

There Becomes Home



Anadarko rests on the banks of the Washita, downriver a ways from the place where the Seventh Cavalry descended on Black Kettle's band of Cheyennes. Blood flowed past Caddo and Kiowa and Wichita homes through Oklahoma, red earth, rushing toward the Red River and redemption. The Baptists, still hell-bent on saving savages a hundred years later, commissioned my parents to Wichita Mission in hopes of finishing the job. Anadarko—home of Indian City USA, of the Redskin Theater, of my Aunt Bertha Pickard who endured it all—is not my home just because I was born there. There becomes home when you learn to walk on your own two feet, when you call the dogs and they come, when you survive the killing fever.

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"Where you from?"

"South Dakota," I said, "Rapid City."

"I've been there." He smiled. "Stopped at Mt. Rushmore on the way to Yellowstone. Took lots of pictures. Seemed like it'd be a nice place to grow up."

Yes, I thought to myself, but there's more to it than colonial meditations at the Shrine of Democracy, pilgrim. Your drive-by shootings aimed low and missed the backyard barbecues, the tree fort, the sledding in winter, the funerals for favored gerbils, and

the spectacular view from the top of the hill, looking down on the Interstate and your tiny car speeding by too fast to notice me there. There becomes home when you no longer crave carved monuments to strangers.

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Santa Cruz was not my home when I moved there from Berkeley, hired to teach neo-hippies about neo-Indians and to write. The land is seductive but expensive, the sea is inviting but cold, the weather is pleasant but boring, and most of the people are in love with all the wrong things. I've endured their cultured taunts defaming midwestern lives and have wondered aloud whether I should quit this project. But the escape from homelessness came on a cool evening after I had put my things in storage and finished scrubbing down my vacant quarters. I conjured up the two women who displaced my dreams, and I revisited my dead-of-night walk away from self-destruction; I heard the birds sing in the eucalyptus one last time, and I found myself at home, in that moment, right there. There becomes home, don't you see, when your ineffable past catches up with you, when you're embraced by the singular beauty of remembering.

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Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished.

Chief Seattle