

**ROAD TRIPS**

<for Martha Collins>

Everyone thought they were so clever:  
the whole range of traveling salesman jokes,  
comments about drug-pushers. I bore up.  
Dad's territory covered most of Iowa,  
one nothing town after another. A regular circuit.  
He'd check into what passed for a hotel,  
set up in the lobby with his suitcase of samples,  
and wait for the customers to arrive. "The best  
part is how needed you feel. People could die.  
Little kids come in to get "Mom's pills"  
(you try not to guess what the problem was.  
Hard to keep smiling when it was clear  
there was no hope." Summers, he'd take me  
along, all decked out in a pinafore,  
Mary Janes, and a huge bow attempting  
to bring some order to my hair. "Appearances  
are all-important, Martha. Maybe it's wrong,  
but people make judgments." Somehow  
the couches always had scratchy upholstery,  
the heat was almost more than I could handle.  
If it had been a successful morning,  
we'd find the nearest diner.  
"I think we've earned a burger and a sundae,  
don't you?" Who could disagree with that?

- John Hildebidle