“Home” isn’t always where you were born and raised, but often it is. As a child, perhaps a person is more susceptible to the combination of raw materials that make up the idea of a place. Memories of orange-red clay that turned to soup after a heavy rain, the sound of pines knocking together, coffee milk in a delicate tea cup, a grandfather’s tattered baseball cap, the feel of the air on the first true day of autumn — such impressions brew a potent sense of belonging, making East Texas where the heart is for some folks, even if the body and the mind choose to reside elsewhere.

After 48 years, my grandmother returned to the same woods and hills where she spent her childhood. In Toledo Bend Village, an out-of-the-way lakeside community of retirees, snowbirds and weekenders near the Texas-Louisiana border, my grandmother and her friend Rhona are known as “the nurses.” The nearest hospital or doctor’s office is 40 miles away, so if someone’s grandson gets a fishhook in his thumb or an accident happens on the county road, Grandma and Rhona are liable to get a knock on their door. Though long retired from nursing and no stranger to health problems themselves, they always answer.

Grandma’s backyard rolls right into Toledo Bend Reservoir. On the porch, she looks out past the rose bushes and fig trees and bird feeders to the muddy-watered inlet under which may be, she says, the very spot she visited every summer as a girl.

Long before the dam project broke ground in the early 1960s, her family would come together to camp at the mouth of what was called Indian Creek, a clear stream that trickled out of the pines to meet with the mighty Sabine River. Grandma rattles off a list of names, people who are and always will be strangers to me except in these stories.

“When we started to come down here, this was a long way,” she says. Family members lived far apart, and most didn’t have a means of transportation. “My Uncle Bob was the only one in the family who always managed to have a truck. He would make trips and get everybody and bring them down here, with their
Toldeo Bend Village is small, and to see it from the highway, there’s not much there. No fast food restaurants, no businesses beyond the single gas station and lube shop and a handful of mom-and-pop bait stores and diners. It’s not a town in its own right — the mailing address here lists it as “Toldeo Bend Village,” while it sits roughly 19 miles away. Full-time residents take ice chests to Jasper to do their grocery shopping and usually go to Beaumont or Suffolk. It’s a small town, and everyone knows everyone.

Yet the people who live here seem to live so close. Benton Brockette devotes himself to politics and the local water board; his wife, Charlotte, 89, and their son Jake, 84, own the rocks and petrified wood. Nell Loftin Potts, her husband, “Ruth,” fishes every day the weather’s good, though he’s now 84 years old. Everyone I speak to proudly mentions the community club, which is a catch-all for the locals, hosting potlucks, card games, fish derbies, cribbage clubs, exercise groups and parties. The church and volunteer fire department are also hubs of activity. I like the kindness of these people and their tall tales of alligators and catfish as life — rare even in much younger people.

Grandma was not against the building of the dam that flooded roughly 180,000 acres of forested land and a handful of small towns. South and the fifth largest in the nation, producing an estimated 205 million kilowatt-hours of power annually. It’s popular as an industrial society, the Caddos traded with Spanish arrivals as early as the 17th century, and later with the French and Americans. The Spanish, establishing several missions in the area, named the site “Sabine River (Rio Santos)” for its cypress forest. Some theories that “Toldeo Bend,” the name for the wide arc in this river, was inspired by a similar bend in the Rio Tagus of Toledo, Spain.

The Toldeo Bend area was sparsely populated and largely ignored in those early days. That is, until distant powers renewed their periodic quarreling over territorial boundaries. A settler, more often than not a squatter, would by the mid-19th century had allowed the habitat to heal.

As an amphibian, they cannot breathe air without water, and once the cottonmouth was in its own right.

To think of “home” as a constant, to imagine that a place you love will not change, but what would Holbrook, or those long-age Indians or padres or steamboat captains, think if they were to return now? Maybe they would look out at the lake like my grandmother does, marveling at its utility and its beauty, in the same time missing terribly what had once been in its place.

Dr. Becktold, the book said, and despite a court order, he refused to leave it. Authorities would persuade him to go, and he would leave, only to return soon after. The last, after again persuading Holbrook to leave, the Jesuits, the workers used a tree-crusher to destroy his home.

It’s foolish, perhaps even dangerous, to think of “home” as a constant, to imagine that a place you love will not change, but what would Holbrook, or those long-age Indians or padres or steamboat captains, think if they were to return now? Maybe they would look out at the lake like my grandmother does, marveling at its utility and its beauty, in the same time missing terribly what had once been in its place.

We drove to the edge of the lake, the steam boat captains, think if they were to return now? Maybe they would look out at the lake like my grandmother does, marveling at its utility and its beauty, in the same time missing terribly what had once been in its place.

But I still remember the first time I ever went to a swimming pool and feed pellets to some captive fish in that steam boat captains, think if they were to return now? Maybe they would look out at the lake like my grandmother does, marveling at its utility and its beauty, in the same time missing terribly what had once been in its place.

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