

Developing My Archive: on being

by

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Abstract

My current visual research examines personal experiences surrounding homesickness and nostalgia. For most of history, nostalgia and homesickness have been linked together even though they differ. Nostalgia is a longing for a time, while homesickness is a longing for a place. Where we come from is an integral part of our being, but what we become nostalgic for also shapes what we become. My work explores the idea of photographs existing as a substitution for memory and how photographic manipulation can change how we remember events. Photography lets me explore and recontextualize my exalted memory surrounding my transition from South Dakota to North Carolina. This method allows me to reclaim control over what I want to remember. Centering imagery around home and routine allows viewers to connect openly to various physical and emotional landscapes. Viewers are encouraged to participate in the transfer and reconstructions of these personal memories. My work challenges us to focus on and appreciate small moments we are surrounded by and how they shape our outward attitudes and understandings of what we consider home.



Developing My Archive: on being

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Art and Design

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

by

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“People make a serious mistake in thinking that you give to those whom you love

The real answer is you love those to whom you give

If I give something to you, I've invested myself in you.

Now that part of me has become in you.

There's part of me in you that I love.”

-Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler

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## INTRODUCTION

### Developing My Archive: on being

Moving locations can be exciting. It provides a change of pace, new opportunities, and new places to explore. Even when people are prepared and anticipating a move, home becomes a transitional space, and they may still find themselves homesick later down the line. My first significant move held this experience. I transitioned from South Dakota to North Carolina to pursue graduate school. The first time I moved out of the midwest, I moved 2,000 miles away. Before I left, I gave away most of my possessions, said my goodbyes, and took as many photographs with my friends as I could. I left with good wishes, celebrations, and other people's stories and memories of me. These memories and photographs became a prized possession for me, becoming some of the first decorations in my new home and, to this day, still adorning my windowsill.

When I first moved to North Carolina, I found myself photographing my environment to understand my new place and where I fit in. This became increasingly hard for me as I began only to find differences aligned with culture shock. As I continued expanding and experimenting with my craft and what I was photographing, my life drastically shifted. In 2019 the world was affected by COVID-19, and during this time, I almost lost my brother to a suicide attempt. At this moment, I had to come to terms with my relationship with what I considered home.

Through my early years, I struggled with the isolation of South Dakota. It was not a place that I had planned to be long-term. When I had the opportunity to leave for school, I took it because it was something that I wanted. I wanted to be a better artist. Given that I wanted to move, I found myself conflicted. Feeling that I had left people that needed me but, at the same time, I resented

the place that raised me. During this internal conflict, I questioned why I was homesick and what was I homesick for? Why was I remembering things I was remembering, and why was I being nostalgic for a different time? These questions began to drive my research.

We look at photographs to remember personal and even historical events. We look at family photo albums to understand who we are and where we come from. Photographs automatically have a connection with memory and truth. I wanted to push my understanding of my autobiographical memory. I wanted to create work that let me look back on my life and this feeling of longing in a better way. During this time, my photography work was led by studies and surveys in history, literature, psychology, and gerontology.

This paper will elaborate on the history of homesickness and nostalgia, the history of the linguistic term, and its evolution as a medical definition. In this context, this paper also explores how nostalgia is currently understood and how it functions for human autobiographical memory as we age. This section explores how nostalgia can be triggered and how this can change moods. This paper discusses how homesickness is affected by folklore, lore, and place and how this can simultaneously reinforce homesickness. These ideas allow me to argue on the usage of photographs as a form of memory and how images can be manipulated to affect mood and our original autobiographical memories.

## HOMESICKNESS AND NOSTALGIA

The American Psychological Association defines homesickness as:

n. a feeling of intense sadness and longing caused by absence from one's home or native land. See also nostalgia. —homesick adj.

American Psychological Association defines nostalgia as:

n. 1. a longing to return to an earlier period or condition of life recalled as being better than the present somehow.

2. a longing to return to a place where one feels emotionally bound (e.g., home or a native land).

See also homesickness. —nostalgic adj.

The terms homesickness and nostalgia have been long felt and documented in different terms. The linguistics of the word "nostalgia" comes from the combination of the Greek word *notos*, which means "return to the native land," alongside *algo*, which is a term used for pain. This stood for the suffering caused by the longing for home. The feeling has been long displayed, even dating back to the classic literature of Homer's *Odyssey*. This text primarily focuses on Odysseus's harrowing journey on his way home after the Trojan War. Odysseus harbors memories of Ithica and his family. Even though Odysseus struggles and is pained by his memories of home, these are the memories that also sustain and galvanize him. (Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, Wildschut, 2011.)

The medical definition of nostalgia was initially coined by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss doctor and scholar, in 1688. Johanne used this word to describe a neurological disease that affected people far from home. Some of the symptoms of this disease were: sadness, heart palpitations, frequent sighs, stupidity of the mind, and not attending to tasks. (Harper, 2022.) It was thought the best remedy for people dealing with nostalgia is to return home, or nostalgia could be fatal—the

understanding of nostalgia as a neurological disease ruled relevant throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Some scholars believed that certain countries were less likely to contract this disease. For example, Britain was aligned with commerce and colonization, which ultimately led to relocation—assuming that British citizens had a better ability to re-adjust to leaving their home. This assumption proves false as homesickness was well documented in early colonialist communications and ultimately demise early attempts to colonize. (Matt, 2017, pg 470.) In 1558, English settlers made their first of two failed attempts to create a colony in Roanoke, North Carolina. This settlement lasted for only a few years before, according to reports, colonists grew homesick and returned to England. (Matt, 2014, pg 14.)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nostalgia was viewed as a psychological disorder associated with depression and melancholy. This trend followed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as nostalgia was linked to a variation of mourning, grief, and psychosis. It was not until the late twentieth century that these terms homesickness and nostalgia deviated from one another. Doctors still used the term nostalgia to reference homesickness, but during this time, nostalgia took on a second meaning which later supplanted the original meaning. Nostalgia began to connect itself with the feeling of bittersweet longing for lost time.

"Homesickness" implies that returning home is theoretically possible, whereas "nostalgia" refers to the longing for something unattainable, such as past or passing time. Both words are distinct on their own, but both words have a linguistic and emotional connection. Scholars and psychologists still suggest "homesickness and nostalgia may represent individuals' attempt to establish continuity with past selves. Longing for lost places, peoples, and times represents a desire to bridge past experiences and present conditions." (Matt, 2017. Pg 470.)

The linguistic history of homesickness and nostalgia provides clues on how our society reacts to the feelings associated with homesickness and nostalgia. These reactions have changed through the centuries but have even shaped the creation of countries and perceptions of these countries. However, the normalization of these terms in our daily vocabulary shows how necessary this function is for us as human beings. As these terms become normalized, the significance of the emotional states related to homesickness and nostalgia also tend to be normalized into our cultural practices and histories.

## AMERICAN FOLKLORE

“Home is the nicest world there is.” – *Laura Ingalls Wilder*.

Lore and folklore are understood as traditional beliefs, stories, customs, and practices not written but passed down by mouth. Lore usually emphasizes and centralizes around a population's beliefs and values. These can be written and shared through speech and passed down over generations. Wes Hill's book, *How Folklore Shaped Modern Art*, states, "folklore can also refer to kitsch and capitalistic imitations of practices." (Hill, 2016. Pg 3) This lore also relates to mass culture, which does not need specific cultural or historical knowledge to understand. Many folklore stories have a form of romanticism that helps to inflate narratives. American folklore revolves heavily around expansion and independence and boosts figures like the Founding Fathers, who embody the American presence. As America expanded west, this presence of individualism and personal was also embodied in lore.

South Dakota is a prime example of how places still emphasize and romanticize their lore. Stories associated with Lewis and Clark, who documented the expanse of the Missouri River, Wild Bill Hickok, who died in the infamous Deadwood, and Jesse James, who avoided arrest by hiding in South Dakota, all explore the wild, untouched nature of this specific location. Books written by Laura Ingles Wilder in her series *Little House on the Prairie* (1962) explore her life as an early settler show the rugged individualism of pioneers as they moved and "conquered the wild west." These specific stories are meant to instill patriotism and amalgamate with more contemporary people who fit into these American ideals.

Susan Matt, an American historian who wrote *Homesickness an American History*, states that psychological advice and American folklore immortalize and reinforce the ideas of pursuing

individualism. Encouraging and normalizing separation as ongoing relocation. "Americans have learned to follow the emotional pattern for rugged individualists: to separate, move on, and find consolation in sweet, nostalgic memories of lost time. The structure of daily life is built around this idea Americans have learned to follow the emotional pattern of rugged individualists: to separate, move on, and find consolation in sweet, nostalgic memories of lost time. The structure of daily life is built around this idea." (Matt, 2014, pg 253.)

## NOSTALGIA AS A FUNCTION OF MEMORY

Autobiographical memories are considered a unique human system that integrates memories and experiences into overarching life narratives and identity. These perspectives and understandings surrounding identity can be influenced by social standing, gender, location, etc. These specific memories relate to auto-noetic consciousness, which can place oneself in past or future events. This allows us to look back at previous memories and reflect on actions and behaviors while simultaneously determining if we would do it again while connecting these to future selves.

Theory and research around autobiographical memories have found that it serves three different functions: self, directive, and social. *Self* relates to memories of the past that tell us who we are. These memories are found to be constant over time. *Directive* refers to memories surrounding problem-solving or lesson learning. These memories allow us to problems solves for current times or plan future events. *Social* functions are the ability to remember events through conversation and communication. Sharing and listening to stories allows us to build and maintain relationships. (Mace, 2019.)

Tabea Wolf (2014) surveyed how nostalgia functions in relationship to other functions in her article *Nostalgia and the Features of the Autobiographical Memory*. In this study, Wolf surveyed 273 people between 19 to 90. People were sectioned into groups based on their age demographic, including emerging/developing adults, young adults, medium adults, high adults, seniors, and very old people. When approaching these cognitive memory functions, our society holds many assumptions, such as older adults use less directive and social functions. In contrast,

young adults have high directive and social functions to ensure their stability even though time may sway this situation.

This survey also produced interesting rates of nostalgia as we age at developing ages. Nostalgia function rates start high in young adults and begin to drop into middle age. At its lowest, ranging at old adults. This research concludes that nostalgic memory functions are essential to every age but especially to younger adults and those of older age. Wolf also found that suppression of nostalgia triggers could manipulate mood. People with Nostalgia conditions held a more positive self-image, especially those with higher social functions. When handling negative situations and experiences, nostalgic autobiographical memories can be used as mood manipulations when remembering personal and positive experiences. This can include an improving ability to regulate emotions and general mood. Those who can share and discuss these memories also excel, especially those in higher age ranges.

This survey shows the importance of nostalgia in variations of states as we age. Nostalgia is a function of how we remember and how we access memories. The particular ways of reaccessing these memories reinforce who we are as people. Through Wolf's research, we also found that there is also a method for manipulating nostalgia and how these manipulations can affect our moods and perspectives of the world and ourselves. The ability to manipulate our nostalgic memory also becomes interesting as we begin to discuss our relationship to images and photography.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUTH

Photography has been a medium associated with realism and memory throughout history, even though creating with lenses has been subjective. Since creating the medium, the myth of the photographic truth has been up for question and debate. This can include subject selection, framing, lighting, the composition of elements, and aesthetic values. Nevertheless, Photography and photographs have been considered objective because they can factually represent their environment and are unbiased.

Photography functioned as a tool in the form of documentation for science. This creates an association of the camera as a machine; this attachment to machines is objective and not influenced by human vision. The photographic representation was used as a systematic recording device that was more reliant on scientists' interpretation drawings and field notes.

This assumption and association with photographs have profound ethical, political, and social implications. This conversation has become even more popular during the rise of photoshop and apps like Snapchat, Instagram, and Facetune. The practices of photograph manipulation have been dated back to the creation of the medium. Photographs like *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840) by Hippolyte Bayard and Henry Peach Robinson's *Fading Away* (1858) illustrate the subjectivity posed by the artists and their physical manipulation of the narrative through the medium.



Figure 1: Hippolyte Bayard. (1840). *Self-Portrait as a Drown Man*.

In Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), he uses the term *studium* to describe the truth of Photography. This is the coded cultural, linguistic, and political meaning of a photograph. The photographer intends this and is objectively understood by the audience. In essence, the *studium* refers to the ability of a photograph to invoke an appreciation for what the image is. Though, the photograph as an object is also subjective. This subjectivity for the object can have emotional value and be meaningful to people. This emotional value and attachment can channel the feeling of magic, which is highly personal and internalized. Barthes also wrote about the term *punctum*, a word for "trauma, to characterize the affective element of the photographs that pierce one's heart and feeling." In a sense, the *studium* is the collection of the signs representing a piece, while the *punctum* is the personalized reaction to the work itself. The photographer does not always account for the *punctum* because these include personal understandings from the viewer. Photography is a paradox. A photograph can hold emotional value and attachment and serve as a documentation of observable facts.

## ARTISTIC REFERENCES AND INFLUENCES

William Eggleston's aesthetic revolves around snapshot photography, allowing him to create anecdotal images surrounding everyday life. These anecdotes explore a specific change in time by photographing small details, objects, people, and a sense of daily life. These use of the snapshot and his use of color allowed him to reframe the history surrounding color photography. Eggleston's color images allow him to express different relationships between concepts such as the banal and the extraordinary. This exploration allowed Eggleston to document transformation in the rural south. While at first glance, many for Eggleston's work seems trivial until deeper analysis. These images are the result of thought-out compositions that only seem random. William Eggleston was a pioneer in color photography, allowing color to begin to dictate the emotion of some images.



Figure 2: William Eggleston. *Untitled, From Graceland*. 1983.



Figure 3: William Eggleston. *Untitled, Red Ceiling*. 1973.

Stephen Shore's work functions similarly. Shore gives depth to the use of snapshots due to his deep calculated formatting in the compositions. His work is based on the experience of seeing and observation which allows a connection and communication of his personal experience through photographs. Similarly to Eggelston, both works function as a visual diary of daily life for the artist. This photographic choice allows an emotional attachment enhanced by the quality of light, color, and composition. In his series, *Uncommon Places* is a collection of Stephens's decade-long cross-country road trips around North America. His interest in North America as a subject did not reflect on the social or political entity but rather an experience of America through the form of road trips, and this experience can only go as far as one can drive. Shore also focuses on people's construction and modification of the landscape. The road is referenced back to the vastness of North America alongside context between American individualism, the automobile, and other forms of travel are essential in understanding this work. Iconic images of the mountain depicted on a billboard in *South of Klamath Falls, U.S 97, Oregon*, mock the landscape it obstructs. Finding the strangeness in the image through this series, you find that places and photographs reveal themselves as what they are and what they are trying to tell us.



Figure 4: Stephen Shore.  
*South of Klamath Falls, U.S 97, Oregon*. July 19, 1973.



Figure 5: Stephen Shore. *South of Klamath Falls, U.S 97, Oregon*. July 19, 1973.

Rebecca Norris Webb also utilizes an ability to document visual experiences surrounding life and place. She uses the camera and images as a form to create metaphors relating to specific locations. Her images speak lyrically and are usually accompanied by her poetry for deeper ties to personal narratives. In books such as *My Dakota* and *Night Calls*, she focuses on reconstructing memory. *My Dakota* is a visual elegy after the loss of her brother suddenly. These images give elegiac qualities of the location to illustrate a natural pause while in grief. These images also show the vast emptiness of South Dakota in general and its ties to emotional

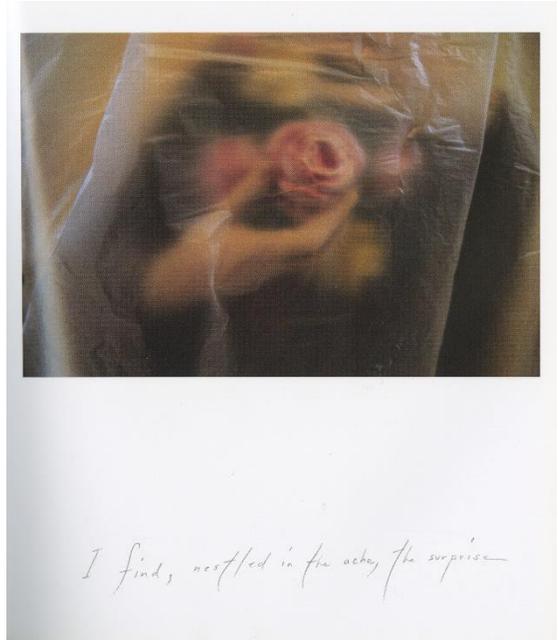


Figure 6: Rebecca Norris Webb. *St Thérèse of Lissieux*. Photograph. *My Dakota*. Santa Fe, NE: Radius Books, 2017.

emptiness. In her book *Night Calls*, Webb retraces her father's night calls. She photographs locations and people that her father attended to. She creates dreamlike images alongside portraits to explore the relationship between people, memory, and place. In the book's preface, Webb states, "*Night Calls* is a meditation on fathers and daughters, on memory and one's first landscape, on the caretaking of the land and its inhabitants, and on history, that divides us as of the much as heals us." Much of Webb's photographic process emphasizes what we remember and how we remember.

These artists specifically influence how I make my photographs and my conceptual development. Most of my work utilizes many similar style characteristics as Eggleston and Shore. This comes from the way we document our everyday environments. When photographing, color and composition become well constructed and thought out, considering what is being photographed. I believe the act of documenting and photographing an environment exalts this daily

interaction with environments into something more thoughtful. Eggleston and Shore also have the ability to associate regional histories and personalities with their work. I was able to accomplish this same association through my work in documenting South Dakota.



Figure 7: Rebecca Norris Webb. *High Winds*. Photograph. *My Dakota*. Santa Fe, NE: Radius

My work heavily relies on my personal narratives and the utilization of memory. Through my constructions of sequence, text, and how I photograph, my work becomes more poetic. This becomes more apparent when seeing the influences of Rebecca Norris Webb. We mutually grew up in South Dakota our sentiment of place is similar. Webb has exceptional skill and reframing ordinary landscapes into emotional beings. This attachment and emotion are enhanced through her use of text in the book formats. When making this work, I wanted my personal narrative to be what strengthened my work and why I utilized text similarly to Webb. This adds something more personal and creates a deeper connection with the audience we share.

## TIES TO MOMENTS

When first making this current body of work, I started by photographing my observations around my daily experiences to begin to articulate what home means for me. I started this visual exploration of my surroundings and my daily rituals. Doing so meant that I also had to pause and live in the moment, which is purposeful. The practice of photography forces one to slow down and consider what is being photographed. What does this stand for, and what does it represent? These moments of pause allow us to take time to appreciate what seem to miss and what we tend to pass over. As mentioned previously, a place has its own personality, history, and conversation. Even if these environments and daily rituals seem needless, they have more to say about us than what we tend to say about them. I wanted to document these spaces that served as a form of transition to home.



Plate 1: *Laundry Day*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

Images such as *Laundry day* and *Wash on Cold to Avoid Bleeding* are examples of this pause in daily routine. I choose to photograph these because of my attachment to laundry day rituals and how that contributes to personal homebuilding. The act of caring for our environment shows mutual respect for our space but also respect for ourselves. The power of taking control of our space allows us also to reaffirm our identity. *Washing on Cold to Avoid*



Plate 2: *Wash on Cold to Avoid Bleeding*, Archival inkjet print, 2020.

*Bleeding* is also the only physical portrait of myself in my series. This image lacks the attachment to my physical appearance, which is intentional. This implies that imbedding of a person into the ritual. We become what we do.

Work such as *Nested* also illustrates these traits. This image was photographed from inside a chicken coop during a morning chicken feed. The early morning light is beaming through the window and onto a collection of chicken feathers. As discussed previously, the act of caring speaks through this image. The act of taking care of livestock, collecting only the best feathers, and photographing create an act of appreciation and pause. The title *Nested* relates to the contextual meaning of this image and the iconographical usage of the birds in this work. *Nested* refers to being domicile but also connected with growth and development. The repetitive usage of the birds in this body of work refers to the past, present, and future. The beginning and end, the ability to move without constraints.



Plate 3: *Nested*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

## RELATIONAL TIES TO PLACE

As previously discussed, places have specific histories, personalities, and attributes that affect who we are as people. Growing up in rural South Dakota, my life was shaped by the isolation of rolling plains, the banks of the Missouri river, living through deep winters, and expansive farmlands. During my transition to North Carolina, one of the first things I noticed was my reaction to the state's physical geography. As I began to exist and interact with the environment more and more, I became more aware of how South Dakota and North Carolina hold similar aspects to each other outside of their geographic locations. Both of these places started to look like home to me. Through my images, I wanted to begin to amalgamate these two places to try and show their similarities.

Images such as *Boomer's* illustrate this amalgamation. The subject in this photograph is Elvis Presley, a red, white, and blue barn square, and the entrance to a bar named Boomers. Even though Elvis was born in Mississippi and lived in Tennessee, he became a widely accepted icon in the Midwest. Barn squares also have a history that



Plate 4: *Boomers*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

dates to the arrival of immigrants in the US. Before barn squares were painted, they tended to be decorated with different types of folk art and patterns that celebrated heritage. These also became a marker for people to identify other farmlands. This practice is still practiced through the midwest and south. Boomer's is a perfect illustration of how two different states and their characteristics are bleeding together.

Through this series, I also wanted to allude to my relationship with isolation. This was something that I struggled with growing up in rural South Dakota but also when I evolved in my transition across the US. In South Dakota, this isolation came from the rural and wide-open spaces of the plains. This physical isolation. While in North Carolina, my isolation came from my physical separation from my previous home. I wanted to create this isolation similarly for my viewer. In images such as *No Lifeguard*, I documented the expansive nature of space in



Plate 5: *No Lifeguard*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

South Dakota. Color and its effect on the viewer was something that I wanted to consider when making many of these images. The overwhelming blue reflected in the snow creates a sense of space that seems endless. The no lifeguard sign also refers to the overwhelming feeling of isolation that no one can save you from.

In sequence, this image is an abrupt transition from other comfortable and safe images; it becomes a wake-up call. Images like *Shipwrecked Somewhere Between Safe and Sound* are my examples of the isolation in North Carolina. This image was made off the Outerbanks coast by Hatteras. There have been many documented shipwrecks around this area due to the dangerous waters in the area. I was able to discover a shipwrecked houseboat while exploring the sandbanks. The houseboat is mainly destroyed and swallowed by sand, while the kitchen sink is still exposed. In the upper section of the image, storm clouds consume the open sky, creating more profound

tension. This image is meant to create feelings of isolation and abandonment and a sense of longing for some form of safety.



Plate 6: *Shipwrecked Between Safe and Sound*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

## REFRAMING MEMORY

When I first moved away from South Dakota, I was perplexed by my homesickness. Given that this was a personal choice to move, and I wanted to leave South Dakota for many years, I was extremely confused by my homesickness. My early life was filled with trauma and isolation. When I could leave, I took the opportunity. When looking back at my life, I want to remember the good times back home, and I want to recognize how South Dakota shaped me as a person.

With photographs automatically attached to our understanding of memory, I wanted to recontextualize and reclaim my memories. Many of these manipulations are done by photographing through the glass and utilizing the reflection. Nostalgia lets of access old memories and connects them with new ones, giving people the ability to reaffirm who they are as a person. This allowed me to create spaces that functioned similarly to nostalgia, daydreams, and memory.

The first created image like this was *For Once in a Dream*. This image compresses interior spaces with exterior spaces, creating a specific dreamlike quality to my work. The blaring white also provided by a bright beam of light and snow gives viewers a beacon for hope and safety while still in an environment shadowed by darkness.

This image challenges the viewers on what and where is safety when dreaming. The text occupied with this image states, "For once in a dream, I imagine you near." This is used to approach my family and lead them to safety and my viewers.



Plate 7: *For Once in a Dream*, Archival inkjet print, 2020.



Plate 8: *Motel*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

*Motel* is another photograph that functions in a dreamlike setting. This image is accompanied by text stating, "is it the feeling of floating that makes time stand still? Making time move backward and forward?" This text is meant to help position viewers in relationship with the transmittal of these liminal spaces. The images

are saturated with reds, blues, and whites, which correlate to the American Flag. The style of this motel also touches on nostalgia, even though someone may not have had any experience with this space. This is another place that is romanticized when looking back at different forms of Americana.

Another image that uses other forms of Americana is *Trophy Hunter*. Again, this image compresses the indoor and outdoor space, creating a dreamlike effect. The images are scattered with detailed trophies and mounts of deer. This image represents romanticism and the pure achievement of American values. These values are challenged by the small detail of the dumpster in the background and the compression of the indoor and outdoor spaces. Unless attained in a dreamlike state, these goals and values seem to be unattainable.



Plate 9: *Trophy Hunter*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

## FAMILIAL TIES

Where I came from attributed to who I am but also did my family. Through my series, I explored this relationship with my family. Through these portraits, I utilize their likeness, the space, and the interaction to symbolize what these people mean to me. Their portraits stand as another form of self-portrait for me. This alludes to their influence on my life.



Plate 10: *Rebecca Shay*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

The first image in my sequence is the portrait of my little sister Rebecca Shay, which is also the title of this image. Out of my six siblings, Rebecca and I are the closest to each other and are the ones that resemble each other the most. In this image, you see Rebecca

on the back of the four-wheeler; a small grill fills the air with smoke as the sun begins to go down. She still is wearing her dress shoes, and her hair is being blown by her pending acceleration. The text attached to this image elaborates on this relationship, stating, "I hear you when I laugh; we used to match so well." This text is inspired by the song *Before the World Was Big* by Girlpool, "I just miss how it felt standing next to you. Wearing matching dresses before the world was big." This image stands as a portrait of both of us. All the things I want my sister to know and all the details that I appreciate about her. My sister is more of a risk-taker than me and tends to be more adventurous, even as she's grown up. This is something that I've always appreciated her for. The text elaborates on my connection to being her sister and how we are the same but inevitably grew apart.

While I was longing for South Dakota, I had the chance to bring part of my family to North Carolina. This was documented through the images of my father seeing the ocean for the first time. This moment was monumental for both of us. It was an incredible moment due to my achievement, passion, and dedication to being a graduate student. My hard work was paying off, and I was excited that I could lead my father to new experiences and environments. As someone that had previously seen the ocean, I was overwhelmed by watching my father, who is 64, see the ocean for the first

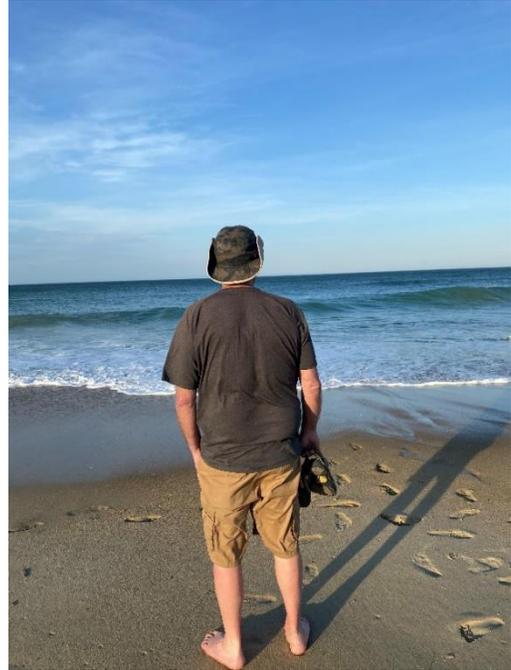


Plate 11: *Dad at the Ocean*,  
Archival inkjet print, 2021.

time. Similar to my other images, you can feel the natural pause of these moments. The need to take in this environment gets passed down to the viewer once they realize the importance of this experience. While this was a one-of-a-kind moment, there was still a place of grief, knowing that it would eventually end and that life would inevitably move on. This is illustrated through my text, "I took my father to the ocean for the first time. At this moment, I found the place where the plains met the sea, where the earth touched the sky, and I wondered if grief had taught me to swim or to fly?"



Plate 12: *Mother Tamera*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

The image of my father also sits in sequence next to the image of my mother. This is purposeful because their union brought me life. The portrait of my mother was created using the reflective case that guarded a statue of Mother Mary. This reflection is used to create the compression of my mother and Mother Mary, elevating my mother's existence into a form of sainthood. My mother dealt with many adversities in her life, but without her, I would not be the woman I am today. She sacrificed so much for others' achievements that it's hard not to recognize this personally. The text attached to this image states, "My mother

does not know how to swim, but she taught me to float. Is the feeling of floating that makes time stand still? Does it stop time

from moving backward or forward?" This refers to her ability to handle herself in a difficult situation and how she passed that skill down to me. I wanted to recognize that I could not be here without her and how her presence would continually affect my relationship with the future.

When addressing this work, one of the things that I wanted to consider was what it does for the future. How does it affect value systems? What did I want for the people in my images and those who view this work? The image of Norah illustrates this tough questioning. Norah's mother is originally from North Carolina



Plate 13: *Norah*, Archival inkjet print, 2021.

but moved to South Dakota to raise her children. Norah's mother is a driving force in my life path and has always supported my decision to move to North Carolina. The usage of Norah represents innocence and pure love. Someone that's life has been untouched by such question and contemplation. The usage of the chicken is meant to represent growth and life and our human relationships to that. Norah has control of this future. Through this series, I want her to understand that she may also have to make giant leaps to grow, but it will always be okay to remember where you come from. Where you come from and what you find essential will affect who you are and what you do. This choice may be challenging, but it will be the best.

## CONCLUSION

In retrospect of this work and research, I have found home within myself and learned how I could continue to keep building as I move forward. During this time and opportunity, I've acknowledged how place, family, and small moments can affect who we are as a person. This work serves as a reminder to analyze what and why we remember these very specific memories that make us 'us.' Using photography, I can continually recontextualize my nostalgic memories and create the person I want to become. This body of work has given me the capability of blending places, time, and human experience. Making these images and the practice of sharing these moments of pause encourages my viewer to do the same, to reminisce.

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## APPENDIX

### TEXT WITH IMAGES

I hear you when I laugh,  
We used to match so well. – From *Rebecca Shay*

I document these changes. Archiving this away from underneath the kitchen table. – From  
*Archived From Underneath the Kitchen Table*

For most of my life, I've lived in silence.  
but once in a dream, I hear you close to me. – From *For Once in a Dream*

I'll imagine you nearby. – From *Riley*

I took my father to the ocean for the first time.  
In this moment, I found the place where the plains met the sea, where the earth touched the sky  
and I wondered if grief had taught me to swim or to fly? – From *Father at the Ocean*

My mother does not know how to swim, but she taught me to float.  
Is the feeling of floating that makes time stand still? Does it stop time from moving backward or  
forward? - From *Mother Tamera*

Is it something we cannot resist? - From *No Lifeguard*

We found ourselves shipwrecked somewhere safe. – From *Shipwrecked Between Somewhere  
Safe and Sound.*

Wash on cold to avoid bleeding. – From *Wash on Cold to Avoid Bleeding.*

SEQUENCE



1- Rebcca Shay.JPG



2- Catch of the Day.JPG



3- Walnut Tavern.JPG



4- Gun Cabinet.JPG



5- Archived From Under the Kit...



6- For Once in a Dream.JPG



7- Riley.JPG



8- Ambulance Entrance.JPG



9- Nirvana.JPG



10 - Dad at the Ocean.heic



11 - Mother Tamera.JPG



12 - Nested.JPG



13 - Laundry Day.JPG



14- Motel.jpg



15 - For Buddies.JPG



16 - No Lifeguard.JPG



17 - Boomers.JPG



18 - Trophy Hunter.jpg



19- Shipwrecked Between Safe...



20- Crown Vic.JPG



21- First in Flight.JPG



22 - Norah.JPG



23- Angels at the Backdoor.JPG



24- Wash on Cold to Avoid Bleed...



25- On Building Home.JPG

