

## Sarah and I Meet in the Middle

Here is something I do.

I'm standing on the side of a road that winds through the hills and redwoods south of San Francisco. I am at a place where I can see the Pacific Ocean and as I turn and pull the scenery into my head, I can see the Pacific coast, San Francisco, the bay, all the way to Mount Diablo far off in the East.

But what I do is attempt to erase the traces of people, the geometric shapes that break the natural scraggs and swoops of the earth. I usually start with houses and buildings, the things close to me, the roads, diamond yellow street signs. Then I push it out further.

Freeways erased with the dark greens of trees or with the suede summer grass so dry that it seems to smolder in the sharp yellow sun. The Bay Bridge, the San Mateo Bridge smear into the water, Alcatraz is just a rocky island.

Depending on how far I want to regress the landscape, maybe there is a solo Ohlone canoe lunging, lunging along the shore where the airport used to be.

I started doing this when I was probably 12 years old, back in Orange County, New York, when I could digest the stories of Sarah Wells, "the first white woman to settle in Orange Country," and, according to the stories, my greatest grandmother. A Sunday drive with my parents, the car paused at a road that led off the Sarah Wells trail, my parents discussing where this new road may lead.

I was not comfortable of their exploration and as they seemed less sure of their route I would start to disassemble the horse farms and fences, the power lines, a satellite dish, until just a dirt trail remained where the road should be.

Because I was a timid child and not a fan of the unknown I looked to my ancestor for comfort in these moments, my parents forcing on into the wilderness, me, on a horse, led by these wild people through the impossibly green forests, surrounded by the eyes of animals long since chased away by guns and cattle.

I found a strange peace with her these moments.  
Sarah moved through this unfamiliar landscape  
and survived, and thrived. She built a square  
in the curvy earth, carved a way to keep living.  
I would put her back in this landscape.  
She was guiding a horse as it dragged a plow,  
ripping roots, churning the dark dirt,  
she was heaving the head of an axe  
through the tight grain at the heart of cold, winter logs,  
she threw seeds and pulled the feathers from fowl,  
she gently slid calves from the bloody wombs  
of their mothers, she breast fed and burped babies,  
bumped their bottoms on the newel post  
at the foot of the stairs to christen them as Bulls.

Sarah was so young when she disembarked the boat  
from New York City and trusted the people who led  
her into the green-shadowed landscape of Orange County.  
She was young and since, from what we know,  
her life until this journey was probably hard,  
was the frozen mud of a sloppy mid-winter,  
she stood at the head of this trail, taking in the details  
of this new landscape, the shadows of the leaves  
gently moving on the ground like hands polishing  
the forest floor, beads of sweat just breaking on the backs  
of her Munsee guides, the cattle flicking flies  
with their stringy tails. She pulled in the landscape  
and she did the opposite of what I do. She had to see a future.  
Maybe she pulled down some of the trees to see  
the first square patch of land. Maybe she heaved  
the stones from the ground and stacked them  
long before there were plans for the house that still stands.  
Maybe she began to populate the world with her people,  
her 12 children, her thousands of descendants.  
Maybe, because she was braver than I,  
she built and grew and towns and cities sprouted like crops,  
and maybe she could even see me,

twelve years old,

staring out the back window of my parent's car,  
as I pull down all her hard work.

David Sorrell  
2012