

My Town

Jennifer R. Nichols

I took a walk in the evening, waiting for the rest of my family to figure out what they wanted to do for dinner or entertainment. The sky hadn't darkened yet, but the air was cool. A gentle breeze swept past me bringing the recognizable scent of lavender, and making me think of all the things I've missed since moving away from this place. The annual Lavender Festival supported by farms like Purple Haze, Rainbow Farms, as well as many others, is quickly becoming a tradition here. I will always think of this as my town, even though I haven't lived here in five years. It is still home, and will always be home.

In high school there was always the kid in every class who would say, "I am going to leave this place as soon as I graduate and never come back." At Sequim High School I heard this a lot. When I visit, I see these same kids, now grown up, serving burgers at Tootsie's—the local burger shack, or working the car wash. I never dreamed of leaving, yet I did and the town has grown.

I try to visit every few months, and each time I come back, I see reminders of how long I've been away. There are new buildings, most built by giant corporations like Big5, Home Depot, and Wal*Mart. There are new restaurants like Applebee's and Jack in the Box. What I see around me in Lacey and Tacoma has invaded my town like a disease. Every new corporation seems to spawn a dozen more. I wonder if ten years from now, I will be able to point out anything I remember from my childhood.

My walk tonight takes longer than I thought it would. It's been awhile since I traveled the loop of roads that will take me back to my parent's place. The last time I did, I was riding a bicycle, and that makes a difference. The gravel sticks in the bottom of my shoes as I shift back to concrete. I know my family must be waiting for me now. I've taken too long. The sky is starting to reveal the stars, and the night sky is still clear and unpolluted enough to see them.

I think about how humorous it is that the city limits will eventually include my parents' house any year now. It's funny because they have a pair of peacocks,

and a dozen chickens, that will have to be grandfathered into the city. The chicken shed made with nailed together pallets probably won't meet city code either, and will also be grandfathered in. The shed barely meet the county code.

I remember when my brothers and I watched as my dad came into the house holding a little piece of yellow paper. It was an official looking form. We all peered at it with curiosity. "He waits for me to build the damn thing, and then tells me it's too close to the mail box. The chicken shed isn't within the postal regulations." My mom thought this was all very funny, and laughed which made my dad even angrier. "This isn't funny. I have to move it, or we'll be fined."

My Mom just shrugged and added, "Well, I guess you better move it then."

So, my Dad hitched it up to a truck and pulled it back a few feet further from the mailbox. The whole structure shook so much we all thought the pallets would come unhinged, and he'd have to build it all over again. Miraculously, after he removed it from the hitch, and it settled down with a crash, nothing broke. He wiped the sweat off his brow and looked around with a strange sense of pride.

"Now, see him complain!" he said.

I don't know why this makes me chuckle. Perhaps because if the city had grown to encompass their previous place, it would have had to put up with horses, pheasants, quail, and perhaps a sheep or two. There the makeshift pens were made with chicken wire mesh and old Christmas trees for cover; and the plywood lean-tos were never pretty either. But I had helped my dad build them right up to the last nailed board; and when we moved from that house, which had more property around it than their current one, I had to help tear them all down.

I still have the ribbons from showing my birds at the county fair. Dad kept the peacocks, which used to drive our old neighbors crazy with loud noises that sounded like a cat from outer space. While watching *Memoirs of a Geisha*, I felt homesick when I heard one in the background making its lonely-sounding call. I wonder how many people realize that it's a peacock making that noise?

Sequim has changed a lot. When I went to school, there were no minorities to speak of. I thought this was odd even at the time, because it contrasted with a lot of the people on television. We embarrassed my mom in the store once by yelling, "Look Mom! There's a black guy over there. Is he a TV star? Like Bill Cosby?"

She grabbed my brothers and me and hauled us into a corner and said

sternly, “Don’t you ever do that again. It’s rude to point at people.” I heard a disturbing rumor later that Sequim once had some sort of city code that forbade minorities from moving there. If there was such a thing it was challenged because soon people from various backgrounds starting coming anyway.

The first time I noticed the corporate take-over it seemed innocent enough. We got our McDonald’s in 1987 with its very own Play Land. As a kid, if your town had its own McDonald’s, it meant it was large enough to be marked on a map. We would go there hoping to get Legos in our Happy Meals. Later, I decided I didn’t like hamburgers at all. But we didn’t go very often, so when we did, it was like a treat. Of course, there is always change that can’t be helped.

This reminds me of Greywolf Estates, one of the apartment buildings I used to live in, which later burned down. No one seems to know how the fire started. The building was old and had been added onto at so many different stages over the years, that the interior didn’t make sense anymore. I remember walking into the entry way for the first time, and seeing a window randomly placed in a wall looking from one room into the next. There was a window like that in a bathroom too, but the new managers of the place decided to remove it. Ironically, I lived in number thirteen and I liked that place; it had a sort of oddness that appealed to me. The oldest parts of the building were from the 1920s, a time portrayed in the movies as a time of recklessness. Now, every time I pass by where it used to be, it makes me wonder what will be gone next?

I return from my walk, glad to be in from the cold. I feel strangely happy that I grew up here. I’m grateful that I can still come back, and think of this place as home, as my town. No matter what happens it will always be Sequim, no matter how its name is pronounced on the local news. Once it was amusing to me watching a T.V. anchor stumble over my town’s name in confusion, because it meant that there was a reason to say it in the first place. It’s funny—perhaps even more so—because I cannot remember why Sequim was mentioned, only that Dan Lewis was stumbling in an attempt to pronounce the name.