MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY XXXV

Spring/Fall 2007

being a collection of
Midwestern creative nonficton
by members of

The Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

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The Midwestern Press
The Center for the Study of
Midwestern Literature and Culture
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1033
2007

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Midwestern Miscellany (ISSN 0885-4742) is published twice a year
(Spring, Fall) by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

PREFACE

In his insightful essay, "The Flyover," Michael Martone challenges the notion that the Midwest is merely inconvenient "flyover" country while still acknowledging that its expansive geographical range also renders the region paradoxically invisible. With its indefinite boundaries and its apparent lack of dramatic features, "The Midwest," he suggests, "is hidden in plain sight."

The essays in this volume sharpen our focus so that we can see the unique and the dramatic in the everyday. As the writers evoke the contours of their home ground, they seem inevitably to speak about the shaping of their own lives. As these lives come into clear view, we can see that the Midwest is indeed many places: a multi-layered terrain of the heart–a palimpsest of lives lived attuned to the natural specificity of water, wind, dark earth, caves, stones, trees, and dust. Amy Nolan evokes the transformative power of Michigan's Au Sable River while Shari Zeck faces the legacy of an Indiana tornado. David Diamond, using his youthful name Slide Davison, dramatizes an approaching South Dakota storm and tells his story of profound loss. In turning her eye to Stearns County, Suzanne Kosanke confronts the drastic changes in rural Minnesota in the last century. With tender humor, Martha Christensen Demerly capures a moment at the cusp of adulthood in her grandmother's South Dakota home. Janet Ruth Heller reflects on a beloved family vacation spot in Wisconsin; Stephen Michael Adams and Dedria H. Barker recreate natural features that dominated their young lives–Springfield, Missouri's Doling Park and the Detroit River. Arising from the fertile loam of landscape and memory, these essays make the hidden visible and affirm the striking and subtle richness of Midwestern places.

WORK CITED

Martone, Michael. "The Flyover." *Imagining Home: Writing from the Midwest.* Ed. Mark Vinz and Thom Tammaro. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P., 1995. 3-12.

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CIVIL DEFENSE

Amy Nolan

I had forgotten the first lesson I ever learned on the river: the place that makes you vulnerable is the place that makes you strong.
—Pam Houston

When I was a year old I fell into the AuSable River. I do not remember the icy December current that pulled me away from my grandparents' green dock. As the cedar-lined river swept me into the current, its speed held me aloft. I was almost around the first bend before my father jumped in and hauled me out, his legs having slipped from underneath him as he chased me and the current. The AuSable is one of the fastest moving rivers in the United States; it never freezes in the winter, and as the snow melts and joins its body, the current speeds up. Where I fell in the water was not deep, but even an adult had to fight the current to get anywhere. My father had practically run toward me, letting the current push him forward, his big strides clumsy with panic. My mother tells me this story, remembering how my body was wrapped protectively in a pink snowsuit that grew heavy with cold, moving water and I had been gazing up at the low, gray sky with surprised eyes. As she tells the story, she reminds me that I never cried–that I simply floated, bobbed down the river for a few seconds that had seemed to her an eternity. She reminds me of how scared she and my father were, how they had felt defenseless against the current, and how suddenly I had slipped from the dock.

The next December, my father died of a heart attack during a snowstorm. My mother gave birth to my brother two weeks later, on New Year's Eve. That summer, when I turned three, my mother, Tim, and I moved from Detroit to my grandparents' house, which they had bought as a retirement house in 1970. I must have fallen in love with

the AuSable River sometime after my father's death, and I named my grandparents' place the "Singing River House." At night I could hear the curling, bubbling current, whose surface shone through a canopy of white pines and cedar trees. During the day, I played in its always-cold, purifying current, the bright green, long grass flowing like angel hair beneath the undulating surface, which revealed the brown glass clarity of stones and reminded me of his soft eyes. As a child I felt at once safe in the river and a sense of unspoken danger, a strange, seductive pull toward oblivion.

We ended up staying in northern Michigan, and moved into a house that is about two miles from my "Singing River House," which my grandmother sold in 1982. I would swim in just about any body of water, no matter how cold, and I didn't care if I couldn't see bottom. I loved the feel of weightlessness as my body surrendered to the gently chaotic currents, my form twisting into soft, exquisite shapes. I often gazed up at the sky from under water, out and up into the sun, its shape spreading out across the surface, so distant from the quiet, cleansing comfort of being under water. I came to find peace under surfaces; I found solace in basements, under blankets, under pine trees, especially blue spruce, whose lower branches spread out so thickly that no one could ever find me. I would go under and pretend I was an animal–a fox, a skunk, a bird–and imagine that I could just blend in with the landscape.

The main branch of the AuSable runs right through the small town of Grayling, where my two younger brothers and I grew up. People used to joke that it is a town through which tourists drive to get somewhere else: to the more mystical "wilderness" landscape of the Upper Peninsula and the delicate majesty of the Mackinac Bridge; down to the gleaming, dirty labyrinth of Detroit; or west fifty miles, to the well-trod and more tourist-friendly resorts, campgrounds and beaches near Traverse City. Yet, here in my modest country, with its often harsh and biting winters, when the cold transformed bodies into hunched, isolated shapes, I learned how to be alone. I could imbue this land with my imagination. Every year I could trust the coming of the heartbreaking fall colors–electric yellows in the maples, gradually turning to sharp and rusting orange, the wild turkey brown of the oaks, and the soft shimmer of tamarack needles falling in the marsh behind our house. I could hear there the longing banging away at my spirit like the echoes of November gun shots, amid the din of snowy wind against my north window.

During the summer after my father died, my mother met a man and married him that winter. My four-year-old self remembers my stepdad as a man whose eyes were always dark with distant rage and, behind that, sorrow. His eyes seemed to say, "I've had it up to here." He moved in with us, and, almost seamlessly, he adopted my brother Tim and me. My mother had our last names changed to his name. I remember starting kindergarten, re-learning how to write my last name.

One day when I was five, I absentmindedly pulled leaves off a maple tree branch in the front yard. I was yelling across the street at my new friend, Steve. My stepdad, whom I was learning to call "Dad," came to the front door, and told me to stop pulling the leaves. I happily shouted back, "I'm sorry! It was a mistake!" emphasizing the last syllable, for I was fascinated with this new word, mistake. I felt very adult and polite using this word, not thinking about what it meant, and not aware that I was still pulling the leaves. Suddenly I heard the slam of the metal screen door, and his six-foot frame was crossing the yard, striding toward me. He yanked up my arm and hoisted me up off the ground, dragging me to the house. My feet seemed to dance, defensively trying to find traction, barely touching the tops of the grass as I was pulled further upward, losing contact with the earth. Then he was whacking me with his other hand, my free hand trying to cover my back, missing. Inside the house I ran into the bedroom my brother and I shared and packed my suitcase. My mother silently watched me walk out the back door, then down the driveway, muttering to myself as I determinedly walked down the tank trail, a military road, behind our house. I followed the tall, muddy grooves left behind by the tanks that rolled by in the summer on the way to the bombing fields. I waited in the marshy grass until nightfall, hugging my legs to my chest, realizing that nobody was coming to find me, knowing all along that I had no place else to go.

In the summer, the National Guard came from surrounding states to practice war games in the fields around Grayling, where there was a big base. Their presence provided the town with a fair summer income, in addition to the tourists coming through. When I played outside, we often heard the distant and then deafeningly loud chopping of helicopters flying low, and the proliferating grumble of practice bombs off to the east and west of our house. I often mistook the distant sounds for storms rolling in; the clear blue sky seemed surreal against the subtle, benign, yet ominous bombing. Inside the

house, dishes rattled in the cupboards at rhythmic intervals, emphasizing the ridiculous fragility of everything that protected us. Outside, my neighbor, Steve, my brothers and other boys played "war" under the high sun, where the brown 'copters flew by in formation and almost touched the tops of the pines. The heavy chopping sound created a hard rhythm on the inside of my chest and throat. We'd bear down into the green foliage deep in the woods behind our houses, crawl through the pine needles and poison ivy, giddy with feigned fear, but knowing we were safe.

I was the only girl in the small, wooded neighborhood called East Branch Estates, where thick white pines dripping with sap muted the haunting, faraway sounds of the freeway running over the tank trail. I would often ride my bike down to the end of the road, which met the trail, and watch the tanks, giant brown gourds of ungreased metal, slowly rolling by with terrible patience, seeming so clumsy and inefficient. They kicked up dust and left deep trenches in the soft muddy road, which filled with water when it rained, making it impossible to travel by car without getting stuck. I would follow the trail for a while, and then ride into a narrower path that led down to a narrow but deep creek, which eventually emptied out into the main branch of the AuSable River. The current is reliably fast there, too, just like the main branch, but it is much sandier. As my skin made contact with the surface of the river, the bracing cold would take my breath away, at once soft and sharp on my skin, which gleamed fish-belly white under the eddying current. I would roll up my shorts higher, test my stamina and go a little deeper, and my arms would flail against the cold, my breath high in my chest, seeming to take flight. I would swim until I got dizzy, and then ride my bike home, letting my clothes and hair dry in the wind.

On the day D., an older boy who was too old to play with us, pulled me by the wrist into the thicket of weeds and birch trees far behind our house, past the rusty creek, past the low cedars, out of the sight of the tank trail, a tornado began to spin in my stomach. At age six, I already knew that the only way to defend myself was to back down and apologize, to retreat. I talked to myself sometimes until the day showed its face again, and I said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," over and over to whoever was angry at me until things seemed okay again. When D. pulled out his penis and put it close to my mouth, I touched it, sniffed it, kissed it, just like he asked me to. I remembered how he had watched me at the bus stop, clicking by my house on his ten-

speed. As he pulled me to the ground, I saw the sky explode into bottomless blue. From above my body I watched the birch trees scrape the bright, endless sky, and the marshy grass smelled too strong of wet and rotting leaves. As he pulled me to his open zipper, I suddenly felt so far from home, and I could hear the slow, distant, grinding pace of the tanks as the storm inside my stomach turned into winter–and turned against the part of me that opened, but refused to swallow what his pale body almost gently emptied out into mine.

From that day on, I practiced silence and invisibility as my best defenses. I learned from my mother to "not rock the boat," to keep it all together, to not explode. I wore socks and underwear to bed, until my grandma told me that a girl needs to "breathe down there." I became obsessed with throwing things away, finding ways to start over: I moved my bedroom furniture around every week, and cleaned under the heat registers, under every dark, hidden space I could find. I forced my body to become narrow, and kept it close to the bones once I began to grow into a woman. I made my periods stop when I was fifteen, and they didn't come back until I was eighteen. I learned to watch from a distance my old fear of being pursued, overtaken, even rescued, with a grim impartiality. On the outside I projected needlessness and compliance. On the inside I spun and spun, and have never known complete stillness.

The summer before my sixth grade year, D. found me again. He stopped his ten-speed at the edge of my yard. He looked a lot taller, and his voice was deeper. He was about eighteen by now, but his knowing smile was the same. Confident, careful, patient, his eyes missing nothing. I was standing in the front yard, with my hands in my pockets, pretending to be a boy. I had a puppy then, who just happened to have an erection as he ran around the yard. After commenting that my puppy was turned on by my "tanned body," D. asked me if I'd like to go for a bike ride with him. I could only stand there, smiling back, like a girl, my insides spinning. Instinctually I peered over my shoulder to see if my stepdad might be standing at the front door, but he wasn't. I suddenly felt fat, my arms and legs too exposed, too bare, like I was taking up too much space. I could sense the sky again, relentlessly blue, looming over me in a bright arc. My stomach beat where my heart should have been, and I heard myself say no, I was busy. My eyes turned to knives as I watched him click away, and I drove my sweating hands into the back pockets of my favorite jeans, fingering the leather outline of a phoenix that my mother had sewn

into the ass. As I turned away, I knew I was still here because I was touching the surface of my body, and my feet were solidly planted. It was the first time I didn't back down.

My body, therefore my identity, was being shaped by a quiet, conservative community that seemed most at peace when preparing for war: preparations that lend a pretend quality to the world, where the sky shifts over the pine trees, forever concealing the enemy that lies within, rather than without. Here I learned that the best defense is a silent resolve to control the body. I also learned that wars are often fought in silence, and bombs are heavy possibilities that loom over the living, creating fear and casting shadows over peace.

I started sixth grade in the fall of 1981, the year the millage failed in Grayling's school system. That year, classes started at nine and ended by two; teachers were shifted around to courses different from the ones they usually taught; and the buses didn't run, so most of us walked or rode our bikes. The first of my three years at the Grayling Middle School, this year would see no repairs to the school's crumbling, 1912 frame. The echoing caverns of the stairwells and the library would be punctuated by the spectral sound of falling plaster chips, evoking a vertiginous sensation of being at once outside and inside. In the makeshift library, bookshelves were barriers against the danger zones where rotting walls chipped and fell more frequently. In the quiet of the library/study hall, I could sometimes hear pieces of the ceiling fluttering down behind me like ghosts.

That fall, a new class called "Civil Defense" was offered as a social science selection. On the first day the band director, Mr. H., shuffled into the dank, basement classroom, tugging at his salt-and-pepper beard. He had no mustache, which gave him an odd, paradoxically slipshod, yet clean Amish appearance. Hoisting up his pants where his nonexistent ass trailed off into his legs, he casually tossed each of us a spiral booklet on which bold letters proclaimed, "How to Build a Bomb Shelter." All semester we watched films like *The Day of the Killer Tornadoes* and a volume of atomic bomb footage from the 1940s and 1950s. In the dark seclusion of the windowless middle school basement, we watched the now-numbing, black and white images of the atomic bomb penetrating the earth and sky simultaneously. We watched as well-dressed white children slid under their desks in graceful unison and put their hands over their heads, just as we had done during tornado drills in elementary school. Chattering amid the teacher's "hushes," we had clumsily slid under

our desks as the school bells sounded in rhythmic bursts. The lights had been turned off, which accented the brightly shining sun outside. The stark contrast had lent a surreal quality to the pretend danger in the classroom–a response to a phantom threat. I had watched the bright world outside clash with the inside darkness. It was beautiful, and comforting. I had kept my body within the borders created by my desk over my head. Sitting on the cool floor, I could feel where my body began and ended. Under the desk, I could smell the outdoors on my skin: the residual heat from the sun at recess, the thin, benign child-sweat on my arms, my breath against my hands. It had been like being under water, compact and self-contained.

In Mr. H.'s class, in that military-colored basement, I discovered a strange comfort in learning about disaster, in a community that had never experienced it. No tornadoes, no serial killers, no cults, no atomic bomb, no war had ever descended upon Grayling. These things existed in my imagination, which blended fear with curiosity, and the cumulative discovery of history. I learned that the United States was built upon war as a defense–and that "civil defense" meant being prepared for the worst. As much as I wanted to embrace the world in which I was being raised, I also wanted to flee from it. As much as I felt my body and mind opening to the possibilities that the world had to offer, I also wanted to disappear. I came to love the shadows, darkness, places from which I could observe others, and learn without risking too much.

Before school each morning I'd stand near the bus garages with some eighth grade girls I knew from the neighborhood. They smoked cigarettes, or passed around a joint and drank Mountain Dew out of dark green glass bottles. I admired them, especially Nancy and Lisa, who were tall and narrow in their jean jackets, tight Levis and high top sneakers, their short hair feathered back like Joan Jett. They covered their school books with brown paper grocery bags and wrote boys' names all over them with big, inky hearts. I coveted their careless toughness: the worn-out jeans with holes in them, the scuffed shoes, the hard, armed, banged-up-ness of their gazes, framed by black liquid eyeliner, scabs of foundation visible along the jaw line. In contrast, my own spit-and-shine, cared-for appearance–shiny new shoes, permed hair and braces, crisp dark jeans, and unmolested books–felt prudish and feminine, too fussed over, as my mother took special care of the outside of me. The home perm she had given me

fueled their good-natured teasing about my uncanny resemblance to Albert Ingalls from *Little House on the Prairie*.

Each fall an assembly was held in the gymnasium, during which the local National Guard gave a presentation on the dangers of finding unexploded weapons out in the fields around the county. Various specimens of explosives and shell casings were set out on the cafeteria tables, which looked tiny and toylike in the middle of the gym floor. Dressed in camouflage, the Guardsmen, tall and earnest, stood behind the tables to make sure no one touched anything. As I walked past the unearthed, rusting objects, I felt a tight chill in my chest that spread to my groin, the way it feels when I pass by a dead animal on the road or a dead body laid out in a casket. I couldn't understand how these dormant, clunky metal shapes could hold such a fire inside them, be ignited by the fine machinery deep within. Still encrusted with dirt and dried grass, they looked out of place sitting in a row on the cafeteria tables where we ate our lunch every day–grotesque vegetables plucked from a deadly garden. The Guardsmen warned us with stories about the most recent cases of kids who had wandered into the fields, picked up live shells, and been badly burned, or worse.

On a field trip that allowed our "Civil Defense" class a tour of the bomb shelter in the county building, I hung back in the doorway, touching the deadness of the smooth, gunmetal wall. I thought about the general, womblike comfort of basements, the hint of water there, the feel of a cement shroud as protection from an exploding sky. Here I discovered that school would always be a safe place. Here I learned how to arm myself with knowledge. Over the years, I have wondered: how can I heal from an invasion to my own body if I am constantly preparing for war? How can I be a compassionate person, and allow my spirit to enlarge, and still be able to protect myself from harm? When do protection and defense no longer serve their purpose?

When I return to the river, I do so when the weight of living becomes too heavy to sustain–when I cannot see clearly for the heaviness of the world and its many wars, and my own resistance to these realities. During these times I come to the river, its current steady, reassuring in its constant transformation. I find my way to Whirlpool Road, where the curve of dirt road stops at a disintegrating pine fence. I walk to the edge, where the river appears to flow toward me as the physics of the whirlpool creates a lazy spiral of bubbles, waterbugs, loose leaves. I breathe in the sharp, clean air, and remember the

source of the deepest, most beautiful parts of myself, all the light and shade of my true name, at once rooted and flowing.

I try to recall the odd sensation I must have felt that December day when the cold water seeped into my snowsuit, just moments before my father pulled me out. I try to recall my faith in a man–the one man who held me close to his heart for two and a half crucial years. The grief is bearable now. No longer defending, I pull my hands away from my weeping face. I kneel over the surface of the river and see my reflection, its features in shadow, and I allow my tears to fall into the receptive current, where they create an exchange of surfaces, body and river.

Wartburg College

THE PRINTER'S DEVIL: A MEMOIR

David Diamond

Dark clouds churned the Bad River sky. Sand drifted off the godless rim of the Badlands. Thunder rumbled. Dust devils danced on the fields west of town. Lightning crashed, and the wind whispered rape.

The sky sparkled and booming thunder froze everyone coming and going at the Kum and Go. They stopped and gawked at the storm boiling out on Highway 14.

We'd had a three-year drought. No rain or snow. Slipping into spring and already hot and dry. Old folks said, "Bad as the Dirty Thirties, you bet."

Main Street was sun-torched and cracked; the river on the edge of town a mud oven full of dead bullheads. Out here, west of the Missouri River, it can be eighty degrees and sunny in January; but East River, in the flat country, it might be nineteen and snowing.

* * * * *

My name is Slide Davison.

I was born in the Dirty 30s, raised a dog-day boy, tall and skinny and tough to my dog-day bones. My father taught weakness as a character flaw.

I grew up on the Bad River back streets, played kick-the-can in the dirt alleys and took some vicious beatings behind the Smoke House Pool Hall.

* * * * *

The day the "church twister" hit town, I was sitting on a curb in front of our weekly newspaper, the *Bad River Messenger*–circulation

2367. The *Messenger* covered all the news between Bad River and Fort Pierre.

W.F. Kelly, a recent arrival from Boston, owned the *Messenger.* My dad, Flint, was the shop foreman and linotype operator. He ran and repaired the presses. Kelly let him write a column called "This 'n That," which Dad always ended with the number 30. "Thirty means the end, Slide. When the world goes kapoot we'll put a big *thirty* on the front page."

Dad's goal was to own the *Messenger.* He stuffed his column with gossip because that's what people wanted. He was self-educated, read the dictionary every night, and insisted The Printer's Devil learn seven new words a week. He gave me tests. I'd say the word, spell it, and define it. For example, I knew that the Kum and Go scene, when the people stopped and stared at the storm, was a *tableau vivant.*

I was the printer's devil and paperboy. I had follow-through. That was Dad's motto: "*Do what you say you'll do. Always finish the job.*" I made sure the people in Bad River got the *Messenger* delivered on time.

Dad said, "Come hell or high cliché, Slide, folks need their gossip, and by God we're gonna dish it out, give 'em a fresh, beautiful copy, hot off the press, and they will love their paper and use it to compare notes about success and failure, clip photos, find bargains at the grocery, clean walleye on it, start a fire, and do many other ugly things I shall not mention."

Dad taught the truth. He delivered these sermons over a shimmering stone of hot type, glasses tipped down on his big nose. Short succinct aphorisms like "People want their name in the paper, Slide. It proves they exist, proves they're alive. Makes 'em hot when their friends say, 'Hey, I saw your mug in the *Messenger*,' or 'I read about you in the paper.'" He'd puff his pipe faster and faster, spewing streams of Sir Walter Raleigh tobacco into the lead-scarred air and end his rants with, "Remember this, Slide: Whatever you choose to do, be accomplished at it. One more thing–don't go in saloons."

He expected a set-up so I'd always ask, "Why, Dad?"

He had several punch lines but his favorite was, "Well, hell, because you have no control over who sits down beside you." Then he'd beeline it to the back door and yell, "Help! I'm trapped in a humanimal universe!" He'd disappear into the alley where he hid his

Jim Beam, have a pop, rush back into the shop, calmly line up the type and put it to bed. "No, sir! Don't ever lose control, Slide."

Dad was my hero.

* * * * *

My parents, Flint and Anna Belle, rented the run-down rooms above the *Messenger* from Mr. Kelly. Dad said, "Kelly's got us by the balls, Slide, but we'll own this newspaper one day."

We were hard up as stray dogs. We killed our food–duck, goose, pheasant, turkey, deer, prairie chicken, rabbit, fish, squirrel. (Have you ever ruined a tooth on buckshot?) I ran a trap line east along the river. I got two bucks for beaver and muskrat at Grady's Trading Post, two-fifty for a jackrabbit, three on a badger.

My big treat was splurging on the "Hot Beef Special" and a piece of pumpkin pie at the Cozy Café. Mom was a waitress, so I received generous servings.

The Printer's Devil wore a canvas apron and worked with thick, gooey ink and hot lead. My fingernails were always dirty. Dad and I stood at a filthy sink in the backstop, washing with pump gas, Borax, and Lava. He'd lather this shit up to his elbows, scrub hard and rough, and say, "The printer's devil is an apprentice to the *art* of printing, Slide. Art, if it's any good, is dirty business."

I set type, ran the job presses, and Dad demanded I learn the linotype. My Uncle Scott was a linotype operator for the *Omaha World Herald.* He belonged to a union and owned his own home. A linotype (pre-computer) was a huge intricate machine, big as a car, with a keyboard similar to a typewriter. Dad typed and the words came out on hot slugs of lead. He'd holler, "I need another peg of lead here, Slide!" I'd run to the casting room and grab a thick bar of lead, race back, and feed it to the linotype.

* * * * *

I loved the feel of a newspaper, the hum of the press, the pungent smell of fresh ink. Miss a beat on a job press, you lose a finger, a hand. "Life is timing," Dad would say. I set type and ran all the NO HUNTING, NO TRESPASSING, BAD DOG, and KEEP OFF signs–the easy stuff. Dad did the big jobs–the wedding announce-

ments, letterheads, auction bills, telephone directory, entertainment programs, etc. Everything had to be perfect.

Ask Dad and he'd tell you he was an "artist."

When we'd go to the Oasis Café, the Prairie Rose, or Toot's Pantry for nickel doughnuts and coffee, he'd pause in the entry and study his handbills. "Now there's a work of art, Slide," he'd say. "Perfect type size, balance, detail. Beautiful, isn't it? Goddam! Just the right amount of ink."

* * * * *

Here's some tank-town advice from The Printer's Devil: *Keep your mouth shut and hit the highway soon as you can. If you stay too long the gossip will eat your heart out and you'll die an insignificant cipher.*

The Printer's Devil wanted to be a journalist. I learned to listen and listened to learn. I considered myself a potential cub reporter. Mr. Kelly promised me he'd print and byline any well-written story with mass appeal. "Something everyone would read. *A three-buck story*."

Dad kept our ownership goal alive by talking about it: "Old man Kelly is one of life's walking dead, Slide. He's so dumb he doesn't even know he's alive." This line impressed me, and I've spent my life observing people to see if they're alive or one of Dad's walking dead.

"This guy, Kelly, had dreams of owning a newspaper out West and writing editorials about politics and world problems. Listen, Slide, if you're gonna run a small-town newspaper here in the Dakotas you better understand people want their name in it. They want gossip, rumor, and innuendo. That's the first damn thing you learn. Most people don't care about world problems. They don't even have a definition of the world. Look, Slide, you have to know how to fix the machines. Learn to write. Most people can't spell. Go the extra mile. Be accomplished. Here's a cliché to remember: There are no short cuts. And, there's no *Messenger* if the machines don't work.

"What happens if I quit and the big press breaks down? Is Kelly gonna roll around in the dirt underneath and fix it? No way. He doesn't know about machines. No machines, no paper. That's what happens. They'd lynch him, because they need their gossip, their name in the paper, that front-page shot, holding the deer antlers, the string of walleyes. They love the trite engagement photos, the sports shots, the naive kids all spiffed up for a wedding. The fiftieth anniversary

picture, dark with boredom and hate. You wait, Slide, our day will come. We'll own the *Messenger.* Keep saving."

* * * * *

Tumbleweeds bounced around on Main Street. Thunder boomed. The temperature dipped. A cyclone drilled the horizon.

This was also a dangerous day for my mom. She was having a baby at the hospital in Rapid City. Dad was with her.

Mom, Dad, and I had spent the pregnancy decorating a "baby room" above the newspaper office. We painted it blue, bought baby toys, a crib–the works. We did everything we could to welcome a new human into our hardscrabble world.

I enjoyed the pregnancy, because Mom would push her big belly against my back and I could feel the little humanimal thumping his feet. Mom and I had a routine:

"It's a boy in there, Mom," I'd say.

"How can you tell, Slide?"

"He's sending me a message."

"What's the message?"

"He wants out."

"What should we name him if it's a boy?"

"Slide Two."

"*You* are a precocious young man, my son."

* * * * *

I needed this baby as much as Flint and Anna Belle. I'd lost a seven-year-old sister, Nancy, to the heat of a Dakota night. I was six when she flared out. Dad told me it was high fever, and she slipped away before anyone could help. He warned me, "Don't mention it again. Don't be tough on your mom."

Nancy's passing resulted in Mom's dark depression, her panic anxiety, which manifested in bedroom lockups and wild mood swings–crying, sobbing, screaming. We put her in the mental hospital at Yankton. She'd stay a month or two and come home rejuvenated, bopping on the latest miracle pill, but within weeks her demons reclaimed her. She'd sneak into her bedroom, shades pulled, door locked, headed for a crack-up.

Dad would whisper, "Don't bother her, Slide, she's sick."

Mom's illness was a dark secret in our family. I wondered how we could save money and buy a newspaper when we were bleeding cash for doctors and hospitals.

The journalist in The Printer's Devil did not buy Dad's story about Nancy's death. He had questions. That she died of a fever I knew for sure. I was in the next room that hot, dark, humid night. I heard the death whispers.

I decided to investigate the death with a visit to my mom's sister, Aunt LaRae. She was old and plugged into all the Bad River rumors. Her life revolved around TV, alcohol, and Marlboros. She drank a fifth of vodka a day and had never been to a doctor.

Her house smelled like a beer joint. I found her perched on a beige couch in a brown pantsuit, sipping vodka and chasing it with Grain Belt beer. The TV blared a game show frighteningly loud.

I clicked it off and asked about my sister's death.

LaRae fired up a Marlboro, had a shot of Smirnoff, belted down a slug of beer, and said, "Are you sure you wanna hear this? Can you handle it? Are you man enough?"

"I'm The Printer's Devil," I said.

She laughed and laid it on me.

"Well, say, here's the story: your mother was in love with Sig DeBolt back in high school. Crazy about him. They went steady. She dated your dad before that. He'd been madly in love with her since the first grade. But when your mom started up with Sig DeBolt it was all over. Your dad was heartbroken. Then your mother got pregnant. She was only seventeen and Sig refused to marry her. They tried to have an abortion, some quack doctor in Deadwood who worked for the whorehouses; I guess he used a wire hanger, but it didn't take. Nancy was born retarded. We all knew she wouldn't live long. Then Sig dumped your mother. So, your father, who was still in love with her, stepped up and married her."

I was stunned, shocked, angry. "Why hasn't anyone told me this?" I asked.

LaRae was down to 90 pounds. Her face wrinkled and gray. She said, "People don't talk about these back-alley things."

A smile twitched at her lips, engaged her, the kind of smile you see when people happen upon auto accidents, the way they gather around the dying. Can't resist the free show. They like to see other people in pain, trapped, dying. Dad had told me, *"When you cover an accident, Slide, scope a mental picture of the scene; take photos, but keep your eye on the crowd. There's your story. Why did they stop? Why are they pushing in for a closer look? Check their faces, the eyes, those sick little smiles. They love tragedy. Interview them... get their perspectives. Let 'em gossip."*

"I don't remember Nancy being retarded," I said.

"You were too young to see it. A botched abortion, that's what it was."

"Everyone knows this but me?"

"They got married before your mom started *showing*. They moved to Wyoming. Your dad worked for a newspaper in Sundance. When they came back to Bad River they had Nancy with them. Only the relatives on your mother's side knew the story. Your father has never told anyone. He's a trooper!"

"And Sig DeBolt?"

"Well, sure, he knows everything."

"So my parents have been lying to me my whole life? That's why my mother locks herself up in the bedroom?"

"What's always bothered me is the way she walks around as if she's the queen of Bad River, pretending nothing ever happened. Prissy and snooty. Thinks she's better than the rest of us."

"Well, maybe she is," I said. "She ended up with my dad."

Hate flared in LaRae's eyes. Jealousy. She was on her third husband, had ditched two kids by the first, was deserted by the second, and was now living with a guy who watched TV all day.

My mother's other sister, Paula, had the most checkered past. She managed the Prairie Rose Diner, popped pills, and was married to the town drunk, my Uncle Rob. He hawked the bars all day for drinks that had not been properly finished. He'd snatch the glass and shoot down what was left. He slept in cars and barns ... a bright boy who had gone to the university and seemed to have a future until he came back from World War II with a mangled mind.

"So?" LaRae said. "What's The Printer's Devil think about his mother now?"

"A developing story. I'll be a journalist one day."

She laughed and said, "I know who you are. The Printer's Devil? You're nothing. I know your dad thinks he'll own the *Messenger*. Lemme tell you somethin', Slide. That would be a cold day in hell. And listen, don't tell anyone what I said about your mother."

"Off the record, huh?"

LaRae appeared frightened, as if by telling me about my mother and Sig DeBolt, she had released a beast that might attack her.

"What?" she mumbled. "Huh?"

"It's secret? You'd be in family trouble?"

"Leave it alone, Slide. Don't stink things up. It could ruin their marriage. Let it be. Take my advice. I only told you so you'd know how life works. I done you a favor. Think it over."

"Okay," I said. (But I did not give her a journalist's word of honor.)

LaRae slid sideways on the couch, fell into a fetal position, and started snoring.

* * * * *

The warning siren howled down at the light plant. One long, two short: *Take cover!*

Lightning lashed the black sky. A wave of dust surfed Main Street. The black clouds morphed into evil small-town faces. Tumultuous thunder. Merchants locked up. The street became deserted, like the country we lived in, and I felt more trapped than ever.

The funnel on the highway whirled toward town. Temperature dropped. Lightning bolts split the sky. Raindrops pelted the sun-baked soil with shiny drops of water that danced on the dirt like brand new dimes.

The screen door on Toot's Pantry banged open and Jolene Jensen dashed out. The neon sign above the door blinked: *The Tootburger / Best in Town.* She balanced a blue sunbonnet against the wind, elbow cocked toward the storm. She shivered and ran for her car.

Here's a sidebar on Jolene: Night waitress at Toot's. Doubles as the "Late Night Special" upstairs. Thirty-four, long blond hair, sexy lips, and a hard, used look preferred by rednecks. Or, as Dad said when he lectured me about oxymorons, "True-blue rednecks."

Toot was balding, fat, and wore a white apron up to his armpits. The way I got the story, and I heard it all the time, different versions The Printer's Devil distilled and fermented, went like this: Late in the evening, when they closed the kitchen, except for Tootburgers, and started loading the drinks with double shots, they'd turn the jukebox up and Toot would whisper to the ranchers, "Don't forget, Jolene plays for pay upstairs. But I gotta collect first."

* * * * *

I slipped into my parents' bedroom one afternoon and riffled the bottom of a huge chiffonnier where they kept their personals. I checked the marriage license and Nancy's birth certificate.

The truth will set you free–or nail you to the past. So here's a tip from The Printer's Devil: *Some people on the High Plains are more dangerous than the weather. I'm talking about the piddling, mean-spirited gossipmongers. I'll lay odds someone is spreading rumors right now that will cause more damage than any storm.*

The Printer's Devil dealt with gossip every day at the *Messenger.* He greeted the people who lurched in and out the front office with handwritten "news" they wanted printed on the "local" page. Trite, pencil-written announcements sprinkled with atrocious spelling and bad grammar. I ran the news back to Dad. He edited, then banged it out on the linotype.

At night we read galleys of local gossip to catch errors and typos. You've never experienced intimidation until you've heard the roar of Bill Buttknob pissed off because his daughter's name was misspelled.

Here's a typical "local" column:

Duane Billings entertained hunters from Missouri this past week. Visiting him on his farm near West Springs were his brother Dwight, sister Doris, brother Delmar, brother Dick, and sister Dee Dee. They shot 126 cock pheasants and 49 hens. Dee Dee also bagged a deer (see photo on front page). The Missouri hunters, led by Booth Andrews, who owns a hotel in Kansas City, said they had the best time of their lives.

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Naomi Nelson visited her aunt Jessie Saturday.

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Mr. and Mrs. Duane Gunderson visited the Emit Haack home Sunday evening for chicken supper. Emit's son, Eugene, home from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, was wearing his brand new US Army sharp-shooter medal.

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Naomi Nelson had coffee with Speck Kilgore at Eastern Star.

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Beverly and Darlene Wunder motored to Sioux Falls Tuesday for the Home and Garden Show at the Coliseum. Bev entered a Priscilla Prickly in the contest and won a red ribbon. After the show they visited their cousin Gertie Genzbinger at her residence. Gertie works the kill floor at the Hormel Packing Plant.

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Speck Kilgore motored to Pierre Saturday to visit friends.

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Charlie Thunder Horse was arrested Saturday night for driving drunk. Upon release from jail he attended church at Trinity Episcopal, where he is a regular and valued member.

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Naomi Nelson had supper with friends at the Prairie Rose Tuesday.

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The Bad River Savages, our famous semi-pro basketball team, were on the road this week and won a pair of games. They traveled to Nebraska Tuesday night and in a double-overtime thriller beat the Valentine Hearts 50-49. Thursday they played the Mitchell Cobbs in the World's Only Corn Palace and pasted the boys from Mitchell 52-32. Flint Davison led the Savages with his brilliant hook shot and poured in 29 points. After the game, Davison, the player-manager and coach, announced the Savages had signed Charlie Thunder Horse to a two-week contract. Davison said, "Charlie's had his problems, but he's working out. He'll get in shape and be a big help. He's the trickiest ball handler in the state." Davison challenged the Phillips 66 Oilers and the Minneapolis Lakers to play the Savages anytime, anywhere.

Davison has three Sioux Indians on this year's team, the first and only integrated squad in the Dakotas. In addition to Thunder Horse, Lionell Six Knives, from the Pine Ridge Reservation, starts at guard for the Savages, and Billy Hawk Crying, a recent graduate of the Flandreau Indian School, will be a plus off the bench. Hawk Crying gained local fame by taking the Flandreau Indian School to the state tournament last year. Davison claims he's young and aggressive– "And, if he's on, he can hit from anywhere."

Sunday the Savages put their undefeated record on the line at home in the American Legion Auditorium against the famous Globe Trotters from Harlem, New York. Last year, before a jam-packed crowd of 557, the Savages beat the New York Trotters with a baffling stall technique that bewildered the funnymen from the tip-off to the final buzzer. It was the Trotters' only loss. The Savages won 23-22, when Davison launched a rocket from mid-court at the final buzzer. Sunday's game time is 2 p.m. Don't miss this opportunity to see the undefeated Trotters battle our undefeated Savages. Revenge is on the line. Tickets are two dollars for front row seats on the west side of the gym, one dollar for general admission, and fifty cents for children.

* * * * *

Dad always managed to squeeze in a couple paragraphs about the Savages and his "deadly" hook shot in the *Locals*.

The hook was a work of art. Dad spent hours teaching me the shot, and made sure I learned. "It's a free ticket to college, Slide."

Dad picked up five to fifteen dollars a game playing with and managing the Savages. "It's all timing, Slide," he said. "Life is a canvas and you paint it with your time."

The club was folding when Dad bought the operation from the Bad River Bank for a hundred dollars at a bankruptcy auction.

Dad knew how to promote big paydays, like the game with the Trotters. The Savages took 50% of the gate wherever they played. The team split that, after expenses, among the players.

Dad was proud he had an integrated ball club. The Savages were an average bunch of white guys until he took over.

I was the ball and towel boy, water boy, and keeper of the medicine kit. Sometimes I'd be allowed on road trips. It was sweet riding in that old high school bus. We'd painted it bright red, with *BAD RIVER SAVAGES* scripted on the side in bold yellow letters in black trim. Dad wrangled the bus as a donation from the city.

I had to keep an eye on the concession stand at half-time. "Make sure they don't cheat us, Slide. Be mean and tough if you have to." Mom ran the stand at home games. She sold the famous "Savage Dog," a weenie on a bun with Indian relish and mustard. Virginia

Look Again, who made and served Indian tacos, assisted Mom. Dad owned the concessions. "Every nickel counts, Slide. This is how we catch up. We'll own that newspaper, you wait and see."

My biggest thrill was riding the bench with the Savages. They always looked spectacular in silky red uniforms with black numbers underneath the distinctive yellow arrowhead logo and black trim on the jerseys and pants.

* * * * *

A person can be an artist in more ways than one. Watching and listening to my dad manage a game and the bench was amazing ...always calm, determined, confident.

"Don't panic, Slide," he'd tell me after a close battle. "People who panic lose. I could take five injured boys out and win–it's all strategy, confidence, motivation, guts."

The Bad River Savages played in the Great Plains Semi-Pro Basketball League, which featured the Huron Wranglers, Mitchell Cobbs, Valentine Hearts, Yankton River Dogs, Pierre Broncos, Rapid City Thunder, Spearfish Hooks, Watertown Coyotes, and Howard Hoops.

We played all our home games in the American Legion gym in Bad River. Dad had put together what he called a "showtime" team, so we packed the place every game. In addition to the Sioux Indians, and my dad's unstoppable hook shot, we had Jumpin' Johnny Jorgenson, who once played with the Minneapolis Lakers but ran into drinking problems and an age wall. He was in jail in Vermillion when Dad bailed him out and got him a room at the Wheeler Hotel. He was forty but could still drain the jumper from the coffin corner.

Dad told me, "All this traveling day and night, keeping Johnny sober, playing ball, working the presses the next day. Just part of hard times. Mark it and remember it, Slide. People say money talks. Money doesn't talk, son; it shouts: *Save me!*"

* * * * *

The storm rumbled toward town, a Mack truck full of bad karma. Toot's screen door banged open and Betty Dalton dashed out.

The Printer's Devil had the dope on Betty: She was nice to men if they took her to the Moonlite Steakhouse and bought her a big rib eye and drinks. She was thirty-five, a beautiful blonde. The rumor, if

you dug deep enough, was that she liked a good spanking accompanied by dirty, degrading dialogue. She blew into town her first year out of the university at Vermillion and was hired to teach English by the public school.

I had the facts. They were in the files at the *Messenger.* I'd written them all down. There was talk about tight skirts and sweaters, provocative poses on top of her desk, and pink panties.

Three years passed without trouble, then she married my cousin Harley. He was sixty-one and owned a string of black Angus, west along the river. She was twenty-five. "Age don't matter, Slide, if you love someone and they love you back," Harley told me one day. "Sure, she might be interested in my dough. I'd be disappointed if she weren't." Harley was my favorite relative. He didn't care what people thought or said about him. He was generous and had a good heart.

Betty divorced Harley and took his money when he went to prison for manslaughter after he'd killed Royce Haymeyer at a class reunion when Royce danced with Betty.

The Printer's Devil, even at his young age, knew that men on the High Plains were insanely jealous creatures and most women *déclassé* (a word my dad liked when I presented it to him) and would press their men to the limit, just to send them over the line.

My mother, prim and proper (after what she'd done), took me to see Harley one visitor's day at the penitentiary in Sioux Falls. I assumed this was her way of showing me what happens if you're not a good boy.

Harley came from Mom's side of the family.

Mom sent me into the prison while she waited. "Go say hello to your Uncle Harley, Slide. Tell him I'm knitting him a sweater."

Harley was shocked when I showed up. So was I–all those bars, guards, iron. First thing I did was ask for the facts about the Haymeyer incident.

Harley said, "Haymeyer was dry-humpin' Betty on the dance floor, out in the middle of the American Legion Hall for chrissakes. No class! Who'd she think she was? I ran to the car, got the tire iron, and smacked him hard as I could. I didn't mean to take his life."

He closed his eyes, took a few deep breaths. There was a white woman arguing with an Indian next to us. Harley jerked to attention and said, "Don't let jealousy get the best of you, Slide."

"Can I ask you a personal question? It's about Betty. The rumors."

"What rumors?" he snapped.

Harley couldn't hurt me. He was behind a window. There were guards. So, I let it go.

"Did she like spanking … dirty talk?"

"She loved it," he whispered. "She loved to talk dirty, loved it when I did. I had no idea everyone knew about it. Guess I should have. She'd bounced in the saddle plenty times before I roped her. Goes to show you, Slide–your reputation shadows you. So make sure it's good as gold."

"I'll sure try," I promised, then popped the big one on him. "One more thing, Uncle Harley, another personal piece of business."

"What's that?"

"Was my sister Nancy really Sig DeBolt's daughter? Do you know anything about it? The dates on the birth certificate. Mom was four months pregnant when she married Dad."

"It's best to forget the past and move on, Slide."

I nodded and wished him a happy birthday.

He laughed and said, "You get so old your wrinkles hurt."

* * * * *

The cyclone cooked up a stronger, hotter wind. My uncle, Clyde Davison, appeared beaten and tired on the steps of the Wheeler Hotel. He was a tall thin man, like all of us Davisons. He lumbered across the street, and sat down beside me. He was smoking a cheroot. He took a long pull, blew smoke, and said: "Just talked to your dad, Slide. Been waiting for the call. It was a boy. Stillborn. Dead. But your mom is okay. Your dad will call later."

I've always wondered why Dad arranged to call my uncle at the Wheeler Hotel. It's one of those life mysteries you never ask about and never understand.

My uncle was an aging man who had been wounded in war and would himself die six months later. He was uncomfortable delivering the bad news. He didn't know what to say or how to act.

We sat in silence until he said, "Storm comin' in off the Badlands, Slide. Dust like a snow blizzard out there. Come home with me. We'll have supper later and wait for your dad."

"I can't," I said, "I'm staying here. Gonna cover the storm for the paper."

"Should we pray?" Clyde whispered.

"Pray for *what*? Praying is for people who like to talk to themselves."

Clyde appeared stunned by my answer. He patted my back and stood up. Another peal of thunder rolled into town. Jagged lightning. Clyde stuck his hands in his pockets and said, "Dirty tricks, Slide. I'll be going then. Come over later. Stay the night."

"I'll wait for Dad. If he doesn't make it home, I'll have a Tootburger and go to bed."

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I recorded this day in my boyhood diary: *Dirty Tricks! We lost Slide Two today. Damn God!*

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Because Mom had made me an intimate partner in the pregnancy–pushing that big belly against my back so I could feel Slide Two alive and active. That soft thump, thump, thump. Slide Two's death sent Mom to the psychiatric ward in St. Mary's hospital at the Mayo Clinic. She became a life-long visitor.

I toughed it out with Dad. He did not tolerate weakness in a time of trouble. I decided I'd write the storm story, the death story, with multifarious levels of meaning and destruction, graduate from printer's devil to journalist.

Mr. Kelly locked up the *Messenger* and yelled, "Slide, go home or come in here. We can hide under the big press!"

"I'm covering the storm for you, Mr. Kelly! It's a three-buck story, at least!"

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I was aware something was wrong with the pregnancy weeks before the stillbirth. I wrote it in my notebook: *Mom pressed her belly against my back tonight–thumping feet fading away. Slide Two in danger.* I wanted a record. Details are important. Truth hides in minutiae.

* * * * *

Tillie Hanson rushed out of her bakery and yanked me from the curb. "You can't sit out here in the middle of a twister!" She was an enormous Norwegian woman. I fought her off, sat down in the howling wind, and clutched an iron gutter drain.

There was a file on Tillie at the *Messenger.*

It's all there in the files–everybody's life.

Tillie showed up one day fresh from the West Texas oil fields with two kids and a dandy named Slim Daddy Slade. There were ugly rumors about incest. Then Slim Daddy disappeared.

Gunnar Benson, who ran the creamery and claimed the high school record in basketball at Bad River High (63 points against Kadoka), said Slim was living up in Minot, but Tillie had never divorced him.

So there you have another humanimal love lesson.

Journal notes on Gunnar: Sex with sows when he was growing up on his father's dairy farm. Speck Kilgore, who owned the Pheasant Diner out on the highway, told half the town, "It's a secret, so don't say nothin' to nobody, but I seen it with my own virgin eyes. He was screwin' a big fat sow. His brother, Eugene, had lured me into the barn so he could violate me."

So much for secrets.

* * * * *

Dazzling lightning ... glittering firebolts. Thunder crashed. A whirlpool of horror twisting toward town.

A big black Lincoln swung off the highway. It was my other aunt, Paula, the one on uppers, the one who managed the Prairie Rose Diner. She had been in Rapid City with my mother.

She pulled in at the curb and leaned toward the open window. "Your brother didn't make it," she said, "I've got him in the back seat."

You could have poured hot lead on The Printer's Devil. I glanced in the back at a tiny pine box coffin, surrounded by empty whiskey bottles, smashed cigarette packs, a crusted Kotex, and a pair of blue panties. The car reeked of alcohol.

Paula said, "I'm taking him up to Willard's Funeral Home. Wanna come? Your mother wants him buried, no funeral or service. Just bury him."

I backed away from the car. I wanted to kill this woman, strangle her, but I said: "I'm reporting on the storm for the *Messenger.*"

She turned, stared at me and said, "What?"

"It's a three-buck story, Paula. We need money to buy the newspaper. Wait for me at Willard's."

Paula took off, drove toward the courthouse, cut off Main, and pulled in at the funeral home.

Sig DeBolt stumbled out of the Longbranch, tall and sinewy, skinny as an orange peel. He had a reputation as a ferocious fighter and mean alcoholic. He owned a beautiful ranch but spent most of his time on a barstool.

There was a loud roar on the south side of town. A Doppler effect. Like a jet plane blasting over a football stadium.

Sig DeBolt staggered across the street and yelled, "What the hell's wrong with you ... sitting on a sidewalk with a twister comin' in. You *nuts*? Crazy as your mother, huh? Git home! Go on now, git!"

I held my pencil above my notepad. "So, you're on the record for publication, you're making statements about me, my mother, the tornado, and yourself."

He leaned over, booze nose and blotched face inches from mine, breath like dog shit. He shouted, "Yeah, you cocky bastard. I got a statement: *I fucked your mother!*"

I packed my pad and pencil in my back pocket. The cyclone scraped the open field next to the courthouse. I stood up. Six-four at fifteen. I towered over Sig DeBolt.

I played defensive back on our high school football team. My dad had taught me intimidation. "Hit that guy low, hard, and mean, Slide. Rattle his bones. Leave 'em hurting. Make 'em cry. Talk to him. Tell him fear is afraid of you. Scare him. Next time that kid runs at you he'll be easy as the town whore. So hit 'em low, hit 'em hard."

I became famous in the Badlands Conference for my bone-crushing tackles. I heard Dad's voice echo in my head as I slid sideways along the curb, as if frightened, in retreat. Then, I ran full blast and drove my right shoulder into Sig DeBolt's belly. His head thumped against the street. I jumped up, kicked him between the legs, did a cannonball onto his belly, and threw a flurry of punches at his face with arms bulging from muscles molded by the heavy lead I'd been hiking from the casting room to Dad's linotype.

I broke Sig DeBolt's nose. Blood squirted. A seam in time ripped open, and I saw him as a handsome lad...a boy a young girl could have given in to.

The twister hit the south edge of town. A grain elevator exploded. The roof on the Catholic Church flew into the sky like a frightened crow. A trailer house disappeared. Signs, billboards, roofs blew away. I lay in the gutter, holding onto Sig DeBolt and the iron grate.

Then, an eerie silence, shattered only by the siren on Sheriff Tuny Clooney's cruiser. He squealed to a stop and jumped out. "What the hell's going on?" he yelled.

"I'm covering the storm for the paper, Tuny."

"Good God, Sig's bleeding! He looks dead."

"How 'bout a comment, sheriff?"

"Huh?"

"A quote on the storm. The death and destruction. The metaphoric splendor. The Catholic church sucked into heaven."

"Huh? It's over...Sig needs a doctor."

Sheriff Clooney dragged Sig DeBolt into his cruiser. "I'll need a full statement about this, Slide."

"Next issue of the *Messenger,* Tuny."

He gave me a quirky stare and drove away.

I jumped up and ran to Willard's Funeral Home. The hearse was backing out of the garage. Paula waited at the curb in her Lincoln. I jumped in beside her. She yanked a pint of Early Times from the glove box and knocked down a swig. She followed the hearse along the highway to Graceland Cemetery. Mr. Willard's obese son, Willie, chopped a spade into the soil and carved out a tiny grave. He bent over to lift the wooden coffin. I pushed him away and whispered, "I'll bury him, I'll do it."

I began crying as I placed the box gently in the grave. I had a sudden urge to open it but I'm glad I didn't. I grabbed the spade and filled the hole until it formed a rich, damp mound of soil. I found a stone and carved 30 into the dirt.

And so, the end of my brother, his thumping feet, the end of the twister, and the end of The Printer's Devil and his true story about hard times on the High Plains. But it was also the beginning of hope.

Dad and the Savages became famous, and Mr. Kelly realized he was in over his head. He sold the *Messenger* to Dad. Mom fought a brave battle...but she lost. One night, toward the end, she was in the hospital shaking with fright. So I asked her, for the first time, what

she was feeling, how her sickness manifested. She sobbed, "Can't you see? I'm losing my mind."

"How does it feel?" I asked. "Tell me."

"Like my mind is going to fly out of my head at any moment and I'll be judged insane. Then they will lock me up in the asylum. I'll die there, and they will bury me, but I won't be dead. I'll start breathing again, but I'll be trapped in a coffin. Promise me, please promise me, son, that you'll make sure I'm dead."

For me it was the initiation of a young journalist who stood unafraid in the heart of a tornado and wrote it down the way it happened. A cub reporter who learned what all good journalists know: *Follow the lies.* They always lead to the truth.

I got the three-dollar lead on the front page of the *Messenger,* and I delivered the news on time. Dad left his column blank, all the white space in memory of Slide Two. It's on file at the *Messenger.* You can check it out along with the local gossip, the grocery ads, the classifieds, the high school page, sports, locals, senior citizen notes, wedding announcements, anniversaries, legals, days of yore, and on page three, with the obituaries, column one, down in the corner, you'll find my brother alive in print.

Black Hills State University

MY MOTHER'S FARM

SHARI ZECK

People think of the Corn Belt states as treeless. It's true that in the last hundred to hundred and fifty years, trees were mostly seen as impediments to expanding the soybean and cornfields, but it is not quite true that we don't have trees or woods. In fact, when I think of the landscape of my hometown in northwestern Indiana, I think less of the fields that stretched black with newly turned earth in the springtime to a far horizon, than of knots of trees, forts built in the woods, and particular maples or other large trees that were my shelters and my playgrounds. Ours was not the great treeless and windblown expanse of the West or the Great Plains, but a land of deep black earth. The hardwoods that grew out of it, though sparser than in the Northwest, for instance, were no less a vital part of our landscape, whether they bordered fields or property lines, or whether the degree of their destruction was the yardstick by which we measured the severity of a storm.

Some people in the Midwest love to watch the trees thrash about in a storm, twisting and flinging branches. They like the magnificent power of dark clouds moving across a field. Not me, and especially not if I am inside a building looking out. I am shaken by the sound of wind against a house. Houses to me sound fragile and dangerous when the wind slaps against their sides or rattles the windows. No doubt one reason for this is the many nights I was pulled as a child from my bed to huddle in the corner of the basement against the possibility of a tornado. My parents, you see, lost their first home from over their heads to a tornado–all that was left was the cement front steps, the cast iron laundry tub, and their lives. We were not trained to relish flashes of light across a stormy sky or to enjoy watching clouds roll in as some folks do. And wind, especially wind, was to be feared.

It was April of 1948 when my father was working in the barn with my grandfather, and Grandpa told him he'd better head back to the house, as the storm that was coming looked pretty bad. Grandpa had seen many storms on the farm, had always stubbornly refused to take shelter during them. But keeping Dad away from my mom and their new baby was another matter! My parents at that time lived on the same farm with my grandparents, about 150 yards away in a house a bit smaller than Grandma and Grandpa's.

Mom was doing the dishes, her rings on the windowsill as she scrubbed the pots from the evening meal, when Dad came flying into the house yelling at her to grab the baby and get to the basement. There they held each other in the southwest corner with my infant brother between them. Like many others who have been in tornadoes, my mother said it sounded like a freight train going right over them.

After it passed, my father pulled brick and debris off my mom and brother, and began to scream, believing little Craig was dead. They crawled out of the basement, and my dad ran to the country road crying for help, as my mother began the long walk to find her parents.

I try to think inside my determined mother's head as she began that walk past the demolished cars and the corn crib that had been actually moved by the storm, her husband screaming, "My baby's dead," fully expecting to find both of her parents gone. When she told the story, she told it in events and pictures not in emotions, and the picture that remains clearest to me as if I were actually there is of my grandfather, the stubborn old man, crawling out of the rubble that was their house, reaching down to help my grandmother up out of the basement.

My brother, fortunately, had only been squeezed breathless by my frightened parents, and as the color returned to his cheeks, a car pulled up from a farm a mile away where they had heard my father's screaming.

Trees, or rather the relative treelessness of the farm, let my parents see the tornado approach, let the neighbors hear their need. Still, twenty years later, when I visited the farm on Sundays with my parents, what I remember is the sweeping willows in the yard and the tall maple trees lining the road. I didn't know then that these were "fast growers," replanted after the trees that preceded them in the yard had been flattened.

No wonder, then, that when my parents moved to town they also planted a weeping willow and several maple trees, anxious as they

were to have trees around them as a sign of life going forward. For me, the big willow was a hiding place, a playground, a site of adventure. Sometimes it was a fort on the frontier; other times it was a ship in the ocean. One huge low branch sloped out gently enough from the trunk to make a perfect bed. I would lie there as quietly as I could, listening to the wind in the branches, watching the clouds against blue skies peek out when the wind parted the upper limbs. The swoosh that the tree made, even on relatively still days, said, "You are in a special place, a safe place, your own place."

That tree too was toppled by a tornado when I was 16 or 17. As I sat huddled with my friends in the hallway of the high school, my mother and father again watched a twister approach them. A few houses in our town lost roofs or windows in that storm, but there was nowhere near the devastation of 1948. I came home and found my mom, as usual, in the kitchen. She didn't talk much that night, as my friends and I phoned back and forth with stories of downed trees, twisted metal siding, and pink house insulation fluttering in the treetops.

I grew up the later-in-life daughter of farmers who no longer farmed but still listened to the farm report every morning on the radio, who always related the weather to the crops, and who looked at dark clouds with wary eyes. My mother's siblings all moved away in the '40s, but they continued to own the farm outside of town after my grandparents died in the mid-'60s. Mom was the executor of the estate and made all the financial decisions about the farm, which was rented out to a man named Lawrence. On Sundays, Mom, Dad, and I would drive out to the farm to look at the crops. I'd be sulking in the back seat, annoyed with the crackling of the AM radio and the sound of the White Sox game announcer. Who in their right mind would want to listen to a baseball game on the radio, anyway? Mom and Dad would talk about bushels and yields and other stuff that didn't mean a thing to me as we passed by field after field of corn and soybeans, broken only occasionally by the odd field of wheat. I would try to block out the radio by imagining I was flying like a hawk alongside the car, or by thinking about what it must have been like after the tornado wound its way down that road. The Boy Scouts had walked the fields back then, arms akimbo, picking up everything they could find. They found every piece of my parents' (now twisted and useless) silverware, and even found Mom's rings. I could almost see them in my imagination, dark blue shirts and yellow scarves, combing the fields for family treasures.

When we got to the farm, Dad would guide the Chevy around the two houses and the abandoned silo, down the dirt path that divided the farm of 280 tillable acres into two large fields, corn on one side, beans on the other, reversed each year. About halfway down the path, Mom would get out and pick a few pods or an ear of corn, and they'd count beans and kernels, which led to more discussion of bushels and being docked for moisture, and I would envision great baskets throughout the field heaped with ears of corn in place of stalks. If I was lucky, on the way back they would tell me the tornado story, and I learned the questions to ask to start them talking like, "Was that the corncrib that was picked up and put back down by the tornado, or was another one here?" or "Which house did you live in during the tornado?" I loved hearing every detail again, almost as much as I loved the frosty mug of root beer and cheeseburger at the drive-in that usually ended these outings.

Sometimes there was an added bonus, because I'd get to sit on my dad's lap and drive. Mom would tsk tsk at Dad for this, but I think she actually didn't mind. She did occasionally point out I was headed for the ditch. The farm was about five or six miles off the main highway, and the road that went past it was straight, narrow, with ditches on either side, large fields, and a house about every mile. It was a great place to learn to drive, or later, after I had my license, to take my El Camino and see if it would hit a hundred.

Now that my parents are gone, I struggle to remember their faces on those afternoons, but I can't really. I just remember long fields, long, slow drives, the excitement of turning the steering wheel, the crackle of the radio. This was belonging, and the core of my childhood: my parents, the fields, the stories, and always the threat of tornadoes. Though we never lived there, the farm was what I thought of as my parents' real home, particularly my mother's. Though I didn't live it, the tornado in '48 defined my history too.

For one thing, it blew away all of the pictures of my mom as a girl or a young woman. A couple of wedding photos, a high school portrait, and one lone photo of my mother and her sister as girls that my aunt in Illinois had are all that remain, photographically, of my mother's youth. I cannot look at photos of her and see if I resemble her. I don't know what color hair she had as a child, what her smile was like. It is as if she started life at thirty. In the one photograph, she is about four, standing in tattered stockings (clearly hand-me-downs from her sister) and a little plaid dress, and is looking down at some-

thing in her hands. I can't really see her face in it. Perhaps this absence of photos is one reason I so often asked her questions about life on the farm when she was a child, but I suspect that keen desire for her stories was something more too. I was in some way trying to see my mother as a person, not just as my mother, and understanding her as a girl on that farm seemed the key to the life that was hers, apart from what she was to me.

When they sold the farm in the mid-'70s, it was another break of sorts, though this time the blow didn't come from the sky but from her brothers and her sister, who pretty much outvoted Mom and forced the farm's sale. There was a public auction, and all of the siblings sat at a table in the front of the room in our town hall, where Mom served as clerk treasurer for a time. Potential buyers and curious townsfolk filled the tiny room; Mom, her siblings, and their spouses sat at a table and faced them. The bidding wasn't going well, and my mom rose from her chair. She gave, impromptu, one of the most beautiful speeches I've ever heard. She talked about the families that had been fed off that ground, the good crops that had come in year after year. She reminded my uncles how they, their father, and Bubby, their beloved brother who had died in a tragic accident in 1952, had cleared forty acres of trees in one field. The room was hushed and I, right smack in the middle of my teen years when mothers are to be defied and ignored whenever possible, thought to myself, "My mother is a great woman."

I had a glimpse that day of Doris, a woman with her own heart and history, a woman with a great mind who never got to have the education she craved and yet ensured for her children, a woman who lost and carried on with a strength no one else at that table could touch. For most of us, our mothers' hearts are mysteries and mine was no exception, but I saw a bit of it that day. She didn't cry; her voice didn't shake. But the ferocity of her feelings could not be mistaken.

My mom didn't cry much anyway (except whenever she talked about Bubby), and when she did, she shed quiet tears. I'm more of a blubberer, like my dad. It isn't that Mom was unemotional or remote; she was, rather, pragmatic and possessed of a fundamental stoicism about the bumps in life's road.

The summer before she died I knew I would not see another summer with her. She wasn't visibly ill, but there was a kind of block on my imagination regarding the future whenever I looked at her. I just *knew.* One July afternoon when I was visiting my folks at their lake

property and Dad was out with my sister and brother on the boat, I found Mom in her bedroom reading. She was in a chair by an open window, with a curtain fluttering next to her and the smell of hogs at the farm about a mile away wafting into the room every now and again. "The smell of money," Dad used to say. I flopped down on the bed and announced I was going to cry.

"I'm like Dad, you know–I'm a crier. But I don't want you to think I'm falling apart. I just need to ask you a question, and I know I'm going to cry." She looked up from her reading. I went on.

"I know I'm going to lose you, Mom, and I want you to know I'm ready. I know you worry about that, about how I'm going to be, and I'm telling you I'm going to be okay. But Mom, what I can't imagine, what I need you to tell me, is how do you live forty years without your mother. You've done it, and it amazes me, but I can't imagine it."

That, of course, is when I started to sob. Mom calmly looked past the fluttering curtains to the field beyond only for the briefest moment, then turned back and said, "You never get over it."

No tears, no drama; she just answered, and revealed a whole self I hadn't imagined–or maybe I had, but I just wanted her to know I had.

"You never stop missing your mom. You never stop thinking about her. But it does get easier. After awhile, you only remember good things." With that, she smoothed the page of her book and returned to reading. Topic closed.

Six months later, I was wheeling my mother into the hospital, knowing she had cancer, not knowing her death was only one week away. She was trembling. I asked her then if the shaking was something that had just started.

"I haven't shaken like this since the tornado," was all she said. Her mind was turning to another time she had faced death, and this simple phrase was the only thing she would say to me to indicate she knew death was calling again, except for later that day when she fretted that she hadn't done the taxes yet and reminded me that Dad didn't know how to do them.

As I watched her doze on and off in a morphine haze over the next few days, all I could think of was the farm, her parents, Bubby, whom I had never met but whose loss so scarred my mother that I felt the absence too. At one point in the hospital, I had the strongest image of a young blonde girl in my head, and at that moment Mom roused from her sleep and said, "When did they put that field there?" Everyone else in the room panicked that Mom was "losing her mind,"

but I knew differently. I knew she was going back to the farm, sorting through her life.

The last night I was with her in the hospital, the doctor came in after midnight to check on her. She woke Mom, and she and the nurse fussed with her a bit. The doctor started to leave without really speaking to Mom, and I stopped her and more or less ordered her to show my mother some respect and talk to her. The doctor didn't bat an eye, and went over and spoke to Mom, assuring her the confusion and the slumber were effects of the medication, not her mind leaving her. My mother roused herself to consciousness under the authority of a physician and spoke very clearly to her, fully sensible to what was going on.

The nurse took that opportunity to change Mom's bed sheets, which meant more tossing and fussing, and when she left, Mom fell back into a deep sleep. She was shaking all over, though. I held her hand and stroked her cheek and tried to calm her. I told her we all loved her, and thanked her for making us strong and good. She continued to shake, eyes closed, unconscious. Finally, my soothing tone broke.

"Mom, I can't cross this bridge with you. I'll stand right here with you, and I'll walk up to the edge with you. But you are still my mother, and I cannot stand to see you tremble like this. I love you with all my heart, and I'm ready, but I cannot take this trembling."

She stopped, and tears ran down her cheeks.

I know I absorbed my mother's fear of storms, though I don't remember Mom's being afraid. I just remember being afraid myself when she called me out of bed to go to the corner of the basement on stormy nights. As she lay dying, I saw that fear of the sky being rent, of life being ripped away, but I also watched her love and her will overcome that fear. I thought again of my mother's long walk toward where her parents' house had been, and of her father reaching for his wife's hand as my mother breaks into a run.

Illinois State University

FIELDSTONES

SUZANNE KOSANKE

In Stearns County, Minnesota, cemetery and church are partners. They sit side by side, the church's steeple sending a call out across rural forests and fields. Though some churches remain growing and vital, many stand deserted now, each with an apron of graveyard, calling only to tourists from St. Paul and Minneapolis who, despite a confusing grid of unnamed, unnumbered township roads, climb over fences and barbed wire to photograph the ruins. "Rustic scenes" they will label these shots when they slip them into plastic albums back in the city.

It's easier for scenic vistas to suggest a nostalgic past when people are left out of the picture. No photos were ever taken showing my dad sleeping on a farmhouse porch with snow filtering in through rusty screens. No photos in any albums anywhere of Dad baling hay in Aunt Mary's fields with his eight cousins. Certainly no photos showing his brother-in-law–who was also his first cousin–eating pork hocks, fat and all. Only family remembers now. Or forgets. In this rural community, names unspoken and stories untold simply fade back into the earth.

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> Two million years ago, the first glacier advanced into the central US covering all of Minnesota except the southeast corner. Stearns and adjoining Morrison counties lay beneath the junction of the ever-shifting Des Moines and Superior glaciers. Nine thousand years ago, boreal forests grew as the ice finally retreated. Eventually, prairie and oak savannah took over. Dacotah and Ojibwe came, then French Canadian fur traders, missionaries, and Euro-American farmers and loggers who at the height of the industry in the 1890s were cutting 60

million White Pine a year until old growth trees were gone. The Little Falls sawmill–the largest in the U.S. at that time–closed in 1919. (www.mrbdc.mnsu.edu/mnbasin and www.morrisoncountyhistory.org)

This bit of rolling prairie has no distinguishing geographical features except the occasional derelict church that tourists seek out: nothing larger than hills, no lakes larger than ponds, and the not-so-mighty Mississippi isn't visible from here, though it flows by a dozen miles away, a mere one hundred miles south of its Itaska origins. Only Spunk Creek, Krain Creek and Two Rivers plus the Soo Line railroad appear on state maps, along with secondary paved or gravel roads that follow township boundaries. Today, the small town of Holdingford, where my dad grew up, is as unremarkable as ever, sitting halfway (as the crow flies) between Minnesota Highway 10 and Interstate 94, with twenty miles to the nearest major city, St. Cloud. My relatives in the area appreciate where they live for this very quality. Being rural Minnesotans–in the same generation and genre that Prairie Home Companion Garrison Keillor so often describes–they are not easily alarmed, but they are downright spooked that Mapquest.com clearly shows how to find their town and each of their homes. And although they were at first amused that Keillor chose Holdingford's water tower for the cover of his book about the mythical town Lake Wobegon, they were not happy when outsiders flooded in to take photographs of everything they considered quaint and charming. Townsfolk were initially pleased when workers at the high school won millions from the state lottery several years ago, but they soon grew annoyed at the resulting sensationalist publicity and intrusion into their personal lives:

> We're giving away $1,000 in prizes. Tell your family and friends! If you took a photo of Holdingford that you'd like to display on this site, you can upload it to our server. Your picture will be displayed to tens of thousands of people that visit this very popular site each day. We prefer pictures of the city itself, without people's faces in them, in JPEG format. You will be able to see how many times your picture has been viewed and soon we will add features allowing visitors to rate each picture. All entries become the property of Advame, Inc. (www.citydata.com/sendpic.php?w=Holdingford-Minnesota.html&n=Holdingford)

At our family reunion in 2000, attendees received a much photocopied 1901 portrait of our ancestors Anna Magretta and John Benjamin Edeburn posing with their eight children, ages nine to

twenty-eight. My dad's mother, Edna, was the youngest. This photograph was probably taken on their 160-acre farm north of Holdingford. On the edge of the picture, staring accusingly at the camera, one clenched fist resting on her apron, is my great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Kirk Ward Edeburn. Of course, everyone looks vaguely unhappy since that was how you were supposed to look in photographs back then: life was serious; tragedy was our common fate. Hold that pose for descendents to learn from. Elizabeth's expression is harder to decipher. Here she sits, surrounded by family and shaded by a canopy of elm branches. It's her son's fiftieth birthday. And she is glaring into the future. Elizabeth's grandsons have her Scots-Irish features, and all six granddaughters have inherited their mother's eyes–though not her round Bavarian face.

Sitting at one of the many card tables set up on the vast lawn of my first cousin's farm, I ask reunion old timers from my dad's generation about people in this photo, and they volunteer their fragments of memory. Although Alfred is not in this photo, one says, "You'll have heard about your dad's brother Alfred, of course." His tragic death suggests others. They remember that Anna's second mother died in childbirth, her father in a farm accident. Anna died of gallstones, Elizabeth of dropsy, John of a heart attack. A nephew was struck by lightning while turning the cream separator. His sister who served in World War I died in the great flu epidemic. A grandmother "turned to stone," paralysis beginning in her toes and moving up to her heart. An aunt's toddler wandered into the road and was hit by a car. Another child died after falling into a tub of hot lye water.

A few remember older stories: Anna's father dying of typhoid. Her uncles joining the Minnesota First Regiment and fighting in the Civil War. A great-great-uncle with General Sherman who died at eighteen a year after surviving that infamous March to the Sea. They are buried now, one and all, some far away and some in Elmdale, Fort Ripley, Highland, or maybe even in Gilgal cemetery, whose location is in dispute even among these grizzled, white-haired old men–all of whom call the local church and cemetery "El-im-dale," though they can't explain why. They look around at noisy grandchildren and cousins twice-removed come up from the Twin Cities, then at Mervin's tilting barn older than they are. "Those were the pioneers, sure enough," one says, nodding at the photo. Then he turns abruptly toward one long table covered with casseroles, Jello salads, and desserts. "Alice made the apple pies this year," he says, his voice

hinting at pleasures they can all imagine. And the others follow him back into the present.

During my childhood, we rarely visited Holdingford. Dad didn't talk much about his country relatives, revealing only glimpses of his earlier days, puzzle pieces that never fit together for me. The only story he told with a clearly tragic ending described his brother, Alfred, who had rheumatic fever as a child and died of a weak heart in his twenties. Personal loss was handled differently by my mother's side of the family. My grandmother grieved her whole life through for her brother Earl who had died in his twenties after falling off a train. She, her sister, and mother all wore identical photos of Earl set into lockets pinned to their dresses by little gold chains. Their tragic loss was well advertised and obvious to everyone. But I heard about Alfred's death only once, when Dad and I were out fishing. He never spoke of it again.

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Rail Prairie Union Cemetery (also known as Gilgal) is located in Rail Prairie township of Morrison County (46.1505 north latitude, 94.2947 west longitude). Other cemeteries of note in the area are Stroming grave site and Prosser farm's site--all classified as abandoned (www.mgns.org/cemeteries). Part of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, Morrison (and Stearns to the south) were empty prairie until tamed by loggers and then farmers in the middle- and late-1800s. Part of the Documenting Deaths Project of the county's Historical Society, Gilgal was opened in 1904 with 104 plots. (www.co.morrison.mn.us. See satellite maps at clocations.com and satelliteviews.net.)

The last time my dad and I visited Gilgal, we walked past the "No Trespassing" sign and up a dirt lane thick with poison ivy to find only prairie grasses and nightshade taking over chunks of stone and cement foundation where the church had been. The Biblical Gilgal, which Moses never lived to see, was the first place Joshua and the chosen people came to after crossing over into the Promised Land. John Edeburn's brother had suggested this name when founders chose to build on a hillcrest at least a city block from the dirt township road. "Nice view but pretty hard to reach in the winter," Dad told me. "Little white church with an organ," he mused. "Sat here empty for thirty years until someone hauled away the floor planking to rebuild his

barn. Someone else took the old door. Vandals." He looked toward the rusting archway that hinted at the cemetery's location.

The graveyard, too, unrewarded by history, forgotten by its heirs, was returning to the rock-strewn prairie of a century ago. Apparently, this congregation had never been prosperous enough for marble or even polished granite stones, no carved statues, angels, or little lambs to mark the graves of infant dead. Only a few dozen tombstones are visible above grass and invading sumac, and their names and dates have faded back into the limestone. I wonder if Dad and I are the only witnesses to its decline. Do other relatives visit? Do they bring flowers on Memorial Day?

Along the graveyard's rather uncertain perimeter are dozens of basalt and granite stones. As they retreated, glaciers left these "erratics" (from the Latin, meaning "ground that has wandered") behind, and they are all over the countryside–good for building fireplaces and foundations maybe, but hard on ploughs. Farmers call them fieldstones, and they can be seen piled in great heaps on the edges of cultivated fields. I would have called them fieldstones, too–if I hadn't heard another story about Gilgal.

I heard this story from a second cousin once removed as she shelled peas in her kitchen. Her grandfather had been a logger until the trees gave out, and most relatives know the tragic story of her grandmother's first four babies, all brought to term, all stillborn. The fifth grew to age four only to be hit by a car. Amazingly, after all that tragedy, she didn't die of grief but lived on to have three more children, all of whom grew up to marry and have children and grandchildren. "Not many people remember Gilgal cemetery," she went on to tell me. "But it has a story to be told."

Every month, after the cemetery's caretaker was finished cutting the grass, the older women in the Gilgal church community would put all those fieldstones back in their proper places to mark graves of unnamed infants. As years passed, the remaining women, growing older and more frail, couldn't agree where each stone belonged. Was that pinkish stone for the first Rohl baby over here with his older brother? Was the Dickson girl's black stone there next to her mother? Eventually, they couldn't keep up with the grass cutter who simply tossed the stones toward the edges of the cemetery to get his job done more quickly. After each cutting, the stones ended up farther and farther from where they belonged. Eventually, when the last woman who knew the stones' rightful places died, they simply stayed where

they were, winter snows and spring rains edging them into oblivion. They trail out along the graveyard's edges now, an uneven string of gray pearls that will not be set right again.

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> Holdingford, year 2000 data: Median resident age: 37.5 years; Median household income: $34,000; Median house value: $77,000; Population: 736. Estimated pop. in July 2005: 710 (-3.5% change); Ancestries: German (51.1%), Polish (21.1%), Norwegian (6.8%), Irish (4.8%), French (2.7%); Other (13.5%); White Non-Hispanic (99.0%); % of population with a bachelor's degree or higher: significantly below state average. (www.city-data.com/city/Holdingford-Minnesota.html#top)

"If you don't know how to enjoy suffering, you don't belong in Minnesota," said Garrison Keillor at the 2006 Minnesota State Fair. His audience–mostly Twin Cities folks–laughed appreciatively. But then he went too far. "There is no rural Minnesota left," he said thoughtfully, leaving me to imagine why his listeners had no audible reaction. Were they thinking, "What a nutty idea! Of course rural Minnesota is still out there." Maybe they hadn't visited it lately, but in the back of their minds were grandparents' stories of farming, hunting, and fishing. Keillor himself told stories about those "Norwegian bachelor farmers" and small- town life.

But other listeners had read about the disappearance of songbirds, mercury in fish, Leopard frogs with three legs, even a recent oil pipeline break in Little Falls that spilled 134,000 gallons of crude oil. They knew that the rural was becoming urban, that country and city were blending together as third- and fourth-ring suburbs expanded. Six-lane freeways now make it possible for those in the Twin Cities to reach fishing cabins in Brainerd and for country folks from Holdingford to get to the Guthrie Theater after only a few hours of traveling. And surely many of Keillor's listeners have kids and grandkids who had left farms for the city and only returned for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Perhaps the stunned silence meant that they recognized Keillor was right: the rural Minnesota they remembered was gone and it wasn't coming back. This would explain those photographers desperately seeking idyllic country scenes. They

sensed an old world passing and wanted to keep some part of it for themselves.

Though many of us have moved far away from rural towns and abandoned cemeteries like Gilgal, we keep going back–if only in our minds. Although we do not have Anna Edeburn's vivid memory of her mother and newborn lying together in a rough wooden coffin, stories like hers and our own imaginations call us back to some country hillside to set the stones right again.

University of Hawaii, Manoa

SOUTH DAKOTA SANCTUARY

MARTHA CHRISTENSEN DEMERLY

For me, the summer of 1958 became a gentle, prolonged, Lenten season of anticipation. Having just graduated from high school, I had been accepted to the postulancy at Saint Rose Convent in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and since I would be entering on the first of September, the months of June, July, and August stretched before me much as I imagined the Sinai Desert had stretched before the Mosaic Hebrews–a wilderness to be crossed before a final renunciation of false idols. The sisters at Saint Rose had admonished me to use my summer for sober contemplation and as spiritual preparation for this austere move, this sacred step. I kept their counsel close to heart.

My family, too, was deeply engaged in taking another step: after fourteen years in the La Crosse area, my father had accepted transfer to Detroit, Michigan. Every family activity was focused on making the transfer in which Mom and Dad and the younger six of their eight children would be moving to the suburb of Livonia and to a whole new lifestyle. Figuratively, as I was moving from the house of my father to the House of the Lord, they were moving from Mayberry, RFD, to Pleasantville, USA.

During that previous winter, I had again been afflicted with a bout of rheumatic fever and medical wisdom of the time had dictated rest and quiet. I knew Momma was concerned about the possibility of another infection, and I knew that the sisters, especially her nursing friends at Saint Francis Hospital, had warned her about the danger of squandering a vocation. Consequently, I too was afraid of becoming a spiritual spendthrift, but I could not imagine what that prodigal process might entail. I vaguely suspected that squandering involved S-E-X. At the time, I was as sexually innocent as cardboard, but I readily deduced that the temptation to squander probably assumed

the not-so-subtle and meretricious allure of music or movies. In my quiet heart, I knew I had to avoid thinking of those mischievous and seductive male icons–Elvis, James Dean, Tab Hunter, and even, pathetically, Pat Boone. Practically, I vowed to avoid even their more approximate and paler counterparts, B-O-Y-S. But where could a monastic aspirant such as I find refuge?

Hudson, South Dakota, offered both a solution and a sanctuary. So I came to spend my eighteenth summer at the home of my recently widowed grandmother, Rose Walker. In her domestic asylum, I would be protected from idle distraction and sheltered from the snares of the devil.

Hudson, at the time, was home to about three hundred Dakotans, mostly native and hardly any of them thinking of religious vocations. As I recall, rainfall, weeds, army ants, soybeans, and hog futures were of primal concern. Occasionally, an engagement or a funeral offered some new conversational crumb, but for the most part, the daily rigors of farm life absorbed its citizenry and filled the pages of its rural rag, the *Hudsonite.* I was even further isolated because, during the weeks I lived there, I did not meet a single teenager who was not also a cousin. I had, indeed, found a sedate, silent, and essentially venerable refuge.

Hudson rippled out from a wide, sleepy main street which hosted established but fading rural merchants. Torkelson's General Merchandise at that time was engaged in promoting packages of Chef Boyardee Pizza as an exotic culinary alternative; a display of shallow round pizza pie tins and rotary cutters promised easy delivery of this foreign novelty. Across the street, Fullenkamp's Drug Store boasted a soda fountain and a tempting but tawdry display of Toni hair products, Tangier lipsticks, and glossy movie magazines. My grandfather's forlorn and abandoned pool hall stood next door, its windows whitewashed. A few other farm-related businesses, all cowering in the shadow of bigger outfits in Beresford and Sioux Falls, appeared to be gasping their last breath. On the corner of the main street, the Bank of Hudson was managed by my cousin, C. J., which generously hosted both the United States Post Office and a State Farm Insurance Office. C. J. was also the town's undertaker; his parlor, opulent in a dusty and decaying fashion, was entrenched next door to another of my grandfather's failed businesses, a forsaken and, as I remember, popcorn and puke-smelling movie theater. I particularly remember prizing one of C.J.'s business cards; it modestly

promised that my cousin would be "the last to let you down." The social core of town flourished at Smith's Locker, where women gathered to withdraw cuts of meat from their rented freezers and where local gossip was nurtured with retelling and garnished with the exuberance of boredom. Naturally, several saloons and a State Liquor Store were scattered indiscriminately throughout town; they showered the locals with liquid refreshment like water from hyssop sprinkled before parched Hebrews.

Grandma's house was a couple blocks off the main street. It was an old and slightly drooping converted shed and may have encompassed as many as five hundred square feet. I loved its tiny dimensions and its sweet-smelling tidiness. It reminded me of the Boxcar children's thrift. I especially enjoyed our daily routine of housekeeping. Grandma and I soon settled into a devoted companionship; we did everything together, and, of course, I took to her matronly occupations with the serenity of ... (shall I say it?) ...with the serenity of a nun. I learned to roll a hem by making dish towels from flour sacks purchased from the mill just at the edge of town. Grandma would pencil a tomato or a bunch of carrots or, my favorite, a cluster of peas into each corner and I zealously enriched the sketch with color and shading. I became quite accomplished at the satin stitch and French knots. In cozy sorority, we mended clothing sent by Momma; we patched ripped knees, replaced lost buttons, and darned heels and toes of socks sometimes too frail to sustain new thread. One afternoon, I learned to use her treadle sewing machine by hemming cleaning cloths cut from an old sheet. Almost every day, we baked something: sugar cookies, using an old glass to press and cut them into shape; moist and nutty apple sauce cakes; or sunny lemon meringue pies for the coffee breaks we shared every afternoon, either by ourselves, or at one of Grandma's sisters' where we played Pitch, a card game akin to euchre, or at Ladies' Aides sponsored by one of the community churches (Lutheran, Congregational, or Methodist). When it came to coffees, Grandma's ecumenical spirit was years ahead of Vatican II.

Occasionally, we left Hudson for farther adventures, traveling ten miles to Hawarden, Iowa, for Mass on Sundays and confession on Saturdays. There we visited Grandma's sister Ag at her home where she was raising my cousins Catherine Ann and Rose Mary, who were orphans, my age, and very interested in movies and music and men. O, my! We journeyed twenty-some miles due west to Centerville, South Dakota, to have coffee with Aunt Grace and Uncle Cha, my grandmother's sister and my grandfather's brother. Sisters had married brothers to form a tight family alliance. Determined to be home before dark and on time for *You Bet Your Life* or *Masquerade Party*, we would head back with a blazing, red Dakota sun behind us.

In the evening, widow and virgin in white nightgowns retired peacefully and reflectively. Sometimes, I climbed a staircase so steep and narrow that I had to use my hands on the upward steps for purchase; I usually arrived at the top as stooped as the ceiling of the tiny attic that was the bedroom. The Hudson library reading room, which was a Carnegie benefice and opened only on Tuesday afternoons, became the provender of my great attic escapes. The librarian helped me find books from a list of suitable authors the sisters had carefully provided, and so I read the novels of Thomas B. Costain and Taylor Caldwell; I relived the age of the martyrs in *Quo Vadis, Ben Hur,* and *The Last Days of Pompeii.* Grandma also had a supply of the *Ligourian*, the *Saint Anthony Messenger*, and *Maryknoll Magazine*. I especially savored the pictures and pages of the Maryknoll missionaries and sadly accepted that Maryknoll had rejected my application because of my history of rheumatic fever. For many years, I kept the kind letter of rejection from the Mistress of Novices, who asked me to become like Thérèse of Lisieux–a missionary through prayer. I would read deep into the night but still rise when I sensed Grandma below. Accompanied by the soft coo of mourning doves, she brewed coffee and fried slices of slab bacon in the quiet, purple glow of a prairie sunrise.

The heat up in that attic room was often heavy and relentless; on those nights, Grandma suggested I sleep downstairs with her. She didn't like my breathing in her face, however, so we slept side by side, feet to face. That way we each had our face near a window and might, if we were lucky, capture a piece of the miserly breezes of South Dakota at night. I now recognize that Grandma had to have been lonely; Grandpa had died only eight months earlier. How callow and insensitive I was in my private fervor! But at the time, I selfishly pleaded with her to tell stories from her childhood.

In those dusky hours, Grandma began to share her lifetime of memories. We first recited the rosary as we lay, and then Grandma would begin stories of her childhood, stories of her mother, Theresa McNaughton Gourley and her father, James Gourley, Irish immigrants who had homesteaded near Rock Valley, Iowa, while the

Dakotas were still a territory. She recounted memories of tornadoes and grasshoppers, of bee stings and lemon juice, of hog killings and barn dances, of influenza epidemics, of teaching in a one-room schoolhouse, of marriages and divorce and funerals. I memorized the names and birth order of the eleven Gourley children; I heard the stories of the births of my Aunt Irene and of my own mother. Slowly, we would drift on these tales of yesteryear into a sleep uninterrupted by dreams and sanctified by thoughts of those who slept before us.

And then, one day in July, my Aunt Irene and her three daughters, native Californians, rolled into town in their little red convertible. My cousins were sun people; they were sun talkers and sun walkers. They radiated. They glowed. Their voices percolated with bubbly enthusiasm; they walked with long, elegant, and unself-conscious gaits. Their names were always spoken in a smooth sequence, MarySusanPat, suggesting a planetary source of heat and energy. Immediately I began to spin in their scintillating gravitational pull. I orbited humbly around their solar preeminence. They wore form fitting shorts and little sleeveless blouses neatly tucked into tiny waists. I wore pedal pushers and boy shirts, oversized. They were tropical birds dressed in ice cream color pastels and madras plaids, I a domestic fowl in twill and denim. Their hair was sun-bronzed and golden, short and face-framing; mine was sternly pulled into a ponytail. I achingly recalled that my Grandpa used to ask if I knew what it was that a ponytail hid. I did! Their nails, both finger and toe, were painted, their legs, tanned and smooth. They used a depilatory, and their eyebrows were shaped by plucking and pencil. They wore sunglasses. Dazzled, I spun in their shadow.

And they had opinions. Unquestionable, firm, and entirely persuasive opinions about boys, pool parties, swimming suits, cars, movie stars, clothes, make-up, school, teachers, food, magazines, skin care, sneaking out, prison escapees, and tobacco. There I was, awash in a shower of adolescent hormonal extravagance, totally bewitched. I secretly committed to memory their suggestions, mannerisms, attitudes, and expressions. I was their fan club of one–infatuated, smitten, and dumb.

I'm not sure how long they were with us, but I am sure that Aunt Irene had joined Grandma's campaign to protect and defend my vocation.

One night I came face to face with my own sexuality, and for a brief moment I felt the earth shake and knew the depths of my corporal frailty. We four were upstairs in that little attic room where the only light hung from the center of the ceiling and where it was impossible to stand erect except in the centerline that ran from the tiny window at the south end to tiny window at the north end. MarySusanPat were wearing baby dolls and I was in boy-cut pajamas. Grandma and Aunt Irene were in bed in the room below us. It may have been as late as nine o'clock. We were reading contraband movie magazines imported by means of the red convertible from California. I recall a lot of *oohs* and *aaahs* as we looked at photos of stars and starlets. MarySusanPat read far more astutely than I, but they kindly noted for me which hairdo, which shoulder cut, which hemline, which pose was the most fetching, and also which of those lacked class, taste, style, or appeal. I tended to look for pictures of Ann Blythe, Loretta Young, or Irene Dunne; they were older but at least they were Catholic stars. MarySusanPat favored the bombshells: Terri Moore, Jayne Mansfield, Jane Russell...and then we came upon a pin-up section presenting Marilyn Monroe.

What possessed me I cannot say, but suddenly I felt a need to impress my cousins with something surprising; I would show them cover-girl glamour. I wonder now whether this was a conscious decision or a kind of defense mechanism; I know I who had accepted plainness and simplicity as virtues now longed to show that I too had something HOT.

I began to imitate the poses of Marilyn. I stood with knees slightly bent, hand over hand on one knee, back arched, head thrown back. I blew kisses and whispered, "Hello, boys!"

I lay on the bed on my tummy, my head poised on my hands, my legs bent at the knee and crossed at the ankles. My ponytail fell in a tumble of golden hair. I carried my glasses in my teeth; I shook my head and began to prowl down the attic's narrow catwalk. I pursed my lips, I mouéd, I shook my fanny, I thrust my pelvis. MarySusanPat were wowed. They laughed and giggled hands-holding-sides giggles, "O my God I'm going to pee" giggles, hooting, screaming, breathless giggles. As I undulated and shimmied, they bounced on the bed and kicked the ceiling in glee.

Suddenly, Aunt Irene was at the bottom of the stairs.

I don't recall her exact words but I do remember our instant silence and my burning shame as she scolded her girls, Mary in particular. They were to pipe down; didn't they know Martha needed her rest? Shame on them. And secret shame on me. I failed to accept the

burden of blame and guiltily trembled as I let Mary take the heat. I recall thinking how noble she seemed in her detachment and silence. Mary was tough, and at once I felt a great debt to her and a profound awareness of my own moral faintness. Even the next morning, Mary remained mute and stoic as the dressing-down continued. Meanwhile, I suffered from private ignominy and a sense of hollow fame. I was a white-washed Pharisee, a hypocrite, a farce. Imagine–I, spiritually puny and morally slipshod, aspired to be a Bride of Christ.

A few days later they left, chattering melodiously and packed into the little red convertible. I knew Mary's loyalty would continue to protect me, and I felt a kind of relief. Soon I was able to forgive my adolescent outburst, and I almost persuaded myself that I could never have been so venal that I would let my cousin take the rap for my wild and uninhibited behavior. But I had.

Grandma and I settled into the monotonous ritual of our days. We continued to do needlework, to go to coffees, to watch our shows, to visit her sisters in a humdrum stream of days. At night, upstairs, I sometimes recalled my sensuous performance and asked to be forgiven for having almost squandered my precious vocation and for having put the blame on Mary. I resolutely put Marilyn out of mind and, as I listened to the song of the cicadas, I imagined myself a missionary. Yes, a missionary in Africa. Equatorial Africa, where I would labor in the fields of the Lord and where I would minister kindly and without ceasing among the poorest of the poor. Equatorial Africa, where eventually I would contract a tropical disease, deadly but not disfiguring, and, surrounded by those I had brought to Christ through the sweetness of my disposition, I would, at the age of twenty-seven (well, maybe twenty-eight), breathe my last–but in the odor of sanctity.

Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

RETURNING TO ELKHART LAKE, WISCONSIN

JANET RUTH HELLER

In the throes of World War II, E. B. White recalled his childhood vacations to a special lake in Maine and brought his young son there to relive the experience. My family has a similar sacred place: Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin. Like many Jewish families, my great-grandparents would take the train north from Chicago to Elkhart Lake, halfway between Milwaukee and Green Bay. They would stay at resorts like Siebken's and Schwartz's and Osthoff's.

My father rediscovered Elkhart Lake in the 1950s when he was commuting three hours from Milwaukee to Green Bay. His company, Milprint, had sent him to straighten out some management problems in a subsidiary. On his way back from work, he would stop to hike or swim and then finish driving home.

When I was in elementary school, my parents often drove me and my younger siblings, Will and Peggy, from our hometown of Milwaukee to Elkhart Lake for weekends and vacations. The lake water was so clean that it was drinkable. At first, we just came for the day and changed clothes in the restroom at the tiny railroad station. But Mom and I protested the cramped quarters, so Dad paid an older woman to let us use her home near the lake to change into our swimming suits. Once we came up on a stormy afternoon, and, as we emerged from her house, lightning split a giant oak in the front yard, and the tree toppled over in front of our cousin Mitch. Shaken, Mitch's dad drove back to Milwaukee, but my family made its pilgrimage to the rainswept lake despite the near miss.

Then we began to stay at Siebken's, an old family-owned and operated resort with green shutters on white wooden buildings. It also had a terrific restaurant. My parents got to know the owner, Ollie Siebken, and her daughter, Pam. Girls from the nearby Camp Harand

put on plays like *The Wizard of Oz* in Siebken's little theater, and we kids used the playground next door when we tired of swimming and boating. The water was so clear that we could see bluegills and perch in the shallows. Although Dad took us fishing many times, we never caught any of the walleyed pike or muskies. But he made up stories to tell Mom about the big ones that got away.

When I was twelve, my family bought a home on the lake in Turtle Bay, which Dad named Sunnyshores. One part of the house was very old, but there were several additions. When my Uncle Bob heard that the home had six bathrooms, he asked whether the previous owners suffered from kidney trouble. Actually, the house had once been a retreat for an order of Catholic priests, and that is why there were so many additions and restrooms. We loved Sunnyshores because there was a lot of room for us five kids and any friends to sprawl out. I had my own room except when company came; then I had to give up my lake view and move into the bunkroom with my younger siblings. We swam every day, canoed, rowed, and sometimes fished. At night, I would stay up late reading novels across from the stone fireplace.

My father loved to take us on walks around Elkhart Lake. He especially liked shallow Turtle Bay because it had unusual colors of water lilies, including blue and red shades. The woods around the lake were full of shagbark hickory trees, willows, pines, maples, oaks, birches, locusts, and aspens. When my biology class studied trees, I gathered fallen leaves for my term project. In the autumn, the trees looked like gigantic gold, pink, and red gloves. The woods sheltered raccoons, which would frequently attack our garbage. We had to put heavy rocks on the lids to keep the smart animals from opening the garbage cans. Wildflowers like columbine, trillium, and asters grew on our property. Dad planted hostas and dahlias. Once a robin nested on top of one of our window air conditioners. Mom refused to run the machine until after the baby birds learned to fly and left the nest. Sometimes we saw garter snakes as we walked around the lake. After the government banned DDT, goldfinches and other songbirds returned to the area.

The lake itself is different colors–blue, brown, green–depending upon the depth of the water. Like E. B. White, if I'm indoors, I love to watch a thunderstorm pass over the lake. The wind bends the trees, and everything gets dark. Rain pours down in torrents, and the thunder echoes like giants bowling. But getting caught in a storm is not so charming. Once, I was canoeing across the lake with friends after a picnic when rain and lightning erupted. I suggested that we canoe to my parents' pier. My mom gave us all fresh towels and fed us fruit and cookies. Then Dad drove all my friends home.

Our lake neighbor Sue taught us Heller kids how to sail. We called her Sue Sailor because she was so good at maneuvering her boat during the races every Sunday at noon. She showed us how to detect squalls and to tack at an angle to the wind. She never tipped, but we kids frequently wiped out in our Seabird and Sunfish. Once Will took me out to show me why I didn't have to be afraid to "heel" in a strong wind. Of course, we capsized! But we laughed, righted our boat quickly, and kept sailing.

My baby sister Nancy was one year old when we spent our first summer at the lake cottage. We have photos of her as a toddler on our pier in her blue polka dot bikini, waving her arms exuberantly. Nancy took swimming and diving lessons at the Gartons' dock near Wheeler's Point. A fearless kindergartner, she plunged off the high dive.

My brothers Will and Paul worked at the boat dock near Schwartz's, taking visitors for lake tours and teaching people how to water ski. Peggy worked at the horse stables near the Quit Qui Oc golf course. I began to spend summers in Milwaukee working for my father's office or serving as a recreation director for children at Silver Springs Neighborhood Center. I always looked forward to the Greyhound Bus ride back to the lake on weekends.

The Fourth of July was always special at Elkhart Lake. Like most lake families, we watched the fireworks from our beach. Some neighbors rang bells if the fireworks were really spectacular. When Elkhart Lake's display ended, we could see the show from Sheboygan or Plymouth. We often had company on July 4th or Labor Day, especially the family of my mom's twin brother. Even if it poured rain, we always had fun with our cousins Joe, John, Jean, Jeff, and their parents, Uncle Bob and Aunt Ann. We watched tennis or preseason football on television if the weather was terrible. When I brought my Chicago-born fiancé up to the lake one fall, everyone teased him as our beloved Green Bay Packers creamed the Bears.

Once, when Nancy was five, she told my parents that she wanted to stay up until midnight on July 4th. I was the family night owl, so I volunteered to stay up with her. We read books and played games and talked. At midnight, Nancy had much more energy than her sev-

enteen-year-old sister. Now Nancy's children, Karen and Mark, are the Heller family's perpetual motion machines.

My mom got elected to the board of the Lake Owners' Association. She lobbied against people's dumping sewage into the lake and against motor boating on Sundays. We were proud when both measures passed the board. The Lake Owners' Association publicized the water purity ratings of everyone's lakefront to embarrass polluters. And Sundays were a quiet day for sailboats, canoes, fishermen in rowboats, and swimmers.

Will, Peggy, Paul, and I brought our boyfriends and girlfriends here. My pal Valerie liked the lake so much that we joked about adopting her. Will pushed his girlfriend Nancy into the lake when she wasn't looking. But she married him anyway.

As my parents got older, it became harder for them to operate two homes. So in 1997 they sold Sunnyshores.

We still have family reunions at Elkhart Lake. Most of us siblings no longer live in Wisconsin. I drive in from Michigan, and others fly in from Arizona, Georgia, and Connecticut. We stay at the Osthoff Resort, a new hotel on the site of Camp Harand, which has moved to Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. (Camp Harand took over the original Osthoff's, so the site has been restored to its early twentieth-century function as a hotel.) The Osthoff is close to Sunnyshores, and we walk by our former home every summer, bemoaning the peeling paint and rusty pier and the lack of interest of the cheapskate new owners. But then we move on for our annual five-mile hike around Elkhart Lake.

We notice all of the changes. One crabby homeowner has blocked the old path and forced people to loop around his property on a steep new trail. But another couple has transformed a ramshackle house and yard into a mansion with a huge garden full of red bee balm and golden torch lilies, every plant designed to attract butterflies and hummingbirds. I wrote a poem called "Haven" about this slice of Eden.

The town of Elkhart Lake has also changed over the years. The population has doubled. There are new homes and condos and new filling stations and convenience stores and restaurants. Schwartz's Resort got sold, remodeled, and reopened as Barefoot Bay. The Quit Qui Oc Golf Club has added a new nine-hole course, and the granddaughter of the original owner now supervises the new holes and coaches the high school golf team. Road America has added motorcycle races to its competitions for cars. Passenger trains no longer stop here, though freight trains rattle through at night. We sometimes pick black raspberries along the railroad tracks. Then I remember my grandmother, Ruth Rosenberg Pereles, who made what I considered the best black raspberry jam in the state. Although Elkhart Lake is a small town, in 2002 the high school girls' basketball team, the Resorters, won its division's state championship. Some local restaurants still post the newspaper article heralding this triumph.

When my brothers worked at the boat dock in the 1960s and 1970s, the staff was all male. Today when Paul's sons go water skiing, a young woman named Jackie drives the boat and coaches them to improve their balance and control of the skis and kneeboard. Jackie communicates via a new intercom system with her cohort Jenny. I ask Jackie when the boat dock got liberated. She doesn't know.

Many of our former lake neighbors have died or sold their lake homes. I miss the Kurmans and the senior Streckers especially. Their children still drive to Elkhart Lake on weekends. My father died in 2004, and it feels strange to come to the lake without him. But when I swim or walk around the lake, I feel close to Dad. I wonder whether the young families at Osthoff's will fall in love with Elkhart Lake the way that my family did.

Coming back to the lake after September 11th and during the Iraq War, with threats of new wars and more terrorism, I can understand E. B. White's instinct to return to a special place with his son during a time of international conflict. I walk to Emig's Point again with my youngest nephew, Mark. He is the same age that I was when I first came to Elkhart Lake. I show him my favorite garden, a huge rock in the middle of the path, Canada geese, and tree swallows. Happy, he starts skipping along the trail. Like E. B. White, I feel like a kid again and have the illusion that nothing has changed since I was five. Yet I also realize that I'm actually fifty years older and the area has changed in many ways. Elkhart Lake soothes my family and me, allowing us to get back to our Wisconsin roots. Here, we can hope for stability amid change.

Note: E. B. White's essay "Once More to the Lake" was published in 1941 by HarperCollins in the collection One Man's Meat.

Western Michigan University

DOLING PARK AND THE TERRAIN OF CHILDHOOD

Stephen Michael Adams

Like city parks everywhere, Doling Park was both a largely empty space and a landscape rich in meaning. Its history shaped the life of the surrounding neighborhoods but moved in its own rhythm and retained its own scale. In the local histories of Springfield, Missouri, once known as the Queen City of the Ozarks, the park's narrative comes in chapters of ownership and development: the 1880s merchant, James Doling, who found the spot while tracking his errant mule, quickly grew charmed by the hilly topography and the handsome cave with its waterfall, and bought the sixty acres that would become the core of the park; the creation of the lake and its "Shoot-the-Chute" boat plunge and boat rides by turn-of-the-century entrepreneurs, with touches inspired by the recent 1904 St. Louis World's Fair; the many re-designs and renovations under management of the city park board from the '20s on. To the families and especially the children growing up on its edge, the park exerted a felt force that was a function, true, of the park's recreational development but perhaps more deeply of its less mutable terrain.

The park was big enough that it marked out fairly separate neighborhoods on its three populated sides, the fourth side formed by a band of woods that buffered the park from Interstate 44. My family lived on Campbell Avenue, its western boundary, and until my teenage years I met no one who lived beyond the east side of the park, since it was out of bicycle range and in another grade school district. So to the eye of a young child on my street, the park seemed endless. My guess is that this was the case to some extent for all the kids in the neighborhood but probably most true for those growing up in a house like ours, with our two largest windows ("picture windows," we called them) both facing east, one in the dining room and one in

the living room. Much of the park we couldn't see: out of the frame lay the ballpark and swimming pool, the playground and carnival rides, the roller rink, and the cave. The windows directed our daily views across the street and down the slope of the north end of the park, each window framing the small lake at the foot of the slope, with a backdrop of the willows at its edge and the native woods beyond. It was the least frequented area of the park, with no drives or parking lots, and I suppose it seemed an extension of our own property, an estate garden meant for our private contemplation.

In the quiet of the breakfast table, we watched the sun's light on the lake, its effects varying with the seasons. At supper we often strained in the dusk to see the geese on the lake or the foxes stealing out of cover for the evening hunt, or perhaps a teenage couple disappearing into one of the thickets between the lake and the cave. When a flash would appear in the wooded ridge above the lake, we knew it was the far rim of the rock quarry glinting in the evening's last rays.

The contemplation of the park, I've come to realize, I partly absorbed at a young age from my mother. It was the early 1960s, and like most of the children in the neighborhood below school age, I spent my days at home. Mornings after my older brother had boarded the school bus and my father had caught the city bus for his job in a printing plant, my mother would take me along if she had any errands: the bargain breezeway of Heer's department store on the square, perhaps, or a ladies' Bible study at the home of a retired missionary, or, twice a month, a visit to the home of a boy who suffered from polio, where women from the grade school PTA would take turns helping the boy's mother massage his stiff limbs. But many days, especially in the cold months, we kept mostly to the house, my mother working at her household chores. Lacking the appliances that had become common in wealthier neighborhoods, she did the dishes by hand and hung the wash on the clothesline in the backyard or, in winter, on a line stretched across the basement. Late summer and fall she put up scores of quarts of tomatoes, green beans, and okra. When she took a break from the chore at hand, she liked to sit with coffee and gaze down at the lake. In warm weather, she would take a glass of iced tea to the screened porch on the south side of the house, where she could also see the grove of mature black walnuts off to the right.

Even as a young child I must have noticed this delight and almost proprietary pride which my mother took in Doling's scenic beauty.

Only as an adult, though, would I understand the tinge of wistfulness that could often be sensed in her contemplation.

During my mother's youth in the 1920s and early '30s, Doling had been a genteel pleasure park. Picture postcards from the period show couples and families rowing about the lake in fine dress and a crowds of hundreds listening to jazz bands playing in the outdoor theatre. This must have been a marvel for a girl whose family had recently moved from a hard-scrabble farm out in the county, from which they seldom came to town. There they had had gospel hymns in the plain Baptist church nearby and ballads played on fiddles and banjo by several brothers in a musical family a couple of farms over, but nothing like what the big bands played beside the lake. Her experience of the sophisticated atmosphere in the park coincided with the broadened knowledge and social life that city living must have given her, in the few years of adolescent freedom before she would marry at nineteen. She went out on a few dates with, but did not marry, a boy already destined for the corner office of a bank; she ran around with a girl her folks thought too wild; she bobbed her hair and, in photos from the time, appears to have imitated the worldly look of Greta Garbo. In her senior year of high school she saw her future as that of a poet and wrote romantic, attentive poems about early death.

Marriage and then motherhood inevitably closed some of these doors, and in any case, with the deepening of the Great Depression and war looming, high-life aspirations could be kept up by few. For the next two decades my parents charted a life together: raised a daughter, became immersed in the Pentecostal movement, and worked at making ends meet. They moved from one rented apartment or small house to another, all over the north side of town and into the county, and during two lean periods they stayed with relatives. In these years they must have sometimes taken their daughter to Doling for a walk or to use the paddle boats that were still there, occasional visitors as all north side residents were. But their stories of these years were filled with the war and economic struggle and tent revivals, and the park was rarely mentioned.

In 1954, the year my sister married at seventeen, my father and mother bought the house on Campbell Avenue. For decades to come, my mother would tell of making my father stop the car when she saw the For Sale sign just across from the park. "I've been lucky," she would say, "having that view every day." The white frame house was small, but it was on a large lot with a two-stall barn for milk cows, a chicken house, and enough flat ground in full sun for a big kitchen garden. The neighborhood consisted of war-period frame houses like ours, a few strings of newer ranch-style houses, and, here and there, older rock houses of the kind distinct to the Ozarks, the knobby walls made of unhewn stone of whatever kinds were found free for the hauling. Most of the men in the neighborhood worked in factories or packing plants or drove trucks, their incomes varying less by what job each held than by whether it was in a union shop. To our south, in a newer house on a small lot, lived an elderly couple retired from decades as missionaries. To our north, in a small red house on several acres, were two middle-aged sisters lived their last half-century in a modest red house on several acres. One took the bus each morning to a clerical job and did the shopping on the way home, and did all the outdoor work on the place in the summer. The other sister we saw only when she opened a side door to empty the mop bucket. Whether she had a deficiency or couldn't bring herself to leave the house, we never learned; if our parents knew, they remained silent on the matter.

The neighborhood was a good choice for the most part. My father talked baseball with some of the men, and they would swap around tips on keeping their old cars and pick-up trucks running. He liked walking up to the park's ball field summer evenings, where he would stand with another man or two outside the fence past first base and watch a few innings free rather than pay the quarter for a seat in the bleachers. But my mother mingled little with the women, and then only with the two or three others who were, like her, more austere or reserved than the rest. Since these were rare, and since mutual reserve could not make friendship flourish, she saved her talk and laughter for daily phone calls with her mother or sisters or married daughter. The neighborhood was good for her husband and for the two sons she bore in their first several years in the house. For her, though, whenever none of her family was around, she preferred a crossword puzzle or the quiet contemplation of the park. How much in those moments she communed with her younger self and with what her hopes had been–or ways of living or means of expression unconstrained by a tight grocery budget and the Pentecostal devotion to holy behavior–she never revealed. Or perhaps these things had all become in her mind simply her untiring love of looking down that hill.

By the 1960s, the time of my childhood, the rowboats and boat chute were gone, the grandstand gone, the pavilion's balcony over

the lake torn down. It was still a place for leisure and entertainment, but louder and maybe a little crass. The main year-round attraction was the roller rink, where old Mr. Morrison was at the Hammond organ four nights a week for open skating. Saturday mornings, the organ silent, the speed-skating team made their furious, elegant rounds, the boys and young men nestled up to one another in a tight chain, inside arms tucked and outside arms swinging together, the wood rollers whirring and on curves scuffing the hardwood. Kids and teens came to the park now for the skating and for the rides that had been set up in a new carnival area: a Wild Mouse roller coaster on its wood frame, the Tilt-a-Whirl, bumper cars, and then the oddly named Fun House, a kind of haunted house entered on small rail-pulled cars and populated with pop-up creatures that were not so much gory or menacing as insanely, gleefully forward. Outside the Fun House sat the mechanical Laughing Lady, Jezebel-painted, her brassy recorded laugh advertising the ride. My mother bemoaned the general change to the park that the carnival brought, and often warned us about the shadowy and mysteriously maimed men who ran the rides. But it was the Laughing Lady that truly disturbed her. Standing at the kitchen sink, snapping beans or scrubbing a skillet, she would grimace and even shiver at the weird cackle, and sometimes shut the window, more willing to endure the stifling southern Missouri heat than that repeated, sinister beckon. The neighborhood kids, though, took delight in her monstrous presence. As we ran through the carnival on our way to the cave or the pool, the bolder among us would give her lacquered head a slap, and then we would scatter and flee the threats of the bleary man tending the ride before we collapsed, satisfied, at our destination.

Doling's cave, too, changed in use and meaning from time to time. The most distinctive feature of the park, the cave was the slow work of water's etching force, a process almost as ancient as the Ozark Mountains themselves. The cave faced north to the lake, which had been formed by damming its spring, and old people in town claimed that its one long shaft reached all the way to the pioneer-era square, which lay along Route 66 almost two miles away. In the early '60s, the cave was still open for anyone to enter and explore. I remember wading in the crisp spring at the cave's mouth, wriggling up crawdads and the eyeless salamanders, and combing the floor for arrowheads and other signs of an Indian past. But we didn't often venture farther into the cave than the first bend, about fifty yards in, where traces of daylight died away; a few times we took flashlights and went farther, back to where the hall narrowed and we had to walk stooped in the streambed, watching for bats and imagining the eye glow of other, unnamed creatures. By the end of the decade, the entrance had been fenced and gated shut, after a boy had been harrowed by a night spent lost in the cave's depths. But the area left at the mouth outside of the gate, a dry space about fifty feet wide and perhaps twenty high and deep, was perfect for cooling off on a summer's day, playing a make-believe game, or watching one of the theatrical thunderstorms that visited the Ozarks plateau on which the city lay.

And it made an appealing spot for nocturnal meetings of various kinds that as a kid I never managed to witness but sometimes heard. Many nights we heard the noise of partying coming from the cave, the rough blare of a transistor radio and waves of screams and laughter that rose to an indistinct roar. We would find the beer cans the next morning littering the creek, stacked on the shallow ledges, and tossed through the gate to the cave's floor. Sometimes late on a spring or summer night we caught another sound, that of incantations magnified but blurred by the cave's walls, the song earnest and steady. Little was said of this at the breakfast table the next morning, but it put both of our parents into a somber mood, and sometimes one of them dragged the phone's long cord under a bedroom door to call the city park board to complain. The witches' circle didn't present merely a different way of thinking, an unwholesome influence. It was more stark than that: Satan was in our park, in our midst. On steamy nights, as I waited for a breeze to stir, I lay with my head in the window, listening for the hoot owl in the pear tree, or the raging arguments of a family down the street, or that weird and insistent chanting from the cave. Even on those many nights when the chant did not rise, it must have shaped the texture of dreams all along Campbell Avenue, and Talmadge Street, and Boonville.

But in my waking experience of the park, those many days and evenings passed there usually with my brother or cousins or neighborhood kids, it was a place of great openness, variety, even bounty. There was a period of two or three summers when my brother and I were old enough to wander the park on our own but not yet old enough to have outgrown make-believe or to take regular summer jobs. We helped pick vegetables in the garden and sold the surplus to neighbors without gardens; otherwise, we could do as we pleased.

Roaming the park was an unplanned thing, a matter of crossing Campbell Avenue and running or sometimes rolling down the long slope towards the lake and only then picking a destination. We always aimed for one of four landmarks that would have formed a rhombus from a bird's-eye view: the cave, at the park's heart; a small spring flowing from a shallow bluff nearer the road and slightly south; out of sight from the road, an empty concrete silo in the woods to the north; and, at the northeastern edge of those woods, an abandoned quarry. All of these places gave privacy, and all but one gave some hint of danger. To reach the quarry we followed a path through the woods that led to its edge, where we would sit and eat a packed lunch or purloined snack with our feet dangling over the drop of about forty feet to the water at its bottom, and if we caught one another unawares, we would give him a quick push while making sure to grab an arm before he could fall. This ploy somehow never led to a fall, and its thrill never grew stale. Other times we would turn on another path that led to the round concrete structure in the woods, about twenty feet high, an abandoned silo or maybe unused cistern or fall-out shelter never lowered into the ground for its intended use. Here was no real danger, but because it seemed the perfect hideout, the structure inspired survival fantasies. A small opening near the ground was just big enough for a child to enter. We imagined holing up there with food and water for weeks if pursued by any kind of villains: Martians, child molesters, Soviet soldiers. Deep in the woods (woods actually little more than a hundred yards across), we probably wouldn't even be discovered. And if we were, we knew how to shoot, and we would make sure to have something better along than the pellet rifles we sometimes carried.

On the hottest days we would stop for a snack or a rest in the cave's mouth, if no teenage couple had claimed it for a lovers' grotto, and take in the cool air from its depth and from the spring that ran along one side. We would usually leave the cave by climbing the series of ledges to the east and then walking a path above the mouth that kept within inches of the edge, a path kept smooth by those too young to care about vertigo or insurance or hospital bills.

If we completed the circuit, and many days we did, we would leave the path over the cave by ducking under the useless fence meant to keep kids off that path, and run along the broad concrete walkway through the little carnival and then downhill into a shallow ravine. Here, hidden from the view of both the carnival and Campbell

Avenue by groves of walnuts and cedar thickets, lay the park's second spring, a smaller one that emerged from a tiered bluff that rose about fifteen feet high and stretched sixty feet or so across. The spring had eroded the rock to form a recess big enough for a child or two to crawl in, just a few feet, and crouch in the shock of the earth-cold water. Even without wading into the water, it was always a nice summer spot, shaded throughout the day by the bluff and surrounding trees. Sack lunches could be eaten sitting on rocks by the spring or up on one of the ledges or in the fork of a cottonwood tree that had grown at such a tilted angle it could be climbed by taking a run at it and staying upright. Once or twice a summer, my brother and I and sometimes our two closest cousins, a boy and a plucky girl just our own ages, would make a meal by living off the land. We ate crawdads five and six inches long grabbed from their backward, darting maneuvers in the spring at the cave, boiled in a saucepan over a makeshift fire too small to attract the park caretaker's eye. We had watercress from the spring at the bluff and blackberries gathered along the sunny path by the quarry. This was the favorite place–sheltered and hidden from view, known only to those from the neighborhood, close enough to hear a call from home but not known to be within earshot–and it was here that we came in pairs and clusters and sometimes alone to think in solitude. It was this place that as we got older we left behind with keenest regret.

By the age of eleven or twelve, we began to see the park in summer as a source of earnings to save up for a new bike or record player or, eventually, a car. Our first jobs would be at Doling's ballpark, where my brother first worked shagging foul balls and home runs that cleared the fence. After a couple of summers at that job, he moved up to ballpark groundskeeper, handing down to me the ball boy job and giving me much of the grounds work at cut pay: hosing down the dusty concrete bleachers, dragging the infield with a section of chain-link fence, chalking the lines with pulverized lime as fine as white flour. Meanwhile he took on extra work mowing in Doling and other city parks and, once he had a car, tested the appeal of his newly muscled body, sleek and tan from the outdoor work, with girls I saw fleetingly, a glint of blonde or copper-red hair, it always seemed, in the flash of the ballpark's evening floodlights through the big Chevy coupe's long side window.

I didn't mind being left behind those nights, really. The pay was not much. Even at that age and that time, a buck a game seemed mea-

ger, especially after deducting what I spent at the concession stand for "suicides"–all four soda pop flavors mixed–and Three Musketeer Bars from the freezer. Three games a night paid three dollars, maybe two and a quarter net, not too bad when the games sailed through their seven innings. But this was before the one-hour rout rule was devised, and sometimes a game might last two hours or more, a hapless pitcher stranded at the rubber for bat-around humiliation, the night games stretching towards midnight. Still, the job gave benefits other than money. The concession stand was run by a young woman, Sharon, who was enough older not to mind talking and laughing with a boy in his early teens during the slow stretches of the evening when none of the players' wives and children was at the order window, and no foul ball arcing over the backstop to send me running out into the night. With her ordinary features and short, mouse-colored hair, her functional uniform and crepe-soled shoes, Sharon had no exotic allure. For that, there were the girlfriends and wives in their twenties and thirties dressed for the warm nights in halters and scant shorts and high-heeled sandals, their long hair piled hair gathered off the neck, stretching their legs languidly in the stands. By the next year Sharon had moved on to a better job. But over the long course of that summer, our nightly talks, our conspiracy in watching for surprise visits of one another's supervisors, even our shared boredom slowly spun an unacknowledged intimacy that made her not an older sister or a youngish aunt but something else yet, a good thing for a boy of thirteen.

Jobs at the park also gave us a chance to work around men outside the carefully sanctioned circles of school and church. The caretaker, Joe, was a short, barrel-chested man with a sun-burnt face and a habit of cussing constantly at everyone and everything, a man who managed to be jolly and highly irritable at the same time. Any problem my brother or I reported to him would cause his neck to begin pulsing and jiggling and his face to turn an angrier red, until he found words for his thought. But the words that finally erupted were always the same, a string of all the words that in my family were strictly banned. Joe only varied the order of the words, the pattern of their repetition. It was wonderful how he could ignore ordinary rules of grammar, making *son of a bitch*, for instance, work sometimes as a noun but often for other tasks. His style of speech seemed aimed at achieving a rhythm more than a meaning, but his meaning we never failed to get. He used the same vocabulary for any source of unforeseen difficulty: a loose water tap, a sadistic lifeguard, a snakebite, a late worker, complaints from neighbors about the floodlights, a new oil leak in the big mower's engine, a visit by the park board director. He saved his soft side for the family he had started in his middle age, a passel of children with bright orange hair, but he swore at the working world in a fair and even way.

Of the umpires, the one I came to know best was Jack, the oldest of the regulars. He lived around the corner from our house, the only family in the neighborhood with a Polish name. Mornings I often saw him waiting at the corner to catch the bus to one of the factories in town, a mirror image of my father with his metal lunch box and cap and patient stance. During the summers, Jack worked three or four nights a week, for the money of course but also, I think, for his quiet love of the game. Like my father he talked little, even when he walked with me up the hill at the end of the latest nights. While umpiring he rarely spoke, preferring a plain hand sign to call a strike or an out, eschewing the showboat cries of some of the umps. When a pitch missed the strike zone, he didn't even look to his left, relying on the absence of both speech and movement to indicate his call. It was the flamboyance of one of the other umpires that one night ignited the anger of a church-league team frustrated by their own errors and a couple of poor calls. This umpire, not one of our regulars, was working the game alone, and before the dust cleared and the ambulance arrived, he had been pummeled unconscious by the team's catcher and most of the infield. I was in the scorekeeper's booth, perched atop the concession stand. The scorekeeper, a boy two or three years older than I, made the call to the police, and then we watched in silence, fearing that the anger would turn towards us next. This was a rare occurrence, though. Any threat of violence was normally diffused by the authority of the umpires, especially when Jack was on the field. Most nights proved a predictable, comforting ritual of sport, a time for railroad workers, salesmen, and shop foremen to keep alive the athletic memory of their bodies and to vary their week.

In time, my brother and cousins and I moved on to other jobs, and then to other towns in Missouri, and then beyond, and our visits to the park came years and more years apart. Occasionally, I drive to Doling in a rented car, between trips to graveyards. The stands and fences of the ballpark are long since gone, and the grass has grown over its dirt infield, but the area of the infield still rises gently to form a mound, as if a burial site, and on its smooth surface some kids are

kicking a soccer ball. The young scorekeeper is now a city cop on his way to retirement, the older umpires and the caretaker no longer living, the rest dispersed to lives that do not intersect. The skating rink has been torn down but its front rock wall retained, a two-dimensional memorial of its vernacular architecture. A large, multi-sectioned community center with gracefully arching sienna roofs appears near the swimming pool. The cave has a new gate, and a sign announces weekly guided tours and a plan to give the cave an official name. Old men wander here and there, walking young grandchildren or great-grandchildren by the lake. A young man and woman take turns giving their little girl gentle pushes on a swing. Driving along Campbell Avenue, towards the road leading to the interstate, I can just see a scattering of kids under the walnuts and on the open slope and down by the thickets at the bluff, still drawn to the park's declivities, its enduring recesses and folds.

Westfield State College

FINDING BUCK CREEK

DEDRIA H. BARKER

Interstate 40, which is also known as the National Road, delivers me south of the heart of Springfield, Ohio. I am due at the public library to peruse the records for the turn-of-the-century whereabouts of my ancestors, but before I go inside, I must see Buck Creek. Maps tell me the waterway twists through town east and west, dividing Springfield north and south. Just north of Buck Creek is Ferncliff Cemetery. Unlike a graveyard, a cemetery is peaceful, like a sleeping place, and beautiful, like a park. An Arlington National Cemetery guide told me that. I imagine the flow of Buck Creek aids in transforming Ferncliff. In the early twentieth century, several of my ancestors were buried at Ferncliff Cemetery, and though I have no photographs of the funeral procession, I imagine that the family followed the undertaker's wagon through the front gate, past the unyielding stone house. Further along the road, and at the bottom of a little rise, they see the creek flowing.

I identify with Springfield through Buck Creek, a piece of water so calming that it passes with ease through the burial park. With the factory-installed compass in the rear view mirror of my GM vehicle, I double-check my direction. I had worked with early twentieth-century maps of Springfield, studying them for an idea of what my mother's parents' small hometown was like. Springfield was like my hometown of Detroit in that it had water running through it.

I get myself to the beginning of town on Limestone Street–it's the long north-south main street. I start driving. I slow for a curious bump in the road, and once over it, I drive further and further, searching, but seeing no sign of Buck Creek. I should have already crossed it. I stop the car, confused. Damn V-8 engine; I drove too fast, and

missed it, surely. It's just a creek, but the one thing in this small town I must see is Buck Creek. It divides my grandmother's life.

Her family home lay south of Buck Creek. There she lived with mother, father, two brothers, and a sister. North of Buck Creek, she was committed to an orphanage, separated from her father by death, and from her mother by work. She crossed Buck Creek moving across the meridian of her young life. I saw it plain: a creek runs through her life.

I retrace my path, riding up Limestone going south. At the end of the street, still no Buck Creek. I start back; obviously I missed it. I am not a good judge of bodies of water because I am from Detroit. I learned the various classes and categories of bodies of water thanks to the Detroit Public Schools' science teachers. They taught the difference between oceans and seas, lakes, streams, and creeks. They taught us locks and canals, rivers and straits. And I was paying attention, not looking out the window daydreaming, not being disruptive, not absent on the day Mrs. Tucker's lesson covered water. I learned all about different bodies of water, except how to pronounce creek in the backwoods way. My husband told me that's crick. But learning and knowing are two different things, and what I know about bodies of water, I know from the Detroit River.

I think every child in Detroit, at least once, looks at the flat, barely moving surface of the Detroit River and, calling up visions of Huck Finn on the Mississippi, announces, "I could swim across that." I know I said it. The Canadian side of the river looks so close, the carpet of water so dense, that given enough faith a child might be able, Jesus-like, to step out, one foot after the other. But any adult with such a child should quickly answer "no." Staring into the water, this adult should finish the lesson that the teacher started. The Detroit River is no river. It is a strait. A strait is a deep water channel between two large bodies of water. The Detroit River is a strait between Lake Erie, which is a Great Lake, and Lake St. Clair, which is a large lake in the Great Lakes hydraulic system. As such, no matter how calm the water looks on the surface, a swift, strong current runs through it. Even the strongest swimmer would be swept along in the current, lose his stroke, and eventually, his life. To the child's boast, the adult should say, "Don't try it." Boring her eyes into the child's head, the adult should say, "You will drown."

More often than not, I was with the Detroit River on Belle Isle, the city's island park. Belle Isle divides the Detroit River on its east

end just before the river widens to create Lake St. Clair. The Detroit River is so narrow that standing on Belle Isle I can wave to the Canadians tending their yards. If I wave with my left hand, the glinting sunlight will blind them. That's how close we are. The Detroit River binds Detroit's south end, so I feel comfortable driving south on Limestone Street in Springfield looking for Buck Creek.

Water is a bond of atoms: one atom of hydrogen to two atoms of oxygen. Always three atoms to create one molecule of water, but who sees one molecule? I see water in cups and in gallons and in straits. For refreshment, for life, I drink water almost exclusively. So did Benjamin Franklin. As an apprentice printer, Franklin drank water at lunch while his shop mates drank ale. The other men believed strong drink made them strong. Franklin discovered he worked faster after lunch than his peers, and, because he had not drunk, he kept more of his money on payday. When I was a newspaper writer, my newsroom colleagues teased about my big glass filled with the odorless, tasteless stuff, except they called it vodka. In Detroit during Prohibition, water and booze mixed when bootleggers ferried liquor from Canada. Fancy speakeasies and blind pigs set up along Jefferson Avenue, the first main street after the Detroit River. But it is the gigantic freighters that force me to accept that the Detroit River is actually a strait. That idea always surprises me in much the same way the freighters do. These working ships sneak into a picture frame bordered by blue on the bottom and blue on the top, and stab the center with rust red iron ore, and the words FORD MOTOR COMPANY. Their rough, silent wake buffets the banks.

I see the Detroit River heave, its surface rises and falls, channeling its breath. Detroiters are a bit topographically impaired because, despite what we are taught in school, when we hear the word "river," we see a strait. Because the two don't really go together, except in the Detroit frame of mind, it is entirely possible that I overlooked Buck Creek. A creek is not big enough to make an impression, what with my idea of open water being quite big and deep.

Looking out an airplane window, the Detroit River is blue. It is not the steely space age blue of actor Brad Pitt's eyes, but the blue warmed by green from the land. Experts say it is the blue of thick layers, the blue of deep waters. That is what I see. Looking at the Detroit River from the air, I feel far from the river because I *am* far from the river, and that is unusual. I have never been able to see the water and still be so far from it. Topographically, a strait is unlike a river. Rivers

contour the land with hills and dales and terraces from which to stand and gaze upon the river. Land generally kneels to a river, creating a valley, hence the Ohio River Valley. The land bordering a strait, however, ends like a cliff. It is a sheer drop formed when the glacier plowed the land. I remember at the foot of Woodward Avenue in downtown Detroit, the land tumbled down to the river about one or two hundred feet. When I was a young working woman in this working man's town, I sat on a bench on the grass and ate my lunch from a bag. I watched the freighters slide past. I watched the seagulls carry out their lunch from the river. When the red light halted the traffic noise, I listened to water slap against the dock. Submarines tied up there and allowed Detroiters to board. I write that as if it's the most natural thing in the world, for a submarine, a high seas drifter, to berth in the Midwest. I liked that submarine docking there. It made me feel a part of an exotic seaport city.

Just from the water craft that frequent the Detroit River, I should have known the Detroit River was not a river. But you don't think about this when you live with something. The man who lives in the house, regardless of his blood or legal relationship to the children of the house, that man is Daddy. When was the last time a submarine sailed the Mississippi or the Ohio? When was the first time? River craft are steamboats and barges, tugs, and paddle boats. All these floated on the Detroit River while a submarine swam below.

From the air, the Detroit River is the ribbon on the waist of my church dress. It's iridescent. It's neat, tight between the bodice and the skirt. That's a strait. A real river is the ribbon sash that unties itself on the high curled edge of the pew as I slip from church. I feel no tug as the bow in back pulls loose, and so slick, part of the ribbon slips through a thread loop. My sash drags the ground as surely as the concrete scuffs my patent leather shoes. Jaywalking, I cross to the candy store with my friends who are also skipping church. In the intersection, the ribbon picks up burnt rubber spread on Saturday night. Given enough time and space, gravity pulls the sash from the last loop and lays it on the ground. Rain colors it with muck. That is a river, a twist on the land, so much brown velvet crushed with life.

Growing up, I had the Detroit River, a strait, as my river and so I don't know—not really know— what a river is. Can I be expected to recognize a creek without a signpost? No wonder Buck Creek got by me; it's much too small, too much a crick.

Not being a man, I stop the car. My anxiety to pin down Buck Creek, the stream of water infusing my idea of my grandmother's life, overtakes me. I need a map. I have two. The one I know best is like the homing device my college professor carried. I opened mail and read letters and checked in manuscripts for his well-respected journal of black literature, *Obsidian.* In fact, *Obsidian* was the vehicle he rode to Wayne State University in Detroit. Alvin Aubert comes from Down South, way down in the south of Louisiana near New Orleans. In moving to Detroit he had escaped from the college town of Fredonia in upstate New York, where it snowed, a lot. After his young daughter's first day of school in Detroit, she confessed to being homesick. Her words triggered in him thoughts of gumbo and jambalaya, and warmed the part of his heart he had left in Louisiana. Aubert wrapped his arms around his child and heard her utter his own thought. "I want to go home," she said, but then added with a sigh, "to Fredonia."

I've never felt closer to my professor than now, as I search for Buck Creek. I search with a heart map dated 1908, and it has thwarted my efforts. Unfolding an up-to-date Chamber of Commerce courtesy road map, I see nothing is what it used to be. Springfield's northern boundary lies miles north of where it used to be, making Buck Creek miles south of where it used to be. Buck Creek, I now see, was that bump in the road I hardly noticed upon first driving into town. I drive back and find the bump in the road. I find Buck Creek.

Leaving the car at a roadside park, I cross the land that is really the outer edge of the broad bank, passing picnic tables and benches, a slide and swings shaded by tall trees. At the bank's edge, clear water passes over bedrocks like a jeweler's polishing cloth. Buck Creek seems friendlier than the Detroit River, though they share one thing: at less than twelve inches deep, Buck Creek could be walked across, but like the Detroit River, it cannot be swum.

In her day, my grandmother may have unlaced the strings on her high-topped brogans, peeled down her stockings and felt the creek as she dipped her toes in the clear, cool water. What was it she said about Buck Creek? She said, "Buck Creek . . . ." She said "It . . . ."

In fact, she had said nothing about Buck Creek. In her writings about Springfield, she never once mentioned this shallow stream. As my grandmother saw it, a creek didn't run through her life. Instead, I have projected my own strait life on hers and imagined Buck Creek ran through her life as the Detroit River runs through mine. We shared

the same bubble, washed over the same memories, bonded like H2O atoms: this small town can only be the home of my ancestors, whose lives transformed my own, with this column of fresh water running through it.

Finding Buck Creek, memories bubble up about the Detroit River. Staring at white-washed stones, I can almost see Belle Isle's fussy white marble fountain. It is named for a bygone-era Detroit panderer, James Scott. His fountain turns a rainbow of color on summer nights and can be admired from a car parked on the fountain's circle drive or approached by way of the terraced steps between shimmering pools guarded by water-spouting lions. We drive to Belle Isle on thick humid nights with all the windows down to catch a breeze. My sister Paula stands near the benefactor's statue and snaps a picture of me and my son sitting on the damp lip of the wide bowl. Diallo bends his arm at the elbow across his forehead in a child's salute. My hand drifts in the fountain runoff. It's Detroit River water. It's the same water in the Belle Isle lagoon freezing over in winter for ice skating. It's the water in the scalding hot chocolate warming my and my sisters' and brothers' numb fingers in front of the warming house fire. It's Detroit River water bobbing up and down in the concrete shoals soaking dead fish bones clean. It's the Detroit River water off the beach of Belle Isle. Buoys mark the safe area.

One Indian summer day I sit in my parked car at Belle Isle. I am pregnant and heavy, in the last month or so of normal movement, maybe eight months along, and hot under this girth. The bathhouse is closed and only the cackling seagulls litter the beach. I can clearly see the water, the swells and the waves, and the apartments high rising and low lying on the city shore across the waterway. I kick off my shoes, put my back to the door and extend my legs across the seat into the lowered window. My feet hang out. My naked toes wiggle at the river that's a strait, and at my family living north of it, together.

Lansing Community College

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Shari Zeck was formally educated at Indiana University and the University of Iowa, but learned most of what was worth knowing at the supper table while growing up in northwestern Indiana or when joining her dad on plumbing house calls. She directs the Program in Arts Technology at Illinois State University, where she also teaches film history. This piece marks a departure for her, and she looks forward to further writing about the small town where she grew up, her parents, their friends, and the particular way lives intertwine in small-town America.