

Here, You Are Alive

by W. Scott Bowlin

When I was young writing was easy because there was so much going on around me and I had always had a good imagination. When I was in school I would imagine the other students differently than they were, or I'd imagine people that didn't even exist. These people were conglomerates of real people- you take the qualities you need from several otherwise boring people and attribute them to the new person.

Maybe the guy down the street drives himself and his sister to school in an old pickup truck with a ZZ Top sticker on the back window and a whip antenna. Maybe the sister who rides to school with him is not his sister but actually his girlfriend. Maybe you have an uncle that showed up on foot one day who likes to take you swimming, but he doesn't have a car. Maybe the truck and the girlfriend are your uncle's.

So now your uncle and his girlfriend take you to the lake every day in the summer. You get to ride in the back of his pick-up truck, and you don't know who ZZ Top is and you don't know that the muffler is gone from the truck and the fumes that burn your eyes while you ride back there with the wind and grit from the road whipping your face aren't good to breathe because it's summertime and you stopped at the store and got a grape soda and he got beer and you're going to get out of this heat and into the lake in just a few minutes.

You look over the cab of the truck while the truck roars down the dirt road and the wind drives the water from your eyes and it streaks across your face and you try not to blink or squint because you don't want to miss anything. You want to see the oak trees with moss hanging from them and the pinecones clinging to the slash pine and you want to see which animals didn't make it across the road and the gopher tortoises that kick dirt as they walk along searching for something. You want to see all of this and remember it forever and have this feeling of newness, this feeling of being right

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here in this moment where there is nothing else but the truck and the dirt road and the aftertaste of grape soda mixed with exhaust and the dust trail that chases it all.

You want to remember being at the lake at night when the mosquitos come out and instead of being hot you are shivering and you sit in the water, cold but not wanting to leave, and listen to your uncle and his girl low talking in the dark. Now you see the glow of cigarettes, hear his voice as he tells her about the city he was living in before he came here. He doesn't tell her that he is married, and that his five year old daughter who is living at your house has a mother back in that same city and she will show up at the front door as soon as she gets a bus ticket. That's all down the road, we are living in this moment and it's almost time to go, if any of it even happened at all.

End

