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**THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY'S
OPEN DAYS PROGRAM**

www.opendaysprogram.org

**Tompkins County Open Days
Saturday, June 10 & July 8**

Join us for 2 days of visiting the best private gardens in Tompkins County.

* There is a \$5 admission fee for each garden.

For more information about the gardens and directions, visit www.ccetompkins.org and click on the link to **Community Beautification**, or call the Garden Conservancy at 1-888-842-2442.

Proceeds of this Open Day will go to the Garden Conservancy and the Cornell Cooperative Extension/Tompkins County Community Beautification Program.



Lake Effect

A Sunday drive down Route 5

> STORY BY BUCK QUIGLEY > PHOTOS BY HEATHER QUIGLEY



Graycliff wouldn't be a bad place to hang your hat.

I'll tell you, people, it can be hard being an old traveler like myself, steeped in the jazzy breakneck literature of the Beats, wondering where did the time go and how did I wind up here in love with a beautiful woman with a beautiful little five-year-old daughter who's sleeping in the room down the hall as I type my reminiscences of a short Sunday drive down one of the many charming, gossamer routes spinning out from our city—like a web spun by a spider on LSD—meandering, struggling to be useful, but mainly just forming an interesting design.

Let me come clean off the bat. I love the Skyway. I know it's an eyesore in need of repair, from below, but I will forever miss it—and the vista it offers—when it's gone. I spent many years of my life living in Allentown and working in Lackawanna. As I look back, one of the things I may have enjoyed the most was the incredible view I had every morning, year 'round, with a bird's eye look at that enormous body of water called Lake Erie. It was exciting for me to think that it was built to let tall boats, full of the booty of America, come floating up to our extensive network of grain elevators. But, of course, that's gone like yesterday's Wheaties.

It's fun to think of the past while we explore our region. As you go up the Skyway heading south from town, be sure to look to your left at the structure that rises like a miniature Superdome—the HSBC Arena. Do any of you remember when it was referred to as the Crossroads Arena? That was the working name for our hockey home before the naming rights were sold to an international banking firm. It was a big deal at the time.

As you descend from the Skyway, you'll see billboards and the huge lakeside bar/restaurant called the Pier—which is either closed or under new management at any given moment—to your right. To your left, as the grain elevators subside, you'll see Tiff Nature Pre-

serve—where you can often feed chickadees and other hungry birds from your hand with some seeds in cold months. Where you can marvel at deer left to this desolate but peaceful habitat and understand that they are simple, beautiful, dumb animals who don't obey the trappings of real estate deals. Occasionally they are even known to commit suicide missions against cars driving too fast through their turf. And sometimes they even cause death to human loved ones. And that is why I never turn down a piece of venison.

Moving further south on Route 5, you pass Ridge Road. If you're curious, or if you care anymore, you are approximately one mile from the little convenience store that was the headquarters of the "Lackawanna Six." Or eight. I can't recall how many there were... but I know the whole country felt better in the days after 9-11, after we caught them. That sure was a turning point.

Next you're into the area we will probably all see as long as we live. When I was a kid, people simply referred to it as "Bethlehem." As the name implies, it's really a sacred place. To drive south through it now on Route 5, you can look to the right and see vast expanses of land, factories and train tracks, forever cutting you off from the lakefront view.

These are some of the remains—in conjunction with other World War II industries—that really put our area on the map. If you can imagine an America that cranked out steel, airplanes, railroads, freighters, all kinds of goods and food by the strength of its own character back in the day... then look to your left and right as you drive through this semi-ghost town and think of the hard-working men and women who lived, loved, fought, drank, smoked, worshipped, cheated, cussed, cried and raised families here. Most, I believe, have left somehow or an-

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other. Because the population of our city has decreased by more than a million since they were here.

Now you're stretching south. Go past the Ford plant, past the strip joint made famous by the film *Buffalo 66*, stay on Route 5 and just keep heading down the lakeshore. Here's where you first get the opportunity to look at the cliffs that characterize the eastern shore of Lake Erie. This is your first glimpse of the water since cresting the Skyway, and the vastness of the lake on the day of our drive seemed infinite. Smooth as glass, barely rippling in the humid haze that blurred the horizon so that the slate blue-gray tones of water and sky seemed one. Past Woodlawn, Cloverbank and Wannakah. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled for the spot where the Seaway Trail jogs right onto Old Lake Shore Road. This is the road to take. California has its majestic Route 1 along the Pacific coast. We have Old Lake Shore Road.

You'll have noticed by this point that this is a different neighborhood than the grain mills. Huge homes hide behind stone fences—dignified, enigmatic and remote as Charles Foster Kane. You're looking for Graycliff, and even though you're following the signs, it can sneak up on you. Graycliff is an architectural treasure of our area, and it's fun to pull in there on a summer day with someone you love and imagine the house as your own—fixed up, of course, since it's going through a much needed renovation—but still beautiful, like an old movie star whose striking features are still there beneath the hard-earned lines of joy, heartache and neglect. Stand for a moment and picture the sun setting through the westward-facing windows to remind yourself that some people really have all the luck. Spend an hour taking the \$10 tour, get some culture and then say, "So long,



Great American food at Castaways Bar & Grill

Frank Lloyd Wright."

Continue on past the fishermen parked by 18 Mile Creek. Or stop and drop a line if you're so inclined. But as you drive on, notice the cars parked on the roadside at Bennett Beach. Officially closed, but clearly in use. Explore further at your own risk.

Soon you'll be rolling into Angola. You'll know by the appearance of summer cottages and the fragrance of sunblock that you've just driven out of an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel and into a segment of MTV's Spring Break. This is Mickey Rats and Captain Kidd's—Mecca of summertime decadence for Western New York. Already the place is crawling with beach bums, bronzed beyond belief for late May. There's something vaguely suburban about this meat-market crowd, but what a great place to listen to Dexy's Midnight Runners at high volume and walk around body watch-

ing. Think Chippewa in your underwear.

If you're a little older, and especially if you're traveling with children, continue on just a little further to Castaways Bar & Grill. It has the feel of a little Florida beach bar, serves good bar food and there's a much more laid-back vibe. There's also a little playground and you're only 50 yards to Lake Erie Beach.

As you continue on, be on the lookout for Evangola State Park. Here you can also get to the water, and there's a big bathhouse. But perhaps more importantly, there is an underutilized Frisbee golf course. A great place to while away an afternoon practicing an obscure sport from the 1970s.

Now you're on your way to the Seneca Reservation. On the bright, sunny day of our trip we wondered about the huge number of people hidden away in the Bingo Hall. The sheer number of cars packed into the

lot surely dwarfed that of any church parking lot in the region—and probably does on any given Sunday. It's hard to believe that gambling's a sin. Just a little further on the right you come upon the Seneca Hawk Family Fun Center. This is still a very new facility and wasn't very crowded when we were there. Driving range, miniature golf, batting cages, go-karts.

Since you're here, fill up on gas. It's still a little cheaper on the reservation, and it'll help your conscience to think that—even though you've just spent an afternoon contributing to global warming—you still practice the virtue of thrift.

From here, you can continue on to Dunkirk and either head inland or continue toward Pennsylvania. Either way will put you smack dab in the middle of our grape growing region. There are a lot of small wineries where you can pretend you're in California wine country—again, the similarity between the eastern Lake Erie shore and the Pacific.

That's another diversion, but since my wife and I had to get home to collect our daughter from our friends' house, we decided to pack it home on the Interstate 90. And to former road dogs like my carny wife and me, there's something comforting in the sound of a Freightliner winding out for parts unknown. Transporting the things we need, moving the possessions of families across the big American landscape like seeds blown by the wind, searching for home in the wide-open and rootless expanse of our country. It was good to know we could get that taste of free-wheeling adventure all in an afternoon, and still be home for dinner and an episode of *Sponge Bob Squarepants* before kissing goodnight and facing the school and work week.

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