

*Self Divulgence in Green Country*

By Noah Walker Bogatko

Back in my pissing grounds I was. I don't like to refer to it that way, but for the majority of my lifetime it was just that; relieving myself on the Christ's-crown-like foliage of wild blackberries whenever I felt like it. It was humid, warm, and rainy, just how I'd always remembered it. It in fact was Oklahoma. The place where the proper red-blooded South collides with the barrenness and breathlessness of the southwest, or what many refer to as the *Suburbs of Texas*. Sometimes I like to refer to it as *Diet Texas*, just to mess with people who know little about the place, or to humble those many Oklahomans who hate Texas for superficial reasons. Next to New Mexico, it's one of my favorite places upon the salted-face of this planet. Being there revitalizes my spirit, and not like how a menthol cigarette or Bang Energy does, no, it fixes me to some people I've known since before my brain could collect memories, and brings me closer to those whom I often find myself fundamentally disagreeing with, but ultimately share the strip of my veins with. Perhaps primally I feel more at home there than I ever did in New Mexico. Sitting on the second-hand sofa belonging to my old family friends' household (that of the Wilmanns') and listening to instinctively familiar voices speak about largely harmless or good-in-nature issues brings me closer to home than I ever have been.

Recently I trucked the ten-hour journey on an empty stomach and under the influence of synthetic caffeine. These two factors have been my traveling tradition since the age of twelve, and they've never done me wrong. Spending my nights on my Giddee's couch (that's Lebanese for Grandfather), and ripping off my semi-bedazzled belt and slipping off my boots never feels any better on the first night unless these conditions are met. As I walked up to his garage door and tapped in the four-digit code, 1936, I heard the chorus of tree frogs coming from the

greenery all around me, and that felt good. Entering the home at 11 p.m., my parents and I were met by my Siddee (Lebanese for Grandmother) who wasn't *up to snuff* as they say over there. She had had no sleep in the past forty-eight hours for the same reason we'd traveled all that way; Siddee was held up in the hospital for congestive heart failure. To cut to the chase, he's fine, no, *resilient*, and his only problem is his diet that awfully abridges that of a healthy diabetic's regiment. But his little unintentional stunt raised a whole lot of familial stress and other largely needless hand-wringing.

This all caused me to be temporarily misplaced out there, and I came to a lot of personally innate realizations there way out east. I'm a man of nature, as many people have zealously referred to me as, and this same setting was the place where many of these realizations were come upon. In a way I tried to replicate the setting of my more rural Broken Arrow childhood; creeks full of bullfrog tadpoles, briar patches impossible to traverse, roadside drainage ditches full of bass and cigarette butts, etc. Yet this proved to be difficult, as I was largely confined to a gated-in chunk of cookie-cutter suburbia. But I ended up making do with what I was given, and that was a pond dyed powerade blue full of sunfish, an old crappy Walmart fishing rod, and a little hill with a line of dying desert cypresses on it that I used for thinking. For me it was heaven.

Though I didn't catch a singular one of those baitfish on my first crack at it, *I had a hell of a time*. And that hill had a good view of the neighborhood where a few of my cousins live and where my great-great-aunt passed away from MERSA at the age of 92. I had hours upon hours to myself and observed how some of my extended relatives that would pass on through the house every once in a while for a check-up on the old man conducted their lives. I got to passively thinking about this, and observed them to be happy sons-a-bitches. While I was fishing away I

just ruminated on this: *they'd always been this extra-content with life*. Indeed, they had, at least for as long as I could remember. One of my cousins ended up becoming a medical-marijuana salesman, and that dude is just happy to take gummies and go semi-illegally snag bass in upper-class residential ponds. *I had to retrieve this general Oklahoman gratuity for life*.

I went on with my beau-beau's spiritual retreat for happiness by further pursuing those things that can make a man feel full. One morning I spent my time standing in the warm-misty rainfalls of a front blown in from the Caribbean, and I listened to that soft breeze collide with the needles of some nearby tall loblolly pines; a tree you really only find in lands below the Mason-Dixon Line. I almost felt indifferent to the muddy-soil beneath my boots, or those worms and earth snakes that tunneled on in that dirt. I was on the right track. I was in a Southern Baptist's rendition of the therapist's appropriated *Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction*.

I believe it to be around this time that I uncovered the truth that you really don't have to overthink life to get a lot out of it; there is no code that needs to be punched in like a garage's key in order to get to the spoils of life, which could be as simple as constructing a smokehouse with your neighbor a safe distance away from your wife's wooden she-shed. As I alluded to before, this realization was and has always been innate within me, I've known it since before I could use words, but being back in my pissing-ground element and seeing how my relatives conduct their lives happily and simply just dragged me back into that perspective.

My last night within my homeland entailed me getting rescued from that maximum-security neighborhood by an old friend; perhaps the first true friend I have ever made. I'd known him since I was four years old, and despite not seeing him for nearing two years it was as if our dynamics had resumed how they had been when we were nine-year-olds and back in the same third-grade class in Catholic school. He took me to his old oil-boom era house and I asked

him about how things were going in his life (they are going pretty well, he's on the varsity football team of his school), and he asked me about how things were going with my life (indeed one very different to his.) We didn't smoke cigarettes, eat any edibles, or drink any beers. We were only more than content with viewing life through the eyes of sober teenagers.

Nearing the end of the night he asked me if I wanted to go see the nearby town I used to live in for a good chunk of my life, and I obliged. We drove some fifteen minutes through outlet mall territory to get into my old neighborhood, and once there I pointed out the old houses of myself, my uncle, grandmother, and second cousin (we all used to live real close to one another because that's how it was on our farm.) Nobody related to me lives there anymore. Eventually we sat on some swings in a nearby park and just listened to some crappy new-age country music. We continued talking about positive happenings in our lives, with the chit-chattering of insects and frogs going on in the background, and the warm buzz of a sodium street light buzzing away. Not long after he took me back to my Giddee's house and I drifted off into a deep sleep, ready to go back to not-far-off New Mexico.