

Here and There

It might have started with the globe, the model of Earth on a tilted spindle, brought home from somewhere by one of my parents. Or it might have started with the jigsaw puzzle of the United States, probably a Christmas gift; or with an old roadmap from the glove box of one of our cars. In any case, I became fascinated with the enormity of the world beyond our little town. I especially liked the globe.

"Show me Texas," I say to my mother, placing the globe on our dining room table before her. She turns the globe slowly and then points a finger.

"Where are the places I have been?" I want to know.

"This is the only place," she tells me, her finger still pointing to Texas.

I like sitting with the globe in my lap, turning it on its spindle, tracing my finger across its blue oceans and over the bumpy places that represent mountain chains. I am amazed at the scope of the world. I wonder, how do we know it is round? At night, I play a game where I spin the globe and see where it stops beneath my finger. If it stops spinning with my finger pointing to land, I imagine going there, wondering what it would be like in a place so far from home. I love the names of the places: Venezuela, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Wyoming.

"Where is Vietnam?" I ask my father. Vietnam is in the news every night. My father, I think, has only a vague notion of where Vietnam might be.

"Get the globe," he tells me. Together we turn the globe slowly. On the second time around, my father sees Vietnam and points a finger.

"There it is, right there," he says. "Got a funny shape to it, don't it?"

"Yeah, kind of small, too," I say. I am curiously happy when I find that most places are not as big as Texas.

Sometimes my brothers and I spread blankets on the floor of our bedroom and pretend the blankets are rafts. I put the globe on my raft to guide me across the seas to Africa, Japan, England, and the North Pole.

Not far from our house a set of railroad tracks carries freight cars north through the scrubland. In the small hours I am sometimes awakened by a train's plaintive whistle. I hear the train's deep rumbling fade into the distance and wonder where it might be going. I ride my bike along the streets of our neighborhood, pretending sometimes that I am riding to California, through the deserts and over the mountains to the Pacific. I will ride along the coast of California to Canada, and then keep going all the way to Alaska, which is bigger than Texas.