

Small Towns Don't Change

The sun shone brightly over the tree tops as I looked out across the sky. It was almost the afternoon, and the end of a long day that seemed to never want to end. I had climbed up the water tower, the one in the center of town, and prayed that no one would catch me in the act. I finally reached the top of the platform and sat down, swinging my feet across the edge as if I were daring enough to not fear the ground below me, but still gripping the railing for dear life. I began to see the true beauty of the place that I have called home for eighteen years. I could see the school, where I had spent most of my time during the weeks of the fall and spring, the town courthouse, and even as far as the once wonderful lake that had recently become just a puddle along the edge of Lincolnton's woods. This was my home, these were the places that I had seen every day, every year of my life, but somehow sitting on that water tower, so high above everything that I loved I began to see my town in a more understanding way.

I first put my attention on the school. The campus was empty, all except a small black SUV that was almost always there no matter what time of day it was. It belongs to the school principal, Mr. Madden, who has practically devoted all of his time to that brick building for as long as I have been there, and I have a sneaking suspicion that his devotion began long before my time and will last long after I am gone. The school was not extremely large by any means, but it was adequate size for the lot of us who had walked by those red lockers that lined the walls for so many years. I had the feeling that whether we liked the work or not, most of us

loved walking up the concrete steps that led to large glass doors and into our normal routine day after day.

I pondered what it would be like to leave this town, to not be at the school or sit in the lower parking lot at night, just waiting for something half-way exciting to happen after nine O'clock on a Saturday night. I soon changed my focus from the school to the court house, which was only a few hundred yards away from the school. The white dome shape of the top of the building looked almost ethereal as the sun began to slowly descend in the sky. The reds, purples and oranges of the horizon seemed to reflect off the roof, creating a tie- die of colors on the well respected home of justice in this small town. I saw a man walking up the steps into the building. As he went past the large white columns at the entrance, I began to imagine being in there too. I could see the large marble floors, checked with a white and black pattern, and the tall ceilings adorned with the bright hanging lights that gave the place such a regal feeling in my mind. I had spent many hours there sitting and looking up at those fixtures on the days I had waited for my mom to get off work in the courtroom.

A loud honk from a car horn in the far off dragged me out of my day dream. As I glanced around, trying to figure out where it came from, I spotted the white, sandy beach of the turnaround. The turnaround has been the summer spot for my friends and me for as long as I can remember. The water that once filled the lake all the way up the slope of sand, now receded back and left the ugliness of mud and shrubs that had once been hidden by its liquid shield exposed to the naked eye. The water I had always swum in was clear and deep, and had none of the disgusting, murky characteristics that the gunk filled pool now had. I could not

imagine trying to wade through the brown sludge or sit on a water tube and glide on the surface now; knowing the likely hood of hitting a tree top was high at the water's remarkably low level. It gets this way every winter, when the people "in charge" feel like we can afford to lose the beauty of the lake. The only satisfaction in looking at this pitiful scene was the confidence that the water would return to its normal clear, and full summer state, just like it always does.

As I sat for hours and looked out over my town, I began to see all the little things that I had always overlooked. I knew every car that drove by on the few roads that bent and curved in the city limits, not by some magical intuition, but because the same people had owned the same vehicles for most of my life. That is what was so great about this town, no one likes change. There is some comfort in that. There is no doubt in my mind that every Friday night there will be absolutely every one, that is able, attending a football game. Those same cars that I watched pass me by will be lined up and down the road leading to the school, as they do every week at that time. The lights will shine brightly on to the impeccably green field, and the town's pride and joy performers will play their hearts out for another win, just like they always have. That is just the way things were in this small town, and even from atop of the old water tower I could see things here were always going to stay the same.