

## Two passages from “On Homesickness and Heresickness and the Longing for Buckeyes”

By Diane Kendig

1.

Last March, on a flight to St. Louis, I read an article stating that the Midwest is not a place but a state of mind. It seems that James Shortridge has polled 2,000 university students on the question of exactly which states constitute the Midwest. Curiously enough, students from Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan considered those three states to be part of the Midwest while students from outside the three states did not consider them to be part of the Midwest.

Stunned by the idea that I might not be a Midwesterner, I set about with my own poll of Missourians, beginning with my cab driver, who told me he was a native of St. Louis.

“I just read an article that says no one agrees on which states are in the Midwest,” I told him. “Which states do *you* consider part of the Midwest?”

“Well, I don’t know the answer to *that*,” he answered me in his rearview mirror, “But I’ll tell you what I do know. I lived in Arkansas once, and it is not the Midwest. And St. Louis is.”

That made a lot of sense to me, but when I told my friends from Illinois, they laughed and said, “St. Louis isn’t the Midwest.”

Maybe St. Louis is not the Midwest, and I have given up asking what exactly constitutes the Midwest, but that cab driver is right about at least one thing: we leave home to know it; we miss it in order to love it. There is nothing like coming home to the real home after living for months with the memory of home.

2.

“I began in Ohio, / I still dream of home,” James Wright wrote. The annual James Wright Poetry Festival takes place in the poet’s hometown of Martin’s Ferry, Ohio, each spring when the dogwoods and fruit trees and maples are surprising the hills of the southeast end of our state with pinks, chartreuses, and creamy whites. One year for the festival someone stamped those two lines by Wright onto a t-shirt and sold them, and thought I never wore a t-shirt before, I brought and wear that one. I wore it to the grocery store here in Santa Cruz the other day.

“Oh, are you from Ohio?” the clerk asked, reading my shirt. “Say, you’re never going to want to go home, are you?”

Most Californians are so rightfully proud of their state, and it would be rude of me to tell one of my hosts that I already want to go home, so I smile and say, “It certainly is beautiful here.”

“Yes, this is paradise,” he says.

But I dream of another paradise where I’ll return to in a few weeks. Meanwhile I long for the relief of being able to remain quietly at home in my rooms and in my woods awhile, running there with my Scottie Emma through the Buckeyes and the pines.

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