something for us to do in little ol' Lagrangeville.

One day we found out that TGI Friday's has endless apps for \$12 so we decided to go there and eat until we vomited. We fell in love with the cheesy gooeyness that comprises their

mozzarella sticks and us picky eaters discovered if you ask for boneless wings with no sauce, they're just chicken tenders. This became our regular eatery. We would start at TGI Friday's then move to Target or Barnes & Nobles in order to kill some time. Who doesn't love the looking through things you'll never buy? Whenever we went to these stores, we always ended up in the toy section. This was our thing. We didn't watch Netflix all day or go to parties to get black out drunk. We would try to find the weirdest board games possible, buy them, and spend the entire night figuring out how to play. We've found many hidden gems throughout our years of friendship. It's always fun to go and find the ones that are not well-known because you can discover some really cool games. One of my favorites we found was about cannibalism. It was called "Donner Dinner Party: A Routy Game of Frontier Cannibalism."

Here's how the game works: each person picks a role card which would tell you if you were a pioneer or a cannibal. The number of cannibals changes depending on the number of total players, so for five players there's only one cannibal. One person is dictated the camp leader, I forget how to decide who, and they deal out a supply card to each player which is like a secret weapon the player can only use once throughout the game. Then each player gets three hunting cards which can be one fish, two squirrels, poison, medicine, or empty hands. Each round the pioneers try to put out enough food so everyone can eat. The cannibal tries to make sure there isn't enough food so someone will have to be eaten. There are two ways that a cannibal can accomplish this: they can put an empty hand card out or they can put out poison. What poison does is it ruins the entire supply of food; the only way to save the food is if someone else puts out medicine.

After every player picks one of their three cards and places it faced down, the camp leader shuffles and flips them over. If there's enough food for everyone then no one dies. However, and here's the fun part, if there isn't enough food, then players must pick someone to die and that person can no longer play in the game. The pioneers are trying to kill the cannibal and the cannibal must try to hide to survive. There's only two minutes to discuss out loud who should be killed and why. Then the camp leader allows everyone to vote and the person who has the most votes dies. If it was the cannibal the game is over; if not then that person dies and a new round is

started. The goal for pioneers is to get rid of the cannibal before the seventh day. The goal for the cannibal is to eat everyone.

Now those are the only rules of the game. You can try to trick people by lying about which card you put down, you can manipulate people to think someone else is the cannibal, anything goes. Basically friendship means nothing during this game; every man for themselves. I remember sitting in my basement around the glass coffee table laughing my ass off because my friends Tori and Alexa were arguing back and forth on reasons why the group can't trust the other. Heather and I were piping in as best we can and adding to the logic behind one over the other. After all the arguing we ended up voting to kill Alexa. She was a pioneer. Dom had been the cannibal sitting silently as it all unfolded.

We played that game for a few hours, trying to see if the pioneers would ever win. They didn't, not even once. We're too good at messing with each other to figure out who is the cannibal in time. That's the thing about board games; they're so addicting. You just want to keep playing them over and over again until you win. Now that we're all in college, we find ourselves not buying new games, but playing the ones we've bonded so well over. Sometimes we'll play "Pandemic" while other times we'll play "Disney Villainous." One game that I really want to go back to is "Be a Broadway Star" even though I know I'll get stuck playing Rafiki from *The Lion King* for the entire game again. Despite having many options, we always end up playing "Monopoly." We know people say that "Monopoly" ruins friendships and if it were any other group of people I think it would, but when we play, we don't let it affect us.

The first time we played "Monopoly," Tori and Alexa had been snowed in at my house for three days. At the time I really wanted to work for BuzzFeed when I got older, so after three hours of online quizzes, we looked up what they were looking for in their employees. One main quality they wanted was experience in running a personal blog. We decided we were going to design our own blog that day, however, we needed some quality content to put in it. We started to design the site on Wix.com, but quickly got stumped on coming up with a name. Somehow in the mix of our frustration and desire to not just sit at the table throwing terrible name ideas at each other, we ended up playing "Monopoly" to spark the juices in our minds.

It started off as a normal game of “Monopoly.” We each took our turn, buying properties here and there. Slowly without both me and Tori noticing, Alexa had accumulated one of every single property color. We played the game all day waiting for the two of us to go bankrupt. The only way to get the game moving along was if Alexa would trade with us but she wouldn’t. Let me rephrase that, it’s not that she wouldn’t trade with us, but that she would only accept obscure amounts of money for trades. I will never forget how she wanted \$2000 for Baltic Avenue. I bantered back and forth with her, saying that was a crazy amount of money for something so insignificant (don’t get me wrong, putting hotels on the purple properties will get you \$450. Tori started to chime in in my defense, and ended up choking on water laughing at the two of us. My response was to ask if I can have her properties when she dies so I can take Alexa down. She ended up being fine, but continued to laugh at the fact I was more concerned over defeating Alexa than her life. We all knew I was kidding of course. I don’t remember if we played out the whole game or just counted up our money to see who had the most at the time, but it didn’t matter. I will forever remember this terribly hilarious argument we had over a “Monopoly” property.

I love remembering the times we were yelling so loud my grandma woke up telling us to pipe down and the times where I felt so frustrated that I could have ripped my hair out. There was one time, Alexa and Tori were hiding from me somewhere outside in pitch black after we had gotten back from dinner. I walked around looking for them; I went inside checking my room and the basement. They were nowhere. I shouted their names. No answer. I remember saying, “Alright, I’ll just leave you here then!” and got into my car around drove around the neighborhood thinking it would scare them out of hiding. I was so frustrated at them as I traveled along my lollipop neighborhood. I smelled the cows as I got to the corner of Heritage Lane and looked at the moon shining in the yucky lake. I pulled back into my driveway expecting them to be waiting for me and they weren’t. Out of nowhere they dropped out of the tree out I had parked near. I was scared shitless. Then I was laughing as hard as they were. They had watched the whole thing go down.