

The First Time I Crossed the Line from Earth to Sky

I was a baby. There's a photo of me, in some drawer somewhere, attached by adhesive to a fading blue cardboard passport, a pillow-sized scrap of pale skin and pale hair balanced on my father's lap, lower jaw adrift with astonishment, pale blue eyes wide with wonder, pointing a pudgy palm towards the flashpoint of the photo booth's engulfing light. My father, impossibly young, smiles at me, nodding. *Yes, a bright light. Look towards the light, my darling. Do you think maybe you could smile towards the light?* We lived in France for a season. We left too soon for me to remember, but I used our brief foreign life as a mark of distinction throughout my school days, at every opportunity. Found distinction in being the child of parents who spoke foreign languages, had foreign friends, had seen foreign landscapes with their own, familiar eyes. Who drank dark intense coffee wrung from filters, a habit which my grandmother disdained—a cup of powered instant Nescafe was the proper and correct taste for a coffee drink, in her experience. Then there was a time when crossing the line between earth and sky came to seem mundane, ordinary, unremarkable. New York, Thailand, China, England, Norway, New York again, Norway, again. Too familiar, in fact. These past years, I have been un-learning my flight habit, putting down roots, storing my suitcase, learning what it means to live a grounded life, a life spent mainly in contact with the wide earth. One day, when I am old, perhaps, I'll cross above the skyline for the last time. And on that day, will there be a bright light? And perhaps my father, impossibly young, smiling towards me and whispering—*Look towards the light, my darling. Do you think you could smile towards the light?*