

University of South Dakota

USD RED

Honors Thesis

Theses, Dissertations, and Student Projects

Spring 2020

The Art of Saying Goodbye

Emily L. Origer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://red.library.usd.edu/honors-thesis>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Origer, Emily L., "The Art of Saying Goodbye" (2020). *Honors Thesis*. 85.
<https://red.library.usd.edu/honors-thesis/85>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Student Projects at USD RED. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Thesis by an authorized administrator of USD RED. For more information, please contact dloftus@usd.edu.

THE ART OF SAYING GOODBYE:
A MEMOIR AND ARTIST STATEMENT

by
Emily L. Origer

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the
University Honors Program

Department of English
The University of South Dakota
May 2020

The members of the Honors Thesis Committee appointed
to examine the thesis of Emily L. Origer
find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted

Dr. Duncan Barlow
Lecturer of English
Director of the Committee

Dr. Prentiss Clark
Assistant Professor of English

Melanie Wood
Lecturer of English

ABSTRACT

The Art of Saying Goodbye:
A Memoir and Artist Statement

Emily L. Origer

Director: Duncan Barlow, Ph.D.

This paper contains a memoir and artist statement. I determined my relationship to a small town in Iowa, my personal tragedy and friendship. I chose to focus the story on the course of one year in my life, specifically, my senior year of high school. During this time, two defining moments of my life happened in rapid succession, which quickly led to the downfall of several close friendships. After leaving and removing myself from this situation, I came to realize those I blamed, my friends and the town as whole, perhaps deserved more credit than I was giving them. Throughout the course of this project, I also set about researching what makes a person connected to their town and how this connectedness determines desire to leave. These themes tied into my story by informing the background and reasoning used to categorize groups of people. These themes are place attachment, which is the relationship and bond one shares with the place they live, and solastalgia, which is the feeling of nostalgia for a place of lost solace. During the course of this project I found memoir and nonfiction story telling effective tools for explaining an experience that may not be universal but present a universally recognized feeling.

KEYWORDS: Memoir, Small Town, Friendship, Place Attachment, Solastalgia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	1
Chapter One: Spring 2015	3
Chapter Two: Summer 2015	9
Chapter Three: Fall 2016	19
Chapter Four: Winter 2016	24
Epilogue	28
Artist Statement	31
Works Consulted	42

PROLOGUE

The cracked leather of the back seat was sticky on my bare shoulders. The humidity of a thousand summer nights in Iowa had left a permanent film over all the leather in the car. The leather was aged and cracked, and my right hand was drawn to a particularly rough spot.

Pick. Pick. Pick.

The leather came away in my hand. I wasn't paying much attention to what was going on anymore. There was a conversation happening in the front seat, but it was strained, unnatural, forced. The two voices that were so familiar to me sounded far away and so alien. Those were strangers up there now.

Pick. Pick. Pick.

My feet rested against the back-passenger side door, my head on an abandoned sweatshirt, propped up just enough so I could see out the window as I lay across the backseat. We should have been sleeping. It was so late at night it had started to become early morning. I was laying in the back because I wanted to try. I hoped the motion of the vehicle would quiet my racing thoughts. Instead, the streetlights blurred, either from the falling rain or my tears, and I was left wondering how we had gotten to this silent point.

The hole widens.

CHAPTER ONE:

Spring 2015

I was born in a town called Estherville, Iowa. It's a small town, smack in the center of nowhere, surrounded on three sides by corn and a river on the fourth. On a good day, there are 5000 people that call it home. There aren't more cows than people, but there are more nursing homes than daycare centers, and more churches than grocery stores. There are three gas stations in as many miles, and two hotels between them. No one ever stays though. We are what's known as a drive through town. Maybe you stop for the night, but probably not. "There must be something better up ahead," passers-through would say, "keep driving."

Upon entering the Estherville Lincoln Central High School parking lot several things were immediately obvious. The first: there was not a lot of money in that dusty old town. Cratered with more dents than the moon, most of the vehicles were older than the students who drove them. The second was, when many of the students came to school they were there because the law told them they had to be—not because they were trying to get an education to get a job. They already had one. It was not uncommon to see tractors parked in the back row of the lot. Students wore their manure covered boots with old work-worn jeans tucked into them to school, leaving directly from there to do homework while they worked fields until it was too dark to see. In the late summer the parking lot glittered with heat, and there was a constant feeling of hot, lazy anger and discontent, the kind of thing you only feel when you're a teenager forced to be in a too hot school when you would rather be anywhere but there.

Yet, in the sea of pick-up trucks, dented Toyotas, and school buses there was one car that did not belong. Always parked in the front row there was a shiny, pale green, 1974 Chevy Nova. The Nova had the air of an aged beauty queen. Once a beautiful muscle car, now a forgotten relic that was just longing for someone to love it again. The Nova's owners looked almost nothing like you'd expect them to. They were not young car enthusiasts who had poured all their money into fixing up their granddaddy's beloved old Chevy into the roaring muscle car it could have been. Instead they were two teenage girls, who had spent just over a year working at the local Subway and saved up \$1500 between the two of them to buy the car. They had decided if they didn't love her no one else would. They adored her bench seat, tired engine and hand crank windows. They considered themselves her rescuers. They had named her Frances. They also happened to be my best friends.

The spring when the twins, Taylor and Kaylee, bought Frances was also the spring of our junior year, when the three of us spent many a long day cruising in the Nova, discussing our plans to move. Getting out was our goal. Our only goal really, none of us had ever thought beyond out, but we were going to make damn sure we made it. Frances' long front bench seat was where we spent endless hours cruising up and down Central Avenue making our plans.

It has often been said that most people in this world can be split into two groups: the movers or the stayers. During those long sunny, days with Frances, I was sure I was a mover. My friends too. Our aspirations to move were coupled with disdain for the people who stayed. The so-called "stayers" were a source of disappointment. They clearly had no goals, no drive. Failures. There were exceptions, of course. But very few. Outside of

those few, if you didn't make it out, you had failed. Never mind that many people stayed because they were happy. They were just lying to themselves. The girls and I were sure we were better. We wanted out to see the world, experience everything the town couldn't offer us, we were going to leave and finally become the versions of ourselves that would make everyone else jealous.

One day, in late spring, on one of those days that promises summer, but you still have to go to school, we were doing exactly that. The three of us were in a psychology class together, and the conversation had shifted from our moving plans to psychopaths, as we'd been discussing the phenomenon that day in class.

"Who, in our school, do you think is most likely to be a psychopath?" I asked. Thinking about how striking the small green corn seedlings looked against the black earth. As always, the leather was sticky with humidity. It seems like it's always humid in Iowa, like there's always a storm brewing, just past the horizon, and with the three of us sitting in one seat it was quick to become unpleasant. The girls had been thinking for quite some time about my question, after a long pause, one of them, Kaylee, said with finality, "I think Lee." We laughed at her. For perspective, Lee was the town golden boy: tall, handsome, smart and athletic. He was perpetually tan and had a very distinct little blonde spot in his rust colored hair. The blonde spot hid a childhood scar, the cause of which long since forgotten, leaving only the noticeable reminder.

"Listen," said Kaylee, leaning over the wheel a bit more, "he can't keep a girlfriend, even though they all want to date him, he's handsome, and we've talked before about how suddenly he gets angry. He fits!"

He *was* a bit of a player, always dating someone new, and sure, we all agreed, he had a bit of a temper sometimes, but he was never violent. And he was only always dating someone new because it was a small town and we were in high school. Things were rarely serious in high school. Just recently, in fact, the girl he had taken to prom left with a different guy, Thomas. She and Thomas were now dating, and she never gave a second glance back at Lee. It wasn't uncommon. Of course, he fit the *textbook* description, but things are always more nuanced than that, Kaylee. The faint strains of the song we were listening to faded out, and just before the next began, our laughter hung there. Glittering like a wet sidewalk in the sun, it felt like nothing could ever take that laughter away.

The wind pulled their long blonde hair out the window, played with it, tangled it with my shorter, darker mane. In those days, crowded in Frances' front seat, it was often difficult to tell where one girl ended, and the others began. Those days in the Nova, or first flirt with freedom with Frances as our guide, it didn't matter where we were going, only that we were together, and as long as the sun shone, we were sure we would be.

When I met Taylor and Kaylee, we were in fifth grade. Met is a term used loosely here, there was one school in Estherville and we all went to it, meaning we all already knew each other. More accurately, when we started *hanging out* was in fifth grade. I don't remember much more than flashes of blonde hair, swings and not really much talking. They kind of just accepted me into their circle. That's the perk of having a twin, I always assumed. They didn't really need to be best friends with me because they were too busy being best friends with each other. I was fine with that. Most of the time I found in the twins a kindred spirit. Two other people who were also committed to moving and

never coming back. In fact, we spent so much time together and were seen together so often that people, both in the school and outside of it started calling me the third twin.

Later we had headed out on our first camping trip of the year. The days were hot, but there was still a bit of a chill in the air in the evenings. Perfect for bonfires, our favorite activity.

The three of us and Frances were parked out, Frances' headlights illuminating the pit where we were trying to light the fire. We'd waited too long and it had gotten dark, we didn't really care though.

"No Kaylee pile the logs in a teepee shape" I laughed.

"Taylor help me!" Taylor was too busy keeping the bulldogs entertained. We'd bring them with us for protection out there. They were big and we were chickens, we'd tell scary stories until we scared ourselves.

I got up out of the chair I was sitting in, rearranged the wood and threw some lighter fluid it on. Kaylee struck a match, lit the wood, and watched it promptly go out.

This was the funniest thing any of us had ever seen. This time we couldn't get the wood light because we were shaking with laughter too hard. The dogs thought we were being attacked, so they started barking, going crazy, making everything funnier.

We decided to trek out into the trees to get leaves for kindling. After almost an entire bottle of lighter fluid, a tree's worth of leaves and some newspaper we'd found in Frances' back seat, we finally had a fire going. Our favorite songs playing in the background, a lively debate about the merits of our favorite fictional character and a few s'mores later we were content.

Suddenly something hit my head. I screamed, sure it was a bat. Something round and white fell in my lap. A marshmallow. So, it seemed war was on the table. I launched one back, screaming and laughing. Eventually we started feeling bad about wasting the marshmallows, so we'd pick them up and reuse them, covered in dirt and all. Out there under the stars, endless space stretching out above us, we made up for it by crowding as close together as we could. Our legs would touch as we rested bare feet near the fire pit. Many days passed this way, crowded around a fire, gossiping, eating and hanging out. Frances gave us more freedom to pass more time alone together.

CHAPTER TWO:

Summer 2015

Part One

Clouds had begun to build on the horizon. The humidity in June means there is almost always a chance of storms. It's just the way life goes. On this day though, the clouds hung heavy, crowded above the softball field. Like drapes that, with one swift motion, could be pulled closed, blotting out the light. The clouds cast a strange light across the field. I was there to watch my younger sister, the only one I have, play softball. She was only in the eighth grade but was allowed to play freshman ball with the high schoolers, a sudden and shocking overlap of her life and my own.

On the way to field a chime came through on my phone, "welfare check" it read. The police were looking for someone, a recent graduate named Thomas. He'd walked out on his shift at the grocery store and hadn't been seen since. I didn't think much of it. He had probably just gone out with his girlfriend or gotten tired of Estherville and packed up and left. People did it all the time. It was town full of movers, sustained by a few stayers.

Taylor and Kaylee were at the Subway, where they worked, even though they too had a sister on the softball team whom they often came to watch. Typically, we sat together, watching the game from Frances' hood. Usually, part way through the game the three of us would load into Frances to go for a quick drive through the summer sunset. The streets were always emptier during a game. We would drive up Central Avenue, just as the streetlights started to kick on. Alone on the road, music playing loudly, the faint

sounds of loudspeaker in the distance, we felt like the universe had shared the secret to friendship with us, and only us. We were unbreakable in the twilight.

Tonight though, I was out with my parents, the heat and humidity and impending storm lent a bit of an electric edge to the game. They were desperate to get it started so they could get it finished before the rain hit. As we walked up through the damp grass, I ran into Lee. I was friendlier with him than the twins were, we went to church together. His best friend also had a huge, unreciprocated crush on another close friend of mine, so we saw a lot of each other. We went through the usual small talk, I was wondering what he was up to that summer, what he had been doing and if he had been looking at any colleges yet. As it turned out, he was headed to Texas for a running camp the following day. He and his mom had a flight out of Minneapolis early the next morning. He had just come to watch our friends play in the softball game.

That's thing about small towns. Local high school softball is basically the social event of the summer. Families, packs of middle schoolers and lone high school students would all gather around the dusty red diamond two or three times a week. They would recline, drink soda and Gatorade and spread the latest gossip.

"We should hang out sometime! Get Taylor and Nic and grab ice cream or go for a hike. It'd be nice to see everyone sometime this summer," I called over my shoulder.

"I'd like that, Emily, oh and by the way, happy late birthday."

"Thanks," I shouted back, surprised he'd remembered, when the twins hadn't even done anything for it yet. It had been just a few days ago and I hadn't really seen them yet. We'd also planned a going away party for another friend who was leaving for a summer study abroad program, so I imagined we'd celebrate then.

After the game, the clouds hadn't broken, but it hadn't rained yet either. The field, and my face, was covered in a dry, red dust that clung in the sticky air like a ghost over the field. When we got home, my sister insisted that she shower first. She was sweatier than I since she had actually played in the game. I doubted the truth of that statement but had no choice but to wait. After I got out of the shower I noticed a missed call on my phone, "Subway" it read. That meant one of the twins had called from the landline at Subway. This in itself, was not unusual. They often called to chat when one of them was on the late shift, as closing the store could get quite boring. The other twin would usually go down there and sit at one of the tables and they'd occasionally call me and leave it on speaker. I just ignored it, figuring they'd understand that I had gone to bed, as I worked 8-4 the next day at my drugstore job. As I was readying myself and plugging my phone in for the night it rang again. "Paige" it said this time. I answered, figuring she was at Subway as well and something really exciting must have happened.

"Hello?" A choked sob responded from the other end.

"Are Taylor and Kaylee okay?"

"No, yes they're fine. It's Thomas. They think he's dead, and they think Lee killed him." More sobbing from the other side of the phone. Three voices this time. She was at Subway, and the twins were there. I had no time to process, her words made me feel like we'd just drifted around a corner, Frances long body kicking up dust, leaving me struggling to breathe and confused about which direction we were facing. My immediate thought was just 'Oh, so everything's fine.' But, of course it wasn't.

"Emily are you still there?" Taylor's voice this time. I wasn't sure. Was I still there? Where was I? I realized I had been silent for too long.

“Yeah, I’m here. I’m just thinking.”

“Yeah. Us too.” More sniffing. “Do you want to come to the store? Jeff let us close early, since the police were just here. Lee came in tonight for a seafood sandwich. So now we’re just sitting here. If you came in, we could go for a cruise” No. I didn’t want to come in. I didn’t really want to do anything, and I didn’t want to sit in Frances’ backseat and drive around the familiar streets, not talking. Frances was still our safe place.

“No. I think I need to stay here, I have to work in the morning.” Ever the responsible one. My concern was still work.

The crying on the other end intensified. Taylor’s voice again. “I was working tonight when he came. The cops questioned me. I thought he seemed a little out of it. And his clothes were so dirty.”

My mind wandered again. Of course, I’d noticed the dirt on his clothes too, but we lived in a farm town. It was far from unusual to see that on a person. He hadn’t seemed weird to me, and I couldn’t stop myself from wondering whether Taylor had applied meaning to something that didn’t really happen, and if she had doomed him worse than she knew.

“Hello?”

I had been silent again for too long.

“I’m still here. I’m just thinking. I saw him tonight at the ball field. We talked. He seemed normal. Do they *know* Thomas is dead?” I couldn’t bring myself to ask if they’d found a body.

Paige answered this time. “There’s no body yet. They have two suspects. Lee and Danny.” Danny was a couple years older than us, sleazy and a druggie. A dealer too. They were grasping at straws, thinking maybe Danny had killed him over an unpaid debt. I doubted that. Danny was a hard guy, and Thomas played varsity tennis. They didn’t really run in the same circles. Paige didn’t sound really convinced that there was more than one suspect either.

“No body though, that means he could still be alive.”

“Yeah. Maybe.” None of us really believed it.

“Listen guys, I have to go. We should take Frances out tomorrow when I’m off work. We can talk more then. I love you.”

A chorus of *I love you too*’s chimed through the phone. I needed to think. The rest of that night, and the days following passed in a blur.

They found a body. Gun shot through the head. Badly beaten. A motive was discussed: a dispute over a girl, Thomas’s girlfriend. Lee was arrested, found in Minneapolis about to get on that flight to Texas. Hell broke loose. Arguing, in-fighting among the town, blame was placed, talk of money and nepotism was tossed around. Riots were threatened.

I’ve been reading recently about a phenomenon called “solastalgia.” It’s used to refer to the feelings of nostalgia that occur when a place of solace, a park, river, or forest is destroyed or changed. Typically, this happens to a natural space after disaster, flood, or fire. Sometimes, people will continue to return to this place, but often, they go somewhere else. They seek these feelings of solace in a different place. To some extent, this is what I felt. That things were different, and the place I’d once felt safe enough to be

bored, no longer looked the same. At the local drugstore, where I worked, the conversations were shorter, more tainted with anger. People crossed the street to avoid one other, others stood in the street holding signs with their opinions scribbled in marker. I don't think anyone read them. Certainly no one cared. It became difficult to know what was safe to say in public, short fuses were common, and any difference of opinion might set it off. Small talk became nearly obsolete for a while. Stopping to chat got replaced with stopping to argue.

That summer, the clouds seemed to always be there, clinging to the corners of my vision and the edges of the horizon. A looming threat of the ever-possible storm about to break loose. The threat of rain made it so we couldn't really take Frances out much, even though we desperately needed a front-seat talk. Her brakes didn't work, and Central Avenue, around the Courthouse, was closed anyway. Everything looked different too, our drives were less pleasant. Greyer, sadder. The town that we had always held in low regard had melted from simply boring into completely unfamiliar. Even the places we cruised to most often: school, the tennis courts, Subway, looked different.

The girls and I threw our party, we were trying to be as normal as possible.

No one ever wished me happy birthday.

Later, the girls would only talk about what had happened in context to themselves. They were scared and upset because of their hand in it. Taylor had been at Subway the night it had happened. She'd talked to him. What if he'd gotten angry or suspicious, could she have been a target? Of course, they had known the boys, interacted, maybe even considered themselves friends. But they weren't as close. And they were better at compartmentalizing. One of their friends was dead, and someone they used to

know had done it. There wasn't any more to the story, and the Lee they knew was long gone. No reason to mourn. Every reason to be angry. We fought about it a lot. I was sad and they were angry, and those two things were incompatible.

Part Two

One especially grey morning, a few days later, I found myself on the tennis courts. The air was still damp, and the courts weren't yet baking in the sun. The air was warm and humid on my bare arms. Set to be another scorcher. Frances was nowhere to be found, the twins were late. This in itself wasn't unusual, they were often late to most things. Half an hour passed since they were supposed to be there, and they still hadn't showed. Normally, they would tell me if they couldn't make it to something.

I called Taylor and Kaylee picked up, but before she could say anything other than hello I interrupted.

"Are you guys still coming to tennis?" I joked.

"What?" Confusion, and a raspy sound like she'd been crying echoed in Kaylee's voice.

Something was wrong again. Only days had passed since the last time, and I didn't think it could get much worse.

"Kaylee what's wrong? Is everything okay?"

"Didn't you hear? There was an accident yesterday on our way home."

"Is everyone okay?" She told me she and Taylor were fine. A telling sign.

"The other driver" I asked? I didn't need to ask though. I already knew the answer.

Crying that sounded like screaming came from the other end that told all the truth I needed to know. A clang in parking lot snapped me back. My tennis racquet had fallen, forgotten, into the dust. It looked out of place there, its orange shell stunning against the grey dust, the grey sky and my grey thoughts. Like an exotic beetle behind the glass at a zoo.

The twins and Paige, the friend that had been at Subway with them, decided to go to Mankato, a slightly larger town 86 minutes away that had a real mall, to do some shopping. The three of them took the scenic route home, to avoid coming back as long as they could. By avoiding Highway 4 and sticking to the unnamed back roads it was possible to go much faster than one should since the roads are long, straight and rarely patrolled. They'd taken Paige's car. They never took Frances on these longer jaunts. Her engine was tired, not up for much more than short cruises. And she couldn't go very fast. Not very thrilling to drive the backroads going 30 miles an hour.

They blew a stop sign and t-boned another driver. Their car hit his gas tank. It exploded on impact, killing him almost instantly. He was a grandfather, he had two kids and six grandchildren, a wife, and was just weeks shy of retirement. Kaylee was in the back seat. She was not wearing her seatbelt, even though later she would tell everyone she was. When she got out, she discovered Paige, standing on the side of the road, staring at the flames, saying nothing. Kaylee then found Taylor trapped, knocked unconscious by the force of the airbag. The seatbelt had prevented her from going through the windshield but had bruised her chest so badly it would remain that way for weeks. When help arrived, the three of them were standing on the side of the road, looking at anything but the mess they had caused.

After she finished her story, I was crying. My wet cheeks were angry, sad and afraid at the same time. I was angry that they had been so careless, sad because a man was dead and afraid that if they had been driving Frances they would have been crushed beyond recognition by her weight.

They told me they had gone looking for a birthday present for me. We hadn't gone for a cruise that afternoon. They didn't want to drive. Instead, I climbed into their bed that night, me on the end, Taylor in the middle and Kaylee on the other end, like always. I felt like I was to blame. Or at the very least, that they were blaming me. If it was my fault they were driving in the first place, then they hadn't really done anything wrong. My guilt forced me to stay the night with them that night.

"I'm sorry." I whispered. Expecting no answer.

"It wasn't our fault"

"It was just an accident," repeated over and over again, like a lullaby until they fell asleep.

I felt like I didn't quite fit in their bed anymore. They fit together so perfectly, and now there was a space between us. One that would be impossible to fill, leaving me cold on the other side.

The girls were physically fine after the accident. They had a lot of bruising, but that's about it. Paige had essentially shattered her knee, but she too recovered. But suddenly, they felt different too. The first tragedy that I was still hung up on, had been overshadowed by something much closer to them, and something I could never understand. They had shared an experience that I wasn't part of, could never be part of, and a little bit of our relationship had broken because of it. Our cruises with Frances

became much less frequent, and I started riding in the back more. They didn't feel safe with all three of us in the front anymore. To a lot of people, even people outside of myself, their behavior looked a lot like they just brushed it off. But I knew them well, we had dealt with mistakes before. Admitting they were in the wrong was always something that was difficult for them, the two of them were always on each others' team so they'd back up their mistakes. In this case, pretending it hadn't happened was how they dealt with it for a long time. They had just neatly boxed it up and put in its compartment. This time, that compartment didn't include me, because I couldn't understand what they had gone through, instead Paige was invited in.

CHAPTER THREE

Fall 2016

Before, I was working at the local drugstore, which I gave up on pretty quickly that summer. I wanted to go somewhere more anonymous. When the same people came into the drugstore every day, they began to believe we were friends and that they could ask me anything.

“Did you know him?” Of course.

“Did you know the dead kid” Yes.

“I can’t believe he’s going to get away with it.” Or, “His mommy and daddy will just pay the judge off.” Or the worst, “That son of a bitch is lucky he’s safe in jail, because he wouldn’t survive two seconds out here, not if I had any say.” I would just sigh my way through the misguided and violent comments, wondering why none of them heard the way they sounded. I was tired of it, so I quit. The twins quickly convinced me to join them at Subway. It seemed less public and more fun, so it wasn’t long before I did.

One day that fall, I got a call from my mom while I was at Subway. It was a Saturday, mid-afternoon, warm, but finally not hot. I was supposed to be hanging out with the girls after my shift. They often brought Frances to pick me up after work.

“Be careful when you come downtown” My mom said from the other end. I rolled my eyes. She was always one to be overprotective, especially when it came to the girls driving me anywhere.

“I will mom, we always are.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. I’ve been hearing rumors. People who are angry about the trial, wanting to riot, blocking the streets, making sure he gets that guilty verdict.”

Huh. That was something I never thought I’d see in my little town, especially because the trial hadn’t even started yet.

“Why? Isn’t that sort of like...illegal?”

“Not necessarily,” my mom started to explain, but I interrupted her. I didn’t really want to hear it. I knew why. People saw his parents had a lot of money, thought they’d pay off the judge. It was something Taylor and Kaylee and I had fought about before. In a small town where there isn’t a lot of money, people that do have it are regarded with suspicion and malice. People thought he deserved a guilty a charge and the highest sentence he could get. I never asked if the twins thought he did it. They didn’t have a lot of money and it was a source of tension in our relationship, they were quick to judge those they thought were more privileged than themselves. That afternoon an announcement came over the radio at Subway. A curfew had been instituted. Everyone had to be home by 10pm. A place that I hated, but had once felt so safe, now seemed unrecognizable. Quieter, more isolated and more threatening. After my shift that day, the girls came and picked up me with Frances, like normal. But, instead of taking our usual route down Central Avenue, we decided to drive out of town. In our heads, we had taken Frances and driven off into the sunset. We didn’t talk much.

Later that fall, the trial finished. Guilty of second-degree manslaughter. He claimed he acted out of a sudden, violent and irresistible passion. A heat of the moment

killing. I still don't know if I believe him or not. But he carries a sentence of up to 50 years, Thomas is still dead, and the girls and I don't ever talk about it. We don't talk about the accident anymore either.

The weather the rest of that season took a turn for the worst. It had been an exceptionally wet year that year, flooding basements, businesses and fields all across the state. One stormy day we'd stupidly decided to take Frances out. Her windshield wipers couldn't keep so we parked at the tennis courts, just talking and turning the heat on when we got cold. Not an unusual experience for us. For months we had been talking about our impending college days. Taylor and I were going to go to the University of Minnesota together. Kaylee was going to a small, private school. She wanted the prestige, but we wanted a city, large and anonymous, full of boys, concerts and things to do. The two of us were going to take Frances to the city, where she'd thrive on the paved roads and real mechanics. We'd use her to pick up boys, cruise to concerts and impress everyone we met. It would be different than our tiny, boring corner of hell. We'd been unhappy there in a wild, too big for this place kind of way.

However, on this rainy day, I had to tell them I didn't want to go with Taylor anymore. Of course, I still did. Going to the city felt like my out, but it was too expensive. There wasn't any way I'd be able to pay for it.

"I don't think I can go to U of M with you Taylor," I said, staring out the window. Pointedly, very focused on the raindrops rolling off Frances' body.

Her head swiveled toward me, almost in slow motion. "What?"

"I don't think I can afford it. I can't justify paying out of state tuition and the really expensive housing fees." Taylor was angry, that much was clear.

“So, you’re just going to keep letting your parents run your life huh? They’re just going to keep controlling your money forever?”

An argument ensued. The twins often thought my parents were too strict in controlling my limited income, I tended to think they weren’t great at managing *their* limited income. They were right though, my decision was linked to the money and my parents had swayed my choice. There was a reason the girls thought my parents were too strict. They often were more concerned with my money than I’d like. I complained with the girls about my parents often, but most of the time, still did what my parents wanted. The girls thought I was a pushover, and in some ways, I was. I hated starting fights, so I’d take the easy way out. Taylor blamed me, who was she going to live with now? What was she going to do? Where was I going to go?

As the thunder rolled outside, Frances seemed to shake in the storm. I didn’t apologize and neither did she. Kaylee, of course, agreed with Taylor. I was being too cautious.

“Where are you going to instead? The community college?” I heard derision in her voice.

“No. I still want to leave. I hate it here. But going tens of thousands of dollars in debt to get out isn’t the right choice for me Taylor.” I responded with what I hoped was spite, but really it felt like sadness. Like a dream had died, and with it so too had our notion of us.

She felt like I was abandoning her. I just didn’t think she understood. More space between the three of us. She felt like the University of South Dakota (even though she didn’t know at the time that’s where I was going) was a cop out. Too close to home. Too

much the same. In some ways, she was right. It is really close to our home and Vermillion, where the college is located, is only about twice as big as Estherville. But in Vermillion I was able to be my own person. I was able to realize that idealized version of myself I had so long dreamed about. They weren't there, none of my old friends were there. It was just me, in a new state and new town where I was able to start over.

CHAPTER FOUR

Winter 2016

It was cold. The kind of damp cold that sinks deep, painfully into your skin. I was running late. Prom had since come and gone. It had been strange, being back there. Prom the year before had been the beginning of what was to come next. Standing back in that room, with the music pounding around my head, the lights flashing like memories brought a wave of sadness. Things had changed so permanently from that day and looking back on that girl from a year ago, so hopeful and so determined, to the girl that stood there today, alone, and more unsure. Taylor and Kaylee hadn't come to the prom.

With graduation nearing we had decided to spend more time together. We were going to have a sleepover, something we hadn't done in a long time. As the evening wore on, we all piled into Taylor's bed, a long-forgotten habit that had long since faded into a routine. Me on the end, Taylor in the middle, Kaylee on the far end.

"Are you sleeping?" A whisper in the dark.

"No, I can't."

"Should we pull Frances out?"

I found myself lying in the backseat. Sitting three of us on the bench seat felt too warm, we hadn't tried that in months. The backseat was cold on my bare arms, thousands of humid days left a permanent film over the cracked leather, the cold bringing a different dampness. I was wearing my sweatshirt like a blanket in the blasting heat of the car. My hand found a hole in the seat, put there by two gargantuan bulldogs, made bigger by my

wandering fingers that evening. It started wetly snowing, almost like rain, and still we drove. The girls were talking about something. I didn't know what.

Instead, my mind wandered to the day Frances came into our lives. The air was hot, sticky against my arms. I was at the tennis courts, and the sun beat down. The green of the pavement made the air seem even hotter than normal. The bounce of the ball of my racquet made rhythmic sound in the quiet air. Me, the mosquitoes and the sun were alone on the court, waiting. I was entertaining myself trying to beat my record of ball bounces.

The crunch of tires snapped me out of my counting. I caught the ball and turned around, only to come face to face with a car painted in the ugliest shade of green I had ever seen. It was pale, almost yellow, but mostly just a sickly green color. I laughed, that car had been sitting in a parking lot for months, and I had been begging my dad to buy it. He told me it wasn't sensible and was probably barely drivable, so to see it moving was really quite a sight. Two blonde heads peered out the windows, pale arms waving. They were ecstatic.

"What did you do?" My laugh rang out across the parking lot. The doors opened and out the girls tumbled, one holding two Blizzards from the Dairy Queen up the road. I ran over, retrieving my ice cream and still laughing.

"We bought a car, duh!"

"Yeah the ugliest old boat I've ever seen!" I teased.

"It doesn't have air conditioning or working speakers, but it has a bench seat"

One of the girls sang.

It didn't take long after that for us to decide we needed to take the thing for a cruise. Kaylee slid in, Taylor next, I got the other window seat. There was no question I'd

be sitting up front with them. The three of us passed ice cream back and forth, played our favorite songs and screamed along to the words.

Kaylee reached out and turned the speaker down, much to our disdain.

“Boo!”

“I love that song!” A chorus of teasing exploded.

“No guys listen, the car needs a name!”

“What should we call her?” Taylor asked. There was never any question she was a her.

Names were tossed out, favorite band members mentioned, song titles that could double as names, flowers. All met with rejection or many half-hearted maybes.

By this time we’d pulled off into a parking lot. The lot was in a tiny state park, surround by trees, pretty secluded. We used to walk up there all the time, but the addition of the car made our trip much shorter. We’d piled onto a bench swing where we had a full view of the car. We swayed gently in the breeze.

“What about Frances?” Taylor asked.

Frances the first was an old guitar of their dad’s, one who missing several strings and wasn’t really playable. We didn’t know where that name came from.

Glancing back over at the car, we quickly determined Frances the second was the perfect name. Over time, Ft2 became just Frances, as we saw her much more often than the guitar. From that moment on the rest of our summers and free hours had so much more potential. Frances almost never got left behind. She carried us to lakes, ball fields, sleepovers and many, many cruises. She was our hang out, almost like another friend.

Now, back with Frances, this time in the back seat I couldn't help but think about what had happened. Frances hadn't made many trips out of the garage in the last few weeks, she'd been retired there for the winter. The twins had bought a new car, a small white thing. Frances had been replaced with something deemed more sensible. I was many things, sad, nostalgic, desperate to not let go of Frances and the memories. Already, it was like I had lost something, those warm days, sitting on her bench seat, going nowhere, just driving, seemed so long ago it was like a dream. Those warm days replaced instead with one quiet drive through the abandoned town in the middle of the night. The stoplights in town turn off at midnight. It was well past that, instead they flashed, a forlorn cry for help across a dark street. I didn't respond.

Frances was returned to the garage.

Graduation day came and went.

EPILOGUE:

Things didn't fall apart immediately after high school. In fact, I'm not sure they ever fell apart at all. The summer after graduation we were still close, even when I think back to it, there wasn't any doubt in my mind that we would always be friends. Our relationship was just quieter those days, more easily interrupted and new friends came into the circle. That summer, our cruises in Frances were infrequent. Her gas bills were expensive, she wasn't exactly safe, and Kaylee had bought a different car. Newer, smaller, white. It had air conditioning, seatbelts and automated windows. It never got a name.

When we finally left for college our lives took three drastically different directions. Moving made me feel equal parts exposed and alone, suddenly there wasn't anyone I knew walking down the street anymore. However, I quickly made friends and started dating a good Christian boy. I call him that because that's what Taylor and Kaylee referred to him as after I told them about him, and they didn't really approve. My friends and I didn't really go to concerts (the holy grail of coolness for the twins) and I didn't really try anything crazier than drinking at a frat party. Not exactly the wild college days I had envisioned, but I was happy. Taylor moved to the city and struggled to pay for her school. She too made friends and was happy, but ultimately decided the money wasn't worth it and moved back home to the community college.

Kaylee on the other hand, had quite a different experience at college. She hated it there from the beginning. It was on a block system and she hated the structure, had too much free time and not enough to do. She planned to leave at Christmas, transfer to USD

with me. But then, she too started seeing a boy, about as far from a good Christian boy as you can get. Wealthy, from New York City, a bit of player and into hard drugs. He manipulated her, sucked up all of her time and then got kicked out of school after she had committed to staying to be with him. She dropped out.

They both ended up back in Estherville the January after we graduated high school.

Then their father passed away, and perhaps being home turned out to be a blessing. They were rightfully devastated, and I was sad, so sad for them. But I didn't know what to do, I'd never really dealt with that kind of death before, I went back for the funeral. I felt like I had to, but I never really reached out after that. Frances appeared at the funeral, a last homage to their dad and the car he teased us mercilessly about. After that, I withdrew not only from them, but from everyone I knew in town. I was already coming back way less often than they were, and many of our other high school friends never left, so they still saw each other often. I would almost never come home on weekends, and when I was back over breaks I wanted to see my family. Not drink with my old friends. I felt on some level that they resented me for my absence, which only made it harder to return.

Later I learned they felt like I had moved on and left them without even saying goodbye. Looking back, I see why they thought that. Because I kind of did. I burned a lot of bridges, many of which will never be repaired. I wasn't angry with them, not when I left and not now. I was just following my dream of getting out and they got left behind because they had gone back. I had successfully done what we'd talked about for so long, and I felt they had failed me. They always say you can never go home again. I can always

go back physically, but it will never be the way it was again. I've come to realize narrowing the world into people who move and people who stay leaves too much grey area in between for the people like me. The ones who move because they have to but are heartbroken when it comes to really leaving. With the distance I've gained, I realized I was not the best friend I could have been to these people, but I think ultimately, we are better off without each other. The girls are happier now, I think there is less pressure on them now that they've settled back into a routine, and they are able to be closer to each other. I am no longer competing to be the third member of their troop.

Frances sits in a sunny field now, spending her last days wasting away in the sun. The night we drove through pouring rain in the early hours of the morning was really the last time I ever saw her. They retired her after that. She sits parked now, in a grassy field that belongs to the twins' grandma. Perhaps someday someone will come along and repair her the way she deserves. I don't blame the girls for moving on. She wasn't very safe and used a lot of gas. We had a good run, but we had all moved up. I am sad to leave the town, my childhood and my friends behind, but like Frances, everything must be put out to pasture eventually, out somewhere in a sunny field, where it will rest until it fades away, leaving a beautifully rusted shell of memory in her place.

ARTIST STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The small town holds an almost mythological position in American life and culture; from movies to books to photos to tv, it has been represented on every side of the spectrum, good to bad. When I set out on my project, my goal was to portray what I thought was the “reality” of small-town life. Essentially, that they are horrible places, wracked with scandal, tragedy, betrayal, boredom and sadness. I thought the glamorous, heroic versions I was seeing on TV were fake, and the idyllic versions I was reading about in books (you know the ones, where the quiet girl gets the football player and they live happily) were unrealistic. I thought I alone knew the truth, and I was ready to expose my personal hell to the world.

A quick search through Google or any number of databases will reveal an abundance of literature over the “small town myth.” Some of these papers focus on real towns, many of them consider the implications of a fictional town on the real world. Yet one theme I kept noticing in my readings was this concept of the “small town myth” or “ideal.” One place where this type of thinking is very evident: politics. Since I’ve spent most of my life in Iowa, I am very familiar with this trope. The Iowa caucuses are one of the first chances of “winning” presidential hopefuls get. For years, and especially recently, I’ve noticed a trend amongst candidates appealing to what they believe are our “small town beliefs.” As if these values are exclusive to towns smaller than 30,000 people. Hard work, dedication, kindness, neighborliness; these are things that are attributed to the town. The candidates also portray themselves as these things. Being from

a small town is a virtue many of them wear like a badge of honor, because those attributes associated with the small town (especially the hard-working Midwest) are traits to value (Thomma). Yet I struggled to see any evidence of those things in my own life.

Of course, in the year since I started this project, a lot of my thoughts have shifted. I've grown as a person, gained some much-needed distance and undergone a major perspective shift. The project became less of an exposé and more of an exploration of personal identity. Writing about some of the worst times in my life, especially from the perspective of the best time of my life, has made me realize how much those experiences shaped my life. About a year ago, I decided to start thinking about how I could best share my story with the world, and so "The Art of Saying Goodbye" was born. After a lot of reading, research, thinking and reshaping, I came to realize there were frameworks that needed to be pulled into my writing, which I will cover throughout the rest of this essay. They shape the direction of my story, and in fact changed the entire outlook of the story I was telling. The following paper will focus on the reason I chose a memoir project, the importance of place attachment and a thread focusing on the use and distinction of solastalgia.

MEMOIR:

I set out on this project because I felt like I had a story people could relate to. Perhaps it ended up being less dramatic and painful than I originally thought, but nonetheless I thought there was something there, I just needed a way to express it. I found my outlet, and something that really interested me during my undergraduate career when I took a class where we focused on creative non-fiction. The focus of the class was more

on news writing and how to make people and event profiles worth reading, and then we were to try our hand at writing our own. I had long since fallen in love with the writing type. A voracious reader as a kid, nonfiction was something I never really dove into. Up until that class (and admittedly much later than I would have liked) I thought it was boring. There was no way nonfiction was going to be able to keep me as absorbed as the typically dynamic fiction I was reading did. I was a fan of thrillers and mysteries but reading people's accounts of events that actually happened I ended up finding very thrilling. Two pieces that stuck out to me were Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" and "Deep In With David Carradine." I liked these pieces because they encapsulated what I wanted to portray. In one, a personal struggle and the other, the fascinating behavior of a person you can't understand, complete with a material possession that so clearly defines that person. I had a set of old friends who I had lost touch with, and I wanted to write my profile in that class about them. I was struggling with the fact that we didn't talk anymore, and they had a unique material possession that changed the course of our relationship.

In the case of "David Carradine" and in my story, that possession happened to be a car. I speculate, as Laurence Gonzales did this is because the car is a symbol of *something* in America. Especially in rural America. People get attached to them. According to Linda Robinson, the car has always been represented in small town America as a symbol of progress: that the world is moving forward (Robinson 177). In her essay, she dives into how the portrayal of those cars shifted from a scary symbol of progress to a status symbol of progress. I believe the people portrayed in both my essay

and Gonzales' essay adopted the vehicle as a symbol of status and power. The recognizable car becomes almost synonymous with a personality.

The story I wrote in that class, about the girls and the cars, became the seed of the piece I am writing about now. *The Art of Saying Goodbye* was born from the times I sat down and realized I would much rather work on my story than write the thesis I set out to do. After my piece for my class got published, I realized maybe there is potential to turn this little thing I enjoyed into something more than just a hobby (of sorts). Thus, I began reading memoirs and looking into what writing a short memoir would look like.

The same semester I started working on my thesis, Karen Salyer McElmurray happened to be a visiting professor at the University of South Dakota. McElmurray is a published memoirist. Talk about luck. Through one of my classes I was given the opportunity to interview her, my luck continued. Many of our questions were very generic: where are you from? How did you "end up" in South Dakota. Then, two things happened that have since really stuck with me. First, she had been talking about why she chose to write a particular story. One about a unique old man in her hometown. She described it as "a piece of the homeplace that always stuck with me." That stuck out to me, because I had been feeling a strange little tug back to my homeplace during the class, it was what I knew best and where both of the story drafts I started came from.

The second came at the end of our interview. A classmate asked her "why was [her] story important to tell?" She responded that it was more of personal story, but one that ultimately contains a "lesson"; that you have the courage to change your life and accept and facilitate that change. She told us that while the story was personal, *the feeling* was something many people could see themselves reflected in. It was then that I realized

memoir is more than just one person's account. Instead, it is the way the hardest, funniest, dirtiest, most exciting moments of our lives are also the moments that other people experience and can benefit from reading.

When I started this project, I had read very few memoirs, but I felt like I alone knew the true experience of a teenage girl who wanted out. I had fantasies of my writing changing people's perspectives about small towns, teenagers and friendship. After a couple years of growing, a few apologies and a wedding, I realized many people have lived a similar experience to myself, and I shouldn't be so selfish. Honestly, I still haven't read as many memoirs as I should have in preparation. But the few I did read, and the many pieces of people-profiling journalism I took inspiration from further cemented the idea McElmurray planted in my mind: my experience may not be as unique as I thought, but I can *tell* the story.

PLACE ATTACHMENT

Before I could tell the story, I needed a little insight into what I was actually talking about. But, since I am rather bullheaded, I thought I already had that framework. In fact, I wrote an entire first draft, which I then edited into a second draft, before stumbling upon a concept that made me want to throw the whole thing out. I started work at the Vermillion Area Chamber and Development Company and on my fourth day, they handed us all a book; "This is Where You Belong" by Melody Warnick. I started reading it mostly because I wanted to make a good impression, but the focus of the book was on something called "place attachment." Primarily, how to develop it and how to become "place attached." However, the first chapter of the book focused primarily on

what place attachment was, and the difference between someone who is a “mover” and someone who is a “stayer.” To summarize the chapter, place attachment is exactly what it sounds like: how connected, attached or loyal to your place you are. Often that translates into staying where (or at least near) where you live (Warnick). Before I started this project, I considered myself a mover.

In her book, Warnick comments on the belief I held about the people who *didn't* leave or want out. She says, “to the modern imagination, people who never leave their hometown are viewed with suspicion—seen as unadventurous at best, pathetic at worst” (Warnick 15). She sums up how I felt, and that was the lense through which I wrote my first draft. The belief that I was somehow more successful than my peers who had chosen not to leave influenced my story’s perspective. Even though, in the grand scheme of things, I hadn’t gone far.

Barcus and Brunn further examine the term place attachment, from more of a numbers angle. They hoped to elucidate the argument that place attachment could mean either roots or imprisonment and narrowmindedness. They set about doing a study on a family reunion in a small town in eastern Kentucky. The town was chosen for its relative racial homogeneity, rural location, strong family ties, and abundance of previously-available literature. The researchers then examined, through a series of questions, if people felt attached to their area, if they’d left, if they wanted to leave and the reasoning behind their choices. Warnick, Barcus and Brunn all qualify that place-attachment is rather hard to quantify, due to it being more of a “feeling” than a measurable quality (Warnick 4; Barcus and Brunn). They categorized the large group they were studying into three sub-groups: rooted in place, tied to place and mobile but attached. The rooted in

place group is characterized by individuals who remain in place by choice, with little interest in moving away. They tend to use positive descriptors when talking about their place. The group labeled as “tied to place” tended to move more frequently, feel less attached and be more restricted by income, they were also the least positive in describing their home place. However, the third group, mobile but attached, tended to have strong place-attachments but move frequently for employment, education or familial opportunities, disproving the common belief that place attachment means staying.

Overall, the researchers discovered movement and place attachment are not dichotomously linked, but rather are related across an expansive network of variables (Barcus & Brunn 43). They revealed complex relationships between being a “mover” and a “stayer,” showing that “long-term immobility is chosen by a few respondents, but imposed, either economically or socially, on many others. For those that choose to remain in place, family and friend networks, involvement with social organizations such as churches and leadership positions within these assorted social groups are important to satisfaction, positive perceptions, and continued residence” (Barcus & Brunn 44). This is one definitive example of the long-held belief that residence term does not reflect strong attachment, rather “one’s perceived social and familial standing or importance within the community and the quality of individual relationships” are a much more accurate gauge of place satisfaction (Barcus & Brunn 44).

I believed staying was bad. Staying meant you’d failed. I believed, like Warnick, that moving would somehow make me into the fullest, happiest, best version of myself, “moving offered absolution for whatever failures I’d amassed” (Warnick 2). However, after reading her book, and following through her journey, and my own move, as well as

reading studies and personal stories (both through Warnick's book and on my own) I found that this is often not the case. We start over in a new place and the same problems kept creeping in. Warnick's book attempts to give the reader a roadmap to loving their place, but I found it also functioned as a roadmap to letting go of the disdain I'd held for a long time and gave insight into how to *forgive* a place.

SOLASTALGIA

Part of the reason I felt I needed to leave, and ultimately what I needed to forgive is the blame I placed on the town and a couple bad events for everything that had ever gone wrong in my life. Of course, with some distance (and after writing a thirty-page rant) I realized this is not exactly the case. My research into place attachment led me to an interesting phenomenon known as "solastalgia," also something that is essentially exactly how it sounds: solace nostalgia. In a case study, solastalgia is defined as "the loss of solace associated with an unwanted transformation of one's homeplace" (Larter et al. 496). This could be through fire, flood, hurricane, tornado etc. The only "requirement" is that the place be visibly changed and usually lacking something from its beginning.

The case study I mentioned examined the feelings of attachment to Point Pleasant Park in Halifax, Canada after it was nearly destroyed by a hurricane. Point Pleasant Park was well loved park that had both recreational and historical significance to the residents. Hurricane Juan swept through the area, the historical buildings and forts weathered the storm. However, the park was left looking nearly unrecognizable after the loss of many trees and most of the canopy cover. The study set out to determine how long feelings of solastalgia may linger after a destructive event and whether long term park users were

able to overcome their feelings to restore meaningful place attachment, especially relative to short-term users of the park (Larter et al. 499). Overall, most long-term users demonstrated a stubborn resolve to enjoy the park in spite of the event that had changed it permanently, and short-term users (many of whom started using the park post-Juan) felt less attached and were more likely to seek the benefits provided by Point Pleasant elsewhere. While these findings are not entirely surprising, they highlight the importance that place-attachment holds in determining the long-term use, restoration and feeling of a place after a disaster. The long-term users sought to return to the place they loved and to, if not return it to its former glory, enjoy it as is.

Typically, solastalgia is associated with a physical change, a natural disaster or landscape-changing accident. My argument, however, is that solastalgia can also occur due to a shocking community event, a violent murder or a school shooting; something that fundamentally changes the way you view your town. I sought to explain this feeling through my story, as I think a traumatic event, or even loss of a childhood friend, pet, parent or grandparent can fundamentally change your view of your homeplace. In my example, my small town was rocked by an unexpected and violent death involving two students at my high school. Many people, myself included, suddenly felt like the safety, seclusion and “it couldn’t happen here” mentality was gone. The place, our homeplace, where most of us felt secure, was definitively changed.

As someone who already didn’t feel attached to the place in the way the long-term park users were, my desire to leave was certainly heightened. I felt like one of the short-term park users: this park is no longer what it once was, I need to find a new to satisfy my needs. I was sure I was a mover, and I was ready to move out. I no longer had the same

benefit and attachment to the town as before. However, I later read another college student's short memoir about leaving for college but needing to return home after Hurricane Katrina. At first, she wanted nothing more than to leave again, and when I started this paper that's where I was too. I was desperate to never go back. Yet, at the end of her memoir she stays in Franklinton. She calls Katrina not her "small town syndrome's worst nightmare" but rather, it's cure. When I started this journey, I was sure I'd never get there. I was sure my place was permanently ruined.

CONCLUSION

In the second-to-last chapter of Warnick's book, she explores what to do about the Bad Things in a town, the shocks and stresses that put pressure on a town. She explains shocks as more sudden and violent and stresses as the subtler pressures a city faces (224). She wrote her book from Blacksburg, Virginia, the site of the April 16th, Virginia Tech shooting. While she moved there after the event, she still explores how to feel attachment to a place when something bad or scary happens. Her commandments are essentially: plan, don't worry, and stay. For a 16-year-old watching a close friend get arrested and then nearly losing three more to an accident, I couldn't plan, I certainly worried, and perhaps worst: I didn't stay. I didn't let my place make-up for it, and I didn't take-action to fix it either. I ran.

Davana, the young lady from Louisiana who was forced to return home after Hurricane Katrina put it best;

Something had changed, and I was on the brink of seeing it clear for the first time. Hurricane Katrina forced me to go home and face my problems. She took away my only escape, and because of it I had to deal with the issues I wanted to run from. Do I like it? No. Do I still want to run? Most definitely, but now I realize

that I was jeopardizing things in my life that are far more important than my idealistic freedom... I know now that I could have easily alienated myself from the people I needed the most (Wilkins 85).

Except unlike Davana I never went back. I didn't return to my homeplace. Of course, I visited, but it wasn't until recently that I truly reconciled with it, and by then it was much too late. I had distanced myself permanently from all the friends, and even a few family members, I used to know. I let my feelings of loss and desire to escape win, though even still I am not particularly sad about it.

McElmurray also left my classmates and I with a quote. She said, "until you're willing to go to the hardest places your writing won't be worth a damn." When I left, I let go of all the place attachment I had ever felt and instead focused on the loss I was feeling. I was sure my home was the hardest place. When I was seventeen, it was the worst place I could imagine. Later though, when I started on my project, and started thinking about it, I realized that I was wrong. It was hard and horrible and kind of awful to talk about it, but I think in the messy there was also beauty. Sort of like growing up: hard, messy, but exciting and interesting, but not while you're in the thick of it. After a lot of research and reflecting, I decided the direction of my paper could be better served creating a narrative that reflects that experience that more people could understand. And so, that is the truth I have discovered on my journey: sometimes, to truly learn the value of a place, you have to say goodbye, no matter how painful. Sometimes, only after that can you reconcile your feelings of solace lost or recognize yourself as a stayer.

WORKS CONSULTED

- Barcus, Holly R., and Stanley D. Brunn. "Towards a Typology of Mobility and Place Attachment in Rural America." *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1/2, Spring/Fall 2009, pp. 26–48. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=53329642&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Dowgiewicz, Kathryn. "Small Towns and Rural Communities: Patriotism's Progress." *Xchanges*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1–7., doi:1558-6456.
- Gonzales, Laurence. "Deep In With David Carradine." *The Still Point*, University of Arkansas Press, 1989, pp. 3–29.
- Khair, Tabish. "The Cosmopolitanism of Small Towns ." *American Book Review* , vol. 36, no. 6, 2015, pp. 4–5. *ProjectMUSE*, doi:doi.org/10.1353/abr.2015.0105.
- Krasner, James. "Accumulated Lives: Metaphor, Materiality and the Homes Of the Elderly ." *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2005, pp. 209–230. *Project Muse*, doi:doi.org/10.1353/lm.2006.0008.
- Larter, Patrick, et al. "Does Time Heal All Wounds? Restoring Place Attachment in Halifax's Point Pleasant Park after Hurricane Juan ." *The Canadian Geographer* , vol. 63, no. 3, 2019, pp. 494–506. , doi:10.1111/cag.12542.
- Leitner, Helga. "Spaces of Encounters: The Politics of Belonging in Small-Town America." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 102, no. 4, 2012, pp. 828–846. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/00045608.2011.601204.
- McElmurray, Katherine. Interview. 22 Feb. 2019.
- Noah, Trevor. *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*. Spiegel & Grau, an Imprint of Random House, 2019.
- Orwell, George. "Shooting an Elephant." *The Orwell Foundation*, Orwell Foundation, 1936, www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/shooting-an-elephant/.
- Porter, Ryan. "Saying Goodbye to Mariposa: Robertson Davies's Deptford and the Small-Town Convention ." *SCL/ELC*.
- Robinson, Linda A. "Nostalgia Four Ways: Mid-Century Hollywood's Representation of the Automobile in Turn-of-the-Century Small-Town America." *Popular Culture Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2017, pp. 170–209., doi:10.1023/A:1025103902708.

- Thomma, Steven. "Small-Town America - the Myth and the Reality." *Mcclatchy*, McClatchy Washington Bureau, 21 Aug. 2011, www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/article24694813.html.
- Todd, Anne Marie. "Saying Goodbye to Friends: Fan Culture as Lived Experience." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 44, no. 4, Aug. 2011, pp. 854–871. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00866.x.
- Warnick, Melody. *This Is Where You Belong*. Penguin Random House , 2017.
- Webb, Shelia. "A Pictorial Myth in the Pages of 'Life': Small-Town America as the Ideal Place S." *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 28, no. 3, Apr. 2006, pp. 35–58. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23416170>.
- Wilkins, Davana Jolene. "Small Town Syndrome's Worst Nightmare." *Southern Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 3, Spring 2006, pp. 84–85. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=21253595&site=ehost-live&scope=site.