

Reaching back from the front seat while Mom drove,
my dad showed us the series of two lane roads we would travel
from our home up north in Minneapolis,
to Judge and Kiki's house
down south in Jefferson City.
He challenged us to add up the miles
between the pinhead markers on the map
and find the exact spot
where our red station wagon was right at that moment,
loaded with the eight of us, our dog, our food, our suitcases.

I loved the names of the towns we rolled through
Owatonna, Oskaloosa, Ottumwa
and I enjoyed the map games,
but folding that map
utterly mystified me.
I would try every which way before giving up and
handing a bulky square, creased down the middle, up to the front seat
where my father would spread it out in the air in front of him,
deftly pop in and out the folds
until the map collapsed into his hands
of its own accord.

Now forty years later,
he and I wait for my mom to get out of surgery,
and we pore over a map
to find a better way home,
and I trace for him the route I have chosen
from 494 East to 35W North to 11th street
and he studies this for a long time
before he moves his index finger along the thick green line
that bisects Minneapolis and says,
"Now, is this what you call north?"
"Exactly," I say.
Satisfied, he creases the map down the middle
and hands it to me.

I don't re-fold it.
Now 89 years old,
he's been married since he was 30,
practiced pediatrics until he was 80,
raised six daughters,
escaped from the Nazis in his youth
and survived a stroke in his old age.

That map, just as it is,
is accomplishment enough.