

## Nonfiction Narrative

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My father is an Indigenous person from the Americas, specifically Choctaw Native American. His family resides on our reservation in Oklahoma, in the small, tranquil town of Boswell, which sits near the Texas border. Boswell is a peaceful place, surrounded by sprawling fields and pastures where cows graze lazily, and the woods teem with wildlife—snapping turtles, rattlesnakes, and copperheads all call this area home. The journey from Houston, Texas, to Boswell takes about eight hours, a drive filled with the promise of reconnecting with family.

I wanted to capture the essence of spending time with my dad, especially since our one-on-one moments have become increasingly rare. He's very much present in our family life, helping to care for me and my younger sister, yet it feels as though we often live in parallel worlds. As I approached my senior year of high school, I realized that our time together was limited; soon, I'd be off to college, and I didn't want to miss the chance to deepen our bond.

Our road trip began like any other journey to visit his family. We set out around 9 AM on Highway 59, carefully navigating Houston's notorious traffic, eager to escape the city's chaos. My dad had his playlists on shuffle—classical music blending into EDM and then shifting to southern rock. In the background, the melodies created a comforting atmosphere, allowing for moments of shared silence. I found myself lost in thought, imagining the time I would spend in Boswell—seeing my aunts and uncles, feeding the chickens, and helping out with the farm in the sweltering summer heat. I also pondered what my father might be thinking; he often feels like a mystery to me. He tends to be quiet around my sister and I, and when he does speak, it's usually about himself. I sometimes wonder whether I should initiate conversation or simply embrace the silence that hangs between us.

As we drove out of the city, the bustling skyline slowly faded into the distance, and it was during this transition that my father and I had our first meaningful conversation of the trip. He turned to me with a glimmer of nostalgia in his eyes and asked if I wanted to stop at a quaint little store called Cooper's Farms, nestled in one of the small towns roughly halfway between Houston and Dallas.

Cooper's Farms was a treasure trove of delights, known for its mouthwatering cobblers, sweet jarred peaches, and irresistible pies. The shop was also filled with charming knick-knacks and quirky t-shirts. Of course I agreed.

As we drove on, our conversation naturally flowed to the simple beauty of life in the country. I found myself admiring the sprawling fields, the forests in the background, remarking on how serene and picturesque everything was. I loved the stillness that came with the landscape, a stark contrast to the noise and chaos of city life.

My father listened intently, and then he shared his own reflections. He spoke of his longing for that same peace and quiet, reminiscing about the days he spent in the countryside. He mentioned that while he loved the tranquility, his job and our family commitments had anchored him in the city. I could hear the wistfulness in his voice. The realization that he missed the rural life made me feel a wave of sadness; I wished he could reclaim that part of his past.

In that moment, the car ride became more than just a journey from point A to B; it turned into a heartfelt exchange about dreams and desires, connecting us in a way that made the miles seem shorter and the landscape even more beautiful.

Again, when we entered the bustling city of Dallas, the conversations faded into nothingness, and I once again embraced the silence within the car. Dallas was filled with chaos compared to where we came from. We were stuck in traffic up high and along the highways, the noise from the outside seeped into the car

occasionally, interrupting the songs on shuffle. My mind drifted in and out of thought, scenarios on replay and I thought to myself again if I should choose to make conversation. I chose against it.

As we drove just north of Dallas, something shifted. My father began pointing out familiar landmarks from his childhood (he grew up in Ponder, Texas—a place that has transformed from a small town into a suburb of Dallas.) With each sight, his memories flowed freely. He shared stories about his first job as a grocery bagger, how he saved every penny for his first car, and the five-mile trek he made daily to work (I am pretty sure that is just a story all parents tell us though). He reminisced about the drive-in movie theaters that dotted his youth, recalling how saving enough money to catch a film with friends felt like a monumental achievement. In those moments, the car became a vessel for connection, a space where we could reflect on the past together.

I sense that my father misses the simplicity of his childhood. It's fascinating to observe the dynamic shift in him; in the bustling cities, he tends to be more subdued and introspective, while in the countryside, he transforms—his spirit seems to come alive as he recounts tales of growing up in a close-knit community. His laughter becomes more frequent, and his eyes light up with nostalgia as he shares the joys and struggles of his youth.

This road trip offers us a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between our worlds. Each story he shares helps me understand not only him but also our family's heritage. It deepens my appreciation for the land we come from and the experiences that have shaped us. As we continued our journey, I had hoped to draw out more of his memories and perhaps discover parts of him that I've never known before...

What are the stories that will shape our connection in the days to come, especially now that I am in college?