

UVic Diversity Writing Contest 2012, Personal Narrative Second-Place Winner

By Jordan Konyk

Returning

When I stepped out of the plane and walked into the crisp Calgary expanse I felt myself feeling as if I had *returned*. Then two weeks later, as I strode onto the damp tarmac in Victoria, I felt it again. I had *returned*. Where did this come from? A feeling never experienced at that level, lying dormant for eighteen years, rushing out twice in as many weeks? An evolution of my concept of home, of belonging, and of perspective, waiting for the changes needed to reveal itself.

Our connections to the land have always been important. There was often very little distinction between *us* and *land*. When hunting, foraging, fishing and migration were our realities there was little that separated us from our surroundings. Where you lived influenced what you could eat, what you could do, and how, or, more aptly *if*, you could survive. Society organized itself in ways that emphasized this connection to the land, to the elements, and to place. With the passing of time, mechanisms evolved; religion, storytelling, science, spirituality, and culture acted like colossal golden ringed monocles, reflecting, magnifying and skewing our narratives of the past for our experience in the present. Adam rose from the earth, the rains were spirits, lightning was punitive, and we intertwined with “Mother Earth” from the moment of our births to the final scoop of dirt scattered onto our graves.

This connection has faded. Our relationship with the land is nonessential in influencing our survival. A gap has formed. It’s a gap between physical necessity and spiritual connection. It’s a gap I’m slowly beginning to discover. When I don’t rely on my knowledge of “home” for survival, when I am able to travel great distances and live in different areas, how do I know where I belong?

The drive from my parents snowy acreage near Calgary to the family farm, cozy among the sand hills of southern Manitoba, is a long one. For twelve hours the prairies unfold and evolve, the sun rises and sets, the winds gale and whisper, and the clouds simmer. On this drive you can watch Canada unfold past your window. The drive begs to be a time of reflection. From behind my frosty backseat window I began to think of where I called *home*. I ticked off the pros and cons of Calgary and Victoria, of Alberta and British Columbia, of University and summer jobs. I wondered if time mattered more than choice. If weather built character or stymied happiness. If I liked mountains or oceans. Snow or rain? Family or friends?

Then it occurred to me. Belonging isn’t something you rationalize. There is no formula that makes you feel at home. And as you grow, you expand and spread your reach. Your home has no choice but to do the same. Home is plural. Home isn’t limited to one place, one bed where you first slept or one kitchen where you first learned to bake. Home is an element contained within you, a grounding that fills anywhere you go with a sense of familiarity. Home, when

experienced from the inside, leads you through foreign crowds and guides you through unknown mountains. Home snaps into place the moment you touch down in a new, a foreign, or a familiar city. Home is what washes over you and tells you that you've finally *returned*.

We all have different homes. We come from every prairie and jungle and delta and shoreline in the world. We know different people, speak different languages and see the world through different beliefs. But in the end, we are all looking for, in every adventure we join, every class we take, and every word we write, to find our home among others. When we open up ourselves and spread our joy, passion, and eccentricity it's like we're opening up a door to our home. To me, diversity means the opening of doors, the welcoming into homes and the spread of the feeling of having *returned*.