

Time and Place

a cultural anthology



We are all of a particular time and place. The space we occupy influences who we are, what we think, how we act, re-act, and what we create. **Time and Place** is about capturing the creativity of a particular moment of the artist's life.

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Krista Foss

People of the Swim

We are dairy-fed, big-boned, a bit hairy. Suited to water. Cold water. So cold it thickens the blood.

Every fall, your toes tingle, like antennae. Where can I swim?
Every fall, you forget how wrong that can go.

Recently, it was a northern lake and a third week in October. A simple cabin with a wood stove, and enough scavenged birch to warm long days of writing, afternoons with a glacial dip.

You arrive after dark, bellies thick with dinner. Outside, the air bites. Inside has too much inside.

Honestly, when is now *ever* too soon?

The on-line pictures showed a placid giant of a lake, welcoming as a bathtub.

Within minutes, you're off to meet it: a middle-aged ogress in a Joe Fresh bikini flip-flopping to the dock under midnight stars. Who needs eyeglasses? Partner warm and safe, happily plying the wood stove.

This is whom I am! You think. Kin to intrepid, wild-swimming Britons. Soulmate of half-naked Russians auguring holes in the ice. Friend to endorphin-junkies and chest beaters.

Just let me be me! Granddaughter of a shield maiden who pushed off bare-toed from a pebbly Nordic shore into October's North Sea, well into her eighties. Without so much as a whimper of surprise, a quick inhale.

At the end of the dock, the lake water seems opaque and soft as velvet. To a half-blind trembling woman.

There's a step ladder that's been pulled up for the season. You hang it back into the water. The unthreaded screws that stick out of the wood are a clue. So too is physics.

When you put your weight on the first step, both you and the unattached ladder splash backward into the lake: A more abrupt, and colder, entry than expected.

There's another problem, besides the ladder, which has begun to sink.

This water isn't really water. From chin to sternum, it's a silty puddle. Below that, there's boggy goop, that's frigid and deep. Your feet can't find a bottom. And there are things grazing your flailing legs – unrecognizable textures, something mossy, something edged, something gelatinous and wiggling.

Panic? People of the swim don't panic.

You slap your Siberian matryoshka palms on the dock, flex your gym-toned shoulders and pull. And pull.

In daylight, you'd have seen right away: it's too high. This dock is built for another era when there was water to reach it. You can't heave your body up. You scrape your ribs against the rough sides. Try again. Each time you're colder. The mud seems eager to keep you, dissolve you into the remains of the primeval forest that's fondling your thighs.

The cottage flickers prettily through the trees. A waft of peppery wood smoke comes from its chimney. You hear the radio. Loud. Really, really loud. Your partner has terrible hearing.

Swimmers imagine the end. We imagine rogue waves smacking us into rocks, or undertows sucking us under. The random menace of a riptide. Hypothermia, whatever.

Mud. No. Not that.

But we're also slippery. You inch along the dock's side, navigate a thicket of reeds, plunge your feet into mud greasy as old bones: the marsh's charnel house. But here your cramping toes find purchase.

The joy of the cold-water swim is running out, toweling off, warming up, feeling so ferociously alive, you talk, and talk, and talk about it to non-swimming friends.

Not searching in the dark for a garden hose, then a tap, rinsing yourself like an old dog, while your partner watches through a window, with your actual dog, both who appear to be laughing. But you can't see. You stick the garden hose into your bikini bottoms hanging low with the weight of marsh crud.

You may die of exposure, but you will not pay the extra cleaning charges listed on the cabin's web page.

So, you are unhappy. For the rest of the week, you look for a place to swim, consider the docks of shuttered cottages, but even those thwarts you: the entire peninsula and its causeways sit in a marsh.

The cabin is spotless when you leave. Yet you droop. And then a glint on the horizon. Another lake, ten minutes down the road.

You detour, scour for a boat launch, change into your Joe Fresh bikini, and dive into a glorious frigid heaven. It's almost clear to the bottom. You can tell; you're wearing your eyeglasses. You yell hosannas to whomever.

And talk about that swim for the entire drive home.

Ed Clayton

Gumboot

Say farewell
to the Re-election
to swansongs of splintered reason
to dead eyes
glad handing
dead lines
of civility

Wave them away
Like you did
Nuance
and
freedom

Say goodbye
to push pin dissonance
to hungry bottom lines
to fears of the other
by pandering to the hate

Go ahead
Inflate your petty path to history
For your exit I cannot wait

Simon

When I was 7, an arsonist set fire to the basement of our apartment building. It was a three-story Victorian walk up; I lived with my sister and dad on the top floor. The arsonist had been targeting our area: Duboce Triangle, a working class neighbourhood in San Francisco. We were poor, but I didn't really appreciate that fact until I was older. We had a kitchen skylight that was actually a hole in the roof; to open it, we climbed a ladder and pulled aside a sheet of tar paper. We had a neighbour named Red who spent all day fixing his car and who shared his apartment with a few young women who would suntan topless on the porch. In the backyard, there was a lemon tree and a garden tended by an older man with a Louisiana accent. My dad worked nightshifts as a janitor at a local TV station. We always knew that if we needed anything when he was at work, we could knock on a neighbour's door.

The arsonist set fire to boxes of clothing and paperwork. In the months after the fire, we would play down there, opening the musty singed boxes and dressing up. An abandoned prom dress, blue satin, was glamorous to us, even in the ruin of its water stains.

The night of the arson, before dad went to work, we watched *The Sound of Music*; he sang along with Julie Andrews. I don't remember exactly what happened in the interstitial hours but I can assume we got into our pajamas, brushed our teeth, and said goodnight to dad.

I do remember the smell of smoke, and sirens, my bedroom illuminated by flashing emergency lights, my nightie adorned with little yellow flowers. And I remember being led out of our apartment, but by whom? What I remember most is a sound.

The metallic squeaking was rhythmic, persistent, steady. It was our hamster, Simon, running in his exercise wheel. Simon ran because he smelled smoke, because he feared for his life and had an instinct to flee. I have a lot to learn from a hamster who lived 35 years ago. Remembering that sound has, over the years, brought me to consider my own instincts, about how I behave when I'm scared, or when I'm faced with something out of my control, or when a certain outcome seems inevitable but I forge ahead anyway. But the truth is that when I'm scared, or facing something scary, I often balk. I make up a story to get out of it. I get lost in excuses. I look the other way, retreat, apologize later. When I think of Simon I feel my instincts are less straightforward than those of a hamster in his wheel.

Country Camper

My sister holds Barbie around the waist. “Ken, I want to talk to you. Now.” Barbie’s pink evening gown has spaghetti straps that try but fail to stay on her shoulders.

Ken’s blank face manages to look put off. “What now,” he calls from the coffee table, legs straight out on a plastic chair.

Ken tips over. My other sister sits him up.

Barbie shakes her head. “I saw you talking to Midge Sherwood at the party.”

Ken’s tuxedo is loose and big. He looks like a ventriloquist’s puppet. Ken stands up. He says, “What the hell is wrong with that? For Christ sake Barbie, she’s our neighbour.”

My sister pulls Barbie’s head back and it pops off. Both sisters laugh. It’s back on when Barbie laughs. “Ha ha. You god damn liar.”

“I’m going to bed,” Ken says. His tux is removed and he’s dressed in striped pajamas.

Barbie hops across the coffee table. Ken looks at her feet. Barbie says, “You’re not running off to bed.”

Ken says through clenched teeth, “Get off my back. We can fight in the morning.”

“Quiet, you’ll wake the girls.”

Skipper and Scooter are asleep on a red velvet blanket in the glossy black Barbie carrying case. It looks like Dracula’s coffin. Their red hair is long, thick, blunt cut ending at their shoulders.

Barbie leans over, her bendable knees click. She kisses each child on the cheek. “Good night.”

A moment of real time goes by. My sister declares it’s another day.

Barbie is up making breakfast for the girls. Ken is lifted off the couch. He grunts like any father on Sunday morning. He knows he should get up but isn't really sure why. He holds a coffee cup, his molded hand pushed through the handle. Skipper and Scooter are put back in the carrying case on the pretext of going out to play.

The subject of Midge Sherwood is immediately resurrected. "I want to talk about last night," Barbie says. Barbie's pony tail is severely tight. Her hairline crosses from ear to ear like a row of baby spruce trees. Her forehead has a blue star drawn with a Bic pen, a result of a fight between my sisters. All was forgiven and the star is now invisible.

Ken is placed beside the Country Camper and Barbie joins him.

Ken is lifted to the roof of the camper. He faces the mirror on the closet door.

"Some of my hair has chipped off." His flat feet clack on the floor when he jumps down.

"Let me make something for lunch." Barbie gets into the camper and fusses with the plastic pots and pans.

"Barb."

She opens the oven and cautiously touches the rack.

"Barb."

She runs her hands over the illustrations of oven controls.

"Barb."

Barbie turns her head. She blinks her eyes once, the imaginary sound of a violin string plucked by a finger comes and goes. "What is it Ken?"

"We don't eat. We can't eat."

Barbie ignores what Ken said. She's wearing a red mini skirt. She yanks at the hem with both hands. "I never liked Midge. You know they made her because I needed a girlfriend to talk to? To talk about you. I told that bitch everything." Barbie's voice shakes. "I told her my personal secrets."

Ken is weary. "I spend most of my life laying in the dark carrying case thinking. I know I don't need anything, but I

want everything.” Ken looks into Barbie’s blue eyes. “God damn it, I can’t even die.” It’s difficult for Ken to notice but he senses Barbie is crying. He puts his hand on her cheek. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that. It’s not your fault.”

Barbie hugs him. “I’m sorry too. I’m a mess. I feel like I don’t know myself. I keep thinking in circles.”

Ken holds her tighter. “We have no control. None whatsoever.”

Barbie looks into Ken’s eyes. “I don’t care about the thing with Midge.”

“Nothing happened with her. We’re dolls.”

Anne Bokma

My Judas Lips

(Excerpted from *“My Year of Living Spiritually: One Woman’s Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life”* published by Douglas & McIntyre, Oct. 2019)

Question: “Do you acknowledge God’s covenant promises, which have been signified and sealed to you in your baptism? Do you truly detest and humble yourself before God because of your sins and seek your life outside of yourself in Jesus Christ?”

Answer: “I do.”

I am 19 years old, standing in front of the altar of Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, and lying through my teeth. I’m participating in the ritual known as the Profession of Faith, my church’s version of confirmation, the age-of-majority rite in which young adults make public their commitment to follow in the ways of the Lord and the teachings of the church. I am making promises I know I won’t keep. In front of me stands Rev. Huizinga with a bench full of sombre elders, all men. Behind me is a congregation of more than 300 that includes my parents and grandparents, who are looking on proudly. I am wearing a smart navy pinstriped jacket and matching modest knee-length skirt that my mom bought for me. As they beam, I die a little inside.

This moment had been my destiny from the time my teenage parents, Henk and Aafke, had me baptized in this church. Actually, it went even further back than that, as prophesied in Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I set you apart.”

My indoctrination in the faith had been years in the making, and now I was expected to fulfill the promise of my birthright. My lower-middle-class mother and stepfather, a homemaker and a carpenter, went without family vacations so they could afford the tuition to keep me and my younger siblings out of public school, where we would have been subjected to worldly ideas—like evolution and dancing.

At our private Christian school, we had daily religion classes, and parents used Magic Markers to black out “sacrilegious” phrases such as “by Gosh” in children’s books when they volunteered in the school library. I listened to the Ten Commandments read out in church 2,000 times over two decades. For three years my stepfather made the long drive to our church every Wednesday night after work and waited in the parking lot while I attended a class with other teenagers, memorizing and then reciting the 129 prescribed questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism, the 400-year-old doctrinal tract of our faith. The cap to my religious education was a closed-door vetting by the elders to ensure I was ready to make public my Profession of Faith.

As I stood at the front of the church to participate in the Profession of Faith, I imagined myself as a runaway bride of Christ. I considered my escape route: down the red-carpeted centre aisle, past the pews of confused parishioners, including my horrified parents and grandparents, and out through the large double doors. But once I got outside, where would I go? My history was here, inside, with these people. Out there was nothing but rootlessness. The story was that my biological father had been an unhappy wanderer ever since leaving this same church—and our family—two decades earlier. I’d been told he went from city to city, woman to woman, a runaway husband, father and son who never found his way back home again. Wouldn’t the same happen to me if I followed in his footsteps?

I stayed put, like a dutiful bride, answering the questions set before me:

Question: “Do you declare that you love the Lord God and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, and to crucify your old nature?”

Answer: “I do.”

My lips spoke the words, but my fingers might as well have been crossed behind my back. I knew it was wrong when I made my way to the communion table and popped a small piece of bread from the communion platter into my mouth. When I raised the goblet of wine to my Judas lips to wash it down, I could taste the bitterness of hypocrisy on my tongue. My hand shook as I placed the goblet back down on the white tablecloth.

Goodbye

Goodbye lungs, surly twins, little trees. Goodbye they say to the dark. Goodbye they say to the tarmac path. Goodbye each breath, each step. Goodbye my buildings, my waving people, my elevators and the super puffing ciggies while mopping floors. Goodbye he says but any koalas? We had eucalyptus but now we have fire. Goodbye eucalyptus, goodbye twins with fire and money. Goodbye fire and money, twins and habitat. Goodbye city of Hamilton, Ontario. We walk into the dark, take habitat with us. Goodbye shins against the flames, fingers tangled with sky. Goodbye mouth a river, eyes two islands lost in flood, cars underwater but who can tell? Goodbye speech and sight. Goodbye streets and mortgages, ravines and furrows, furloughs, tongues and mathematics. Goodbye clouds, streetcars filled with fish or birds, our hands gripping oceans. We are leaving now. We are leaving because tangled in this net the ocean comes with us.

Christine McLeod

Before You Go



I want you to draw me sitting in the chair by the window with the cat on my lap.

I am looking through the window watching the birds at the feeder

The sky is grey and low.

I want you to draw me from the point of view of the window

Vegetarian Burgers

It was one of those days just after Christmas and before New Year's, where the butter and the liquor and the chit chat had pried me free of any sense of the time or the place. It was during one of those afternoon moments where I was sitting on the couch looking off into space, that my 11-year old approached me and declared, 'Dad, in 2020, I'm becoming a vegetarian.'

I have a memory of responding to him horribly-- 'son, I fully support this decision'—which, let me be clear, would have been a great thing to say, if I hadn't infused it with so much world-weary sarcasm and the bitter certainty that my child's conviction would dissolve by lunch.

Two days later, just as my brain had begun routinely imagining rigid East European models of meatless living, hinged on fermented eggs, boiled root vegetables and intervals of fasting and winter outdoor swimming, my son mentioned it again. This is what he said. Well, not exactly what he said, but this is how I heard it.

"Dad, I think I want to be Pescatarian, you know, simplify my diet so that we're eating lots of that, what is that premium fish, you know the fish that doesn't taste fishy? What's the name of the only fish in the sea that I like? And those massively expensive nut energy bars, what are those called? And that really complicated dinner that you made the one time, can you make vegetarian food like that, you know that will appeal to boys like me, whose dietary palate has been calibrated to 'bacon' since the womb."

“I’m doing this because I love the earth, dad.”

In January, my wife comes home with four different boxes of vegetarian burgers. And I spend an inordinate amount of time staring at the boxes before putting them in the freezer. They remind me of the horrible veg burgers from the 90’s about which I still have occasional flashbacks. But I know they are different. These are the kinder, smarter, burgers of the 21st Century.

The Veg burgers my wife brought home come in a cereal box labeled “Dr. Umschoen’s Adjective/Adjective /Adjective burger (by which I mean pick any combination of legume/herb/bean—i.e. corn soy basil patty, or beet black bean chili burger—and you’ll get the idea). There is a logo on the box that features a mortar and pestle, a basil leaf and a farm at sunrise. There is a preponderance of the words ‘simply’, ‘purely’, and ‘sensible’ in the label text. Reading through it, I momentarily imagined Dr. Umschoen, riding her horse across the wind-swept meadow toward her impeccable forest laboratory, where her team has just finished morning stretches in order to face another day of rigorous and precise food science.

Inside each box is a blister pack or vacuum sealed bag, protecting each frozen burger from outside contaminants. These bags are made from some form of marine grade plastic; and I quickly understand I must not try to callously open this bag with my teeth. I must use scissors and unveil each like I was unwrapping them for YouTube. I must birth them slowly and preciously from their casing as if each were their own edible iPhones.

DO NOT THAW. COOK FROM FROZEN. This instruction is, without exception, on every box. Typed there with an urgency, a danger. Don’t let these patties thaw to room temperature. They will tell you the horrible truth about the conditions by which they were made.

They will tell you that veg burgers need not be calibrated by science and engineered like Swiss time pieces. They will remind you that each burger will save exactly the same amount of wild animal life as will be killed once the indestructible packaging that swaddles it enters the anthroposphere. They will reveal that Dr. Umschoen runs a rural laboratory of lies and reckless profiteering.

Last week I conducted an experiment of my own. I bought a bag of dry beans; I rinsed them and soaked them overnight and then rinsed them again and then cooked them in a cast iron pot. I ended up with a crap ton of beans, so many beans I couldn't look at them without feeling a hopelessness. Nonetheless I noted the name of this bean in my journal, on page titled 'Adjective Diary'.

I boiled potatoes. I didn't know how these would factor in exactly, but I like potatoes. They have Irish fairy magic laid overtop ancient Aztec wisdom. They will always get me out of a mess.

I chose another vegetable, randomly. In the fridge is kale, corn, beets, spinach, rapini. The rapini was on sale two weeks ago and is throwing off fumes. I boiled water and blanched out most of its bitter evil. Then I minced the hell out of it. Then I wrote its name in my adjective diary.

I added two eggs, a crap ton of salt, breadcrumbs. Momentarily, I wondered if my son would have issues with eggs, wondered if he already feels hate towards gluten? Then I remembered I'm never going to tell him what's inside of these. Because what's the ingredient that's in every vegetarian burger? Lies. I threw a big handful of cumin in, because cumin confuses the palate. I wrote 'cumin' in my adjective diary, but leave out the words 'eggs, breadcrumbs, crap ton of salt.

I mixed it all together until it was the consistency of a good cookie dough. Then I floured the outside and rolled it into a log, and then with a very sharp knife I cut them into nearly perfect discs about ½ inch thick. They were then placed on a pizza tray and put in the freezer, and later stacked with a little wax paper in between, in groups of 12 in sturdy plastic bags in the freezer.

According to my calculations, I've made 87 Cumin Rapini White Bean patties for material costs of roughly \$2.35. I have enough to ensure that my family will never want a cumin rapini white bean patti for the remainder of their lives. Not to worry, the combinations are endless when making Adjective/Adjective/Adjective Burgers.

On each plastic bag in the freezer, written in green sharpie in the scrawl of a lunatic: DO NOT THAW: COOK FROM FROZEN.

Scenes from the Wrong Side of the Bar # 39

"I think I want to go home" ... with that sentence, we began our move from behind the wrong side of the bar.

One step at a time though.

We had been in England for 3 of the past four years. We had come to study, found summer jobs, made friends, went home, and then returned to work and help our friends. We branched out on our own. But as many roots as we laid down, we still had stronger roots at home. Throughout our time there we always said to ourselves we had the ultimate trump card: we could go home. It did not seem likely we would play it though. Parents had even begun to resign themselves to annual or biannual Atlantic crossings. As time passed however, the card began to itch in our hands.

We had been running our own pub for about a year. It was quite the year. Tony Blair was elected; Blur and Oasis battled to see who would rule Cool Britannia; Princess Diana died in a car crash. There are stories for each of these events but now is not the time or place.

Friendships were made but there was always a sense of otherness, of isolation and a certain loneliness. We were the bosses, the Colonials, the lord and lady of the manor so to speak. The connections were never quite as we would have hoped and it was time to go home.

Once the decision was made, the question was how to execute it and get out of our contract. The obvious answer was to lie.

I simply explained to the district manager of the brewery I had been offered a position as a research assistant with my former professor and had to take it up immediately. Simple as that. I never knew if he believed me. What else could he do but arrange for another couple to assume our roles.

Several things happened during this time. First, we (ok, me, if I am being truthful) decided to raise funds for trip a to Paris before returning home. Almost anything in the pub had a price. You see, there was considerable storage space under our pub. It had been used by the brewery to hold leftovers from decorating their establishments - chairs, tables, carpets, fixtures, fittings, and the like. So much had been crammed into the space the brewery had lost track of what was in it. I knew this as I was asked to inventory the space but never got around to doing it. So, no one would miss what they did not know was there.

Secondly, we had to deal with our beloved Austin Mini, Milhouse (so called because it reminded us of Milhouse Van Houten of the Simpsons). We debated looking into shipping Milhouse home but, given his state, and the cost, the idea was a non-starter. In the end, rather than sell him for scrap, we sold him to Ollie, a local wheeler, dealer, "right diamond geezer" type straight out of a Guy Ritchie film. Ollie took Milhouse, gave us £150, and drove off. Turns out Ollie never transferred the ownership. We found this out about a year later. We received notice of several outstanding speeding tickets and we had to provide proof we were not in the country when the infractions occurred. We also had a few years worth of purchases that would not make the journey home, which we sold off in due course.

The last matter to resolve was the actual hand over to the new couple. They had been through our pub earlier as trainees but had not stood out. She was affable enough. He was a former squaddie with a severe and overbearing military quality.

He held himself out to be superior to you in most matters. It did not help, however, he seemingly could not grasp simple concepts. When we were handing over the cash in the safe - quite literally and in the presence of an accountant hired by the brewery to oversee the process - he opted not to count the contents of the safe being received from me because he "couldn't be bothered". Our Parisian adventure could have been taken to a whole other level had I been less scrupulous. To cap off the exchange, he had to enter a new password into the system to assume full responsibility for the establishment. I suspect the accountant was less than pleased when Mr. Squaddie turned to us as he was typing and asked if "security" was spelt with one "t" or two. The accountant and I may have exchanged a look. Spelt with one "k".

Having left our pub in the hands of the new couple and after a final night of drinks, we said our goodbyes. We returned to London and stayed with friends for a few nights. We went off on our subsidized Parisian adventure. And then it was time to go home.

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