

An Eternity of Lifetimes

While driving the long stretch of road between Chicago and Memphis, TN, I sat in the passenger seat and stared out the window. Miles upon miles of fields stretched ahead, dotted with the occasional isolated farmhouse, each surrounded by faint dust stirred up by the roving farm equipment tending the land. My eyes moved from house to house as I began to wonder about the lives of the men, women, and children inside. Then I thought of those who came before—those who once called these houses home. Some homes were new and likely still held their original owners, while others were clearly generations old.

What moments had unfolded behind those walls? What unseen dramas? What celebrations, heartbreaks, lives, and deaths had come and gone like a vapor in the wind?

Further down the road, I spotted a farmer driving his truck through a field, inspecting the long, narrow irrigation equipment poised to begin operation. I glimpsed the form of a man inside—wearing what I imagined to be the stereotypical outfit of a rural farmer: a late middle-aged man in a trucker's cap and blue button-up shirt. Who was he? My heart softened as I thought of the lives he had touched. The family that loved him. Maybe dinner was waiting, and his kids were sitting around the table, ready to greet him once his chores were done. Not long ago, that man was a young boy running across the field, waving at his dad as he rode by on his John Deere tractor, planting seed. His smile then was innocent and pure. The world before him was full of hope and promise. In that moment, his greatest joy was the dream of someday being big enough to drive that enormous tractor himself. And now, as a man, I wondered what dreams he still held. What hopes he quietly carried. How his children might look up to him—this simple man of the earth behind the wheel of a dusty farm truck—as their hero.

Many miles down the road, as the landscape shifted, a small clump of houses came into view: two modern homes and one dilapidated structure, sagging under its own weight. Next to it sat a weathered sports car from the 70s that hadn't run in decades. Scattered toys lay abandoned in the overgrown brush behind the house. Beside it, a modest newer home had a boat parked in the driveway. Through the picture window, I could barely make out the figures of people moving about—living their lives. Unaware that, for that split second, I

caught a glimpse into their world. As I took it all in, I was overcome with compassion. I thought about their daily routines, their relationships, their quiet joys and sorrows.

House after house—barns, RVs, machine shops, abandoned vehicles—they all held stories. What would it be like to live them all? To be a fly on the wall in the story of every life? To have known their parents and their parents' parents. To have witnessed the lives that had to come together, against all odds, to bring these modern-day families together. What sorrows and happiness would I have seen? What amazing stories of heroism unfolded that no other human was witness to? What selfless acts were performed to the thunderous applause and cheers of no one? How many silent kisses were placed on the foreheads of sleeping children as their parents checked on them in the stillness of night? How many sleepless nights were spent praying for the health and future of those they loved?

If I were gifted the chance to walk beside each of these lives—from birth to death—what depth of compassion and understanding would I carry for their strengths and weaknesses?

A woman sits alone, crying quietly in her sunroom. I would remember the eight-year-old girl she once was the first time she felt that pain as her parents separated.

A man yells brashly as he sits at the bar drinking. I would recall him as a teenager—longing to be seen and accepted. He was loved but never fully understood. Now he is a man who is loud and over-the-top, hoping to be seen and accepted.

And a grandmother prays with her grandchildren before eating dinner. I wipe away a tender tear as I recall how her own grandmother prayed the same way with her so many years ago.

If I could spend an eternity of lifetimes, how much better of a man would I be for having known them all—for having walked with them through joy and sorrow alike?

As the sun sets on that long stretch of road between Chicago and Memphis, I look out over the dusty fields and dream.

About the author:

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