

Querencia

For Marion Cott

It's always somewhere,
though you don't have to have been born
there or, in some cases, even live there.
My father calls Scotland home
though he was born in a ramshackled house
in Kentuck, West Virginia and never saw
the Kirkton of Skene until he was 70.
For me, home is his Appalachain hills,
though I've been absent 40 years, traveling
from cornfields to wheatfields, finally landing in a state
between the Great Lakes.

For years, I gave Kansas as my home address.
I did not see buffalo roaming, but scholars
from the humanities council clicking their ruby heels,
sometimes alone, sometimes in herds, galloping
into tornadoes, blinking through blizzards.
One February, I spent 4 days trapped at Motel 6
in Hays after I-70 closed, snow howling
and swirling into my room beneath the crack
in the door, because I took Robert Frost
and his poems of New England winter to the junior high.
I did not see the deer and the antelope, but Jayhawks
and Wildcats, and a primordial throwback, the Wheatshock.
Only a few uttered discouraging words at book discussions
in Atwood and Ashland and Abilene when *The Woman Warrior*
came to town. I discovered hamlets with the World's Largest
Hand Dug Well, The Garden of Eden, the original Pizza Hut,
Dorothy and Toto's once-airborne home.

I sailed in my Beetle through the green swells
of the Flint Hills, watched oil rig horses rock, kneel down,
drink deep from dark underground streams.
I sang hymns with the Mennonites, learned stories
pieced in cloth: The Drunkard's Path, Flight of Geese,
The Rocky Road to Kansas, a road I thought I would drive
forever. *Querencia*, the Spanish speakers say: the safe place,
the home place, where skies are not cloudy all day.

— Anita Skeen