

[Now]here

She wears a chunky blue necklace every Monday to honor her brother's death, and she often thinks about her two children, waiting for her to return home after a long day at school. She's trying to get into the medical school down the street, but her grades are slipping somewhere between her son's soccer tournament and gas prices. This is why she has a very unhealthy habit of biting her nails.

Or so I assume.

In reality, I've never talked to this woman. I don't know her name, but I know her schedule, only because we have the same one. In the mornings, we get on the bus together, and we both get off the bus in the late afternoon. I think she asked me for the time once, but that could've been the boy who also shares our schedule on Fridays, so I don't really know. In fact, I don't know if she even has a late brother, a husband, or children. I don't know what she is studying or why she bites her nails, but I feel as if I should from the sheer fact that I see her more than my closest friends. Under the irrational desire, I construct her life, and I don't really mind that it isn't real. At least it is something, and something is everything I've ever created while traveling on the road.

...

I can actually recall the precise moment in my childhood when I turned to the window. We were driving past Kanorado, and I was lying on my back, attempting to sleep in a vehicle I had never been able to sleep in. My brother and husky were cuddled

up on the floor, while my mother slept in the passenger seat. My father drove, but he didn't like speaking whenever the road turned dark. Now that I'm older, I know he was exhausted from the travels, but when I was younger, I emotionally accepted it as neglect and bit my tongue as I looked up at the sky. Since I was currently living in Atlanta, I hadn't seen the abundance of stars in two years, and though I'd seen them before, I was suddenly fascinated by their return. The sky wasn't the Space Needle, yet I was witnessing something far greater than any tourist attraction, and it had always been there. I only had to look around and see to feel the world around me, and it didn't need a brochure to entice my fascination.

With an imagination to guide my roadmap, I began watching the other travelers, the locals, the in-betweens. I wondered what their lives were like, whom they talked to, and what they talked about. I started placing myself in their car and pretending to learn from them instead of the books I read along the way. I would even take the information straight from the books and pretend I learned in their cars, knowing they were quite possibly oblivious to the information I had just read. Nevertheless, the blonde teenager driving by became my teacher, because I wanted a teacher I didn't have. She explained love, while a mother of three explained discipline, somehow managing a word in while lecturing her kids in the backseat. If I were lucky, one might look over and make eye contact, and I would get a better look at their face or hear a clearer voice inside my head. If I were unlucky, I would barely have enough time to imagine what they were like before they sped up or disappeared off an exit ramp, and I would be left to search for another. But, even when I felt a connection, I knew that I was ultimately alone in the

experience. I didn't know them, they didn't know me, and we knew, whether they reflected or not, we may never know, and I wasn't okay with that.

I wanted someone to connect with outside of my constantly moving and traveling family, but I didn't feel as if I had a way. We had moved over five times before I even got out of elementary school, and I had given up on the idea of staying anywhere. My home - although I had a physical one - wasn't home to me. It was the road, and I was from there, whether I enjoyed it thoroughly or not.

During my childhood, I spent over one hundred hours on the road traveling across states. At some point during the summer and winter, in a nineties minivan, my father would pack our four-person, one-dog family up, and we would drive from wherever we were living to my grandparents' homes. My grandparents lived over twenty hours away from one another.

Looking back on my childhood, I truly enjoyed the serene isolation the road allowed. I saw the mountain ranges of Georgia and Tennessee where we often paused to have lunch. I witnessed the aurora lights somewhere between Canada and Wisconsin, and I took pictures of the Amish buggies as we coasted through Intercourse, Pennsylvania. I've even swum in the Great Lakes.

I thrived on the adventure, but over the years it eventually became a tedious task without much meaning. I listened to numerous CDs and played hangman with my older brother one too many times to allow the miniscule games to entertain my child-self any longer. Naturally and effectively, I ultimately turned to the window to dream about my present and future's possibilities.

...

Somewhere in my late teens, I had my first interview for my published novel, and I thought I was prepared to answer anything about myself. But I wasn't.

"Where are you from?" he asked, and I stared at his legs, wondering if he hadn't stood up to introduce himself, because of his insecurity about his height.

"I was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania," I said.

He managed a smile as he tapped his pen against his notebook. He didn't write anything down. "Not where you were born," he said. "Where are you from?"

I didn't respond, because I didn't know how to. At this point, I had moved over ten times and lived in five different states, none of which I had lived in more than the other. I wasn't in a military family. My father's business only required him to change states in order to manage the region, but even if I explained this, the interviewer wanted a solid answer.

"I'm not really from anywhere," I said.

He shook his head, somewhat aggravated. The question was only supposed to take seconds. "Where do you live now?"

"Stilwell, Kansas."

His pen recorded the answer, and I fought the urge to stop him. I knew he wouldn't change it, and he didn't. Later, when it appeared in the local newspaper, my name was printed with the town, and I felt guilty.

I knew nothing of Stilwell. I wasn't familiar with the history, people, or even the area. I still had to use a GPS just to find the nearest gas station, and I felt inconsiderate

when I said I was from there. To me, in order to say that I was from somewhere, I had to personally feel a connection with the buildings, the streets, the people, and I didn't. I wasn't even close, but that didn't matter to the media as much as it mattered to me.

Don't get me wrong: I wanted to feel the pride of a hometown. I wanted to say I was from there. I wanted to feel confident enough in my own location to say how much I loved the unique terrain or even the weather. But I couldn't.

I only lived there for one year before we moved again, and I still have the article. I've thought about throwing it away on the sheer fact that a singular line bothers me so much that I cannot look at the others. But I haven't. A part of me enjoys the possibility that a reader believes I have a hometown when I've struggled to find one. However, I've also come to the realization, through hours of flipping through questioning photographs (where was this, how old was I, who was with me), that I may have forced this disassociation upon myself.

Maybe I don't want to be from anywhere, because I know I'll probably have to leave it again. Then, it will be this place that once was rather than a place I can return to comfortably. Strangely enough, I wasn't able to continue regular conversations with old acquaintances until my friend, Adam Stephens, found me on Facebook almost six years after I had moved. He reconnected me with a variety of old friends, and I saw their faces shift from ten to fifteen in a matter of minutes. Upon conversations, their lives, along with mine, morphed quickly as well, and the hope of constant comfort melted away with news I had been absent for. However, I clung on to what I could until a singular moment shattered the dream completely.

Adam Stephens died in a car wreck right before our high school graduation, but I didn't learn of it until a month into my freshman year at college. My long-distance friends knew I didn't check Facebook often, but none of them took the moment to tell me. They weren't sure how to, and I know now that they didn't say anything because of our lack of connection rather than our friendship. I learned this when I finally realized he hadn't talked to me in months, and when I saw the messages of heaven and hope on his Facebook wall, I knew, but I couldn't cry. How was it my loss? The sheer fact that he had been gone, and I hadn't known why for months, proved that it wasn't. It couldn't be. Not when I was too far away to not only attend the funeral but to know about the funeral at all.

My inability to be from anywhere took away my ability to grieve, and it ultimately shattered an identity I made myself believe I had.

...

Nevertheless, in the midst of moving across the country, I often wonder if I am missing out on a connection that seems quite vital in others lives - a place or a space where they can always, if not physically but mentally, return to. I cling onto their stories, their emotions, their experiences as if they are my own, because mine aren't close enough to consider the possibility of a home I've always desired. They aren't mine, but I can trick myself into believing they are until I can manage to find one.