

Coming from a lineage of farmers, I am married to the land in northern Phelps County, Missouri. Its celestial call resides deep in my soul, buried in my bones, and no matter where I run, I can never escape it. The land is silent, far removed from deafening urban centers to the east or west. Though she doesn't make a sound, she speaks to me, telling unwritten, incomprehensible stories of my forefathers who walked the same fields and woods I do. The machinery has changed, but the land remains the same; the people remain the same. Mothers bring joy to their homes as they cook supper on late summer evenings with windows open or warm the fire when the boys return home on a frozen winter night from breaking ice on the pond so the cows could drink. Fathers wake up before dawn to take their young son fishing, only to spend all day fixing fences in the hundred-degree heat and to stay up all night waiting for his cattle at the local sale barn. No doubt he will begin the next day the same as before.

Grandparents will spoil their grandchildren, relatives ensure you're never alone no matter where you go, and friends from long ago catch up on fall evenings around a campfire when everyone returns home for the harvest.

There resides a sense of pride in every local institution. Our schools, banks, barbers, restaurants, gas stations, and stores all mean more to us because they're ours. We do business with the local folk, who share in our experiences and have earned communal respect through the generational crafting of their family craft; a reputable name is worth more than gold. Every Sunday morning, I hear the ringing of acapella revival hymns vibrate across the wooden floors and pews of the little white church on the hill, dancing among the ceiling rafters, floating to heaven. An old King James with a peeling leather cover sits next to me on the pew, the pages inside worn near incomprehensible, for the words inside it were more than some old story because they are lived every day by those who read it. Some washed-out gravel road connects the family land to the cities, but more importantly, provides our escape from them. Though no lights but the stars above light the way at night, I can navigate the road with my eyes closed. For

it was my ancestors who settled this valley and formed these roads. Its curves carve into me like the lines on my palms.

It's a feeling an urbanite can never comprehend; they live on the land, but I live with it. Not as a sovereign, but as a steward preordained to protect God's creation through simple living as due service for His blessing of my soul with a birth in the land of plenty, far away from the cruel world. It is not my anointment alone, but one shared with those who embrace their historical lineage as the farmers of Phelps County. If the land suffers, we do; if her harvest is plentiful, our joy is abundant. The love we share for one another runs as deep as the roots of the grass that sustains us. And though for others their life will end, ours will be eternal. When our souls are bound for glory, our bones become a part of the land we spent our lives cultivating, laid to rest beneath a simple stone near that little white church on the hill, reunited with friends gone before on the golden horizon that reaches far over yonder. Forever a part of the patch of Ozark dirt that God's elect are blessed to call our home.