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A PLACE CALLED PLACE: MIGRATIONS

Enter the beginning of the world and a shattered silence. It's been lively ever since. The human species clamors most, shouting and shifting and trying to prove a point; even in the act of love we whoop it up. Is there flux in the oceans, flight in the sky? Birds bluster and every dolphin sings, every whale spouts, clicks, whistles, and pulses. Life implies commotion, so we invent earplugs and develop a knack for parietal art, find a cave, and paint.

Cry—we wake crying—slapped silly into taking a breath, made to gulp air so we don't lie there a blob of fleshy nothing, unmoving and unmovable. The slap is what does it, and each day we're slapped again into taking a breath, into moving from one spot on our timeline to another. It's a heck of a way to live, jolted awake just as we're getting comfortable, but if it weren't for this, we would grow roots at birth and send them straight through to the earth's mantle, lands would go unexplored and planets would remain nameless, so who, pray tell, would care about a mountain top, who the moon?

Corn casts a long shadow in Iowa—150 years and growing. It's a living thing, corn, and straight the rows. Fields stretch for miles, broken by a line fence, a house and yard, driveway, all cordoned off between two highways or rural roads, country mile by country mile. Here a dugway, there a gate, and stark above the green and brown lies blue.

In winter, trampled segments in the middle of snow-covered fields signal one thing: deer crossings and sleepings, as also evidenced by the narrow side by side sets of hoof prints leading from road to field.

Migration, someone said, is lateral movement from one place to another. Corn shooting toward the stars in its savage growth does not migrate, according to this definition; trees don't migrate as a whole: forests stick around. A tree, the solid thing, hosts movement within with its xylem and phloem, sap zipping through those living fibers, and nourishing it, but it moves not, neither does it take flight or run on raised roots in the likes of the fantastical Treebeard of Tolkien fame.

NONFICTION

An exception might be made in the case of a neighbor's hardwoods which have unwillingly migrated to a lumber yard in preparation for a furniture factory then on to someone's living room. Those trees have migrated—moved and shapeshifted, and now serve a new purpose. But perhaps this is better called a transmogrification, or even a transfiguration, but no, that may be too spiritual for this discussion. Simply, that which was grounded has become commercial property, as is often the case.

Black farmers settled Iowa in the early 1850's, some as free and some as fugitive slaves. But continuing discrimination at local venues eventually drove most away, and today only a few dozen remain; this people group has moved to more welcoming situations—they've migrated—and who can blame them?

Then the question arises, is forced migration true migration? Did my Great Grandmother migrate from the Southeastern U.S. to Missouri in the Cherokee's mandatory leaving along the Trail of Tears? Is a constrained journey the same as a casual stroll for one's health or a relocation closer to kin?

A small stream trickled along the crease at the bottom of the hill. This was at the end of high school, at a new place. An ice cold spring bubbled from the ground at the lowest point of our thirty Missourian wooded acres in 1999. And now, in Iowa, behind the house and between the hills, a stream runs where the cattle roam, where I snowshoe in winter and trek for morels in mid-spring. Growing up, we had no stream in a backyard, but we had a pump handle that had to be primed.

Time marches on, as the saying goes and goes and goes. Time and circumstance usually equals movement. I have migrated far from Martin-Luther-Straße, from a wet midwife-delivered newborn in an apartment above a chocolatier in the small Bavarian town of Ansbach. I currently live too far from my German mother and American father, now migrated to Arizona. I've moved and changed, grown tall by woman-standards, migrated in every sense of the word, in growth and movement, progress and hurts and failures too. Nobody knows what you've been through, so let's not overwhelm them all at once, I occasionally say to myself in the mirror. Sometimes I have an answer for that, but mostly not. Sometimes I rehearse the fact that "every good road leads somewhere" and a hill was made to

be climbed. At least that's the answer I give to the immigrating wrinkles I didn't have yesterday; and for the bleariness of eye, this is what I say to myself in the mirror, all in the name of movement, all in the course of time.

Cattle migrate from hill to dale to hill again outside my windows. Sheep migrate from one end of a small pasture to the other. Currents move; a river's substance migrates perpetually. Beneath or inside the earth, surrounding the core, the magma oceans flow and move—there is fluidity. Even crystals change shape when atoms migrate. The atmosphere and environment precipitates landform movement; glaciers scrape and hollow out, realign masses of earth, and continents transform over the long span.

The end of movement is death. But even in death is transition: flesh to dust, and who knows where the spirit goes, where it flies? (*Bear your shoulder, breath of God—turn toward us and shimmy.*)

Migration is an opaque thing, clear enough in the light but slightly muddled upon closer examination, rather like a winter begun on snowshoes and finished on a slalom course. Life lives out this way, face in the wind, with the occasional lull for catching one's breath, but there is movement, always movement. Adaptation, ah, adaptation, happens the moment we melt into movement's embrace: a vulture adrift on the current above the tree line, the raptor riding the updrafts and occasionally adjusting its wing flaps for maximum efficiency. It exerts little effort yet continues to rise and circle, higher and higher, northward with the wind, a slow and steady pace, circle, lift, drift. It has adapted to its surroundings and become part of its place; this sort of adjustment keeps us sane in the midst of so much change.

At the end we mark a million moments in time, ten thousand wings in the air, singing as birds do. Chance after opportunity after decision, over and over again. This is what we call day, days, hours, and a lifetime. The fluidity of life is movement, and to move is to migrate, and to live.