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The place where you live: St. Petersburg, Florida.

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THE PLACE WHERE YOU LIVE

Orion readers write about their hometown

Susan Dickman

Evanston, Illinois

AFTER SIX YEARS in California, where I fell in love with the hugeness of the Pacific, I returned to the Midwest, the place where I grew up, and stood at the shore of Lake Michigan and thought: *Oh. You?*

Life among the majesty of California's mountains, deserts, and a powerful, salty ocean left me easily underwhelmed. It took me a few seasons to adjust to the Midwest's seasons: the cold is *cold*, and the heat is steamy. But then I noticed that the

deep silence of winter is involved with the lake's chilled waters. I saw that the shape of Lake Michigan's coast really does lead through Indiana to Michigan. And then, one day, I found myself walking down Chicago Avenue under a heavy, midwestern sky—remembering that above the cloud cover there is a bright and sparkling sun, that there will be no mountains once a nonexistent fog burns off—and I happened to glance eastward and catch sight of a slim patch of blue.

That's Evanston: a place with one Great Lake at the end of the street.

Thomas Hallock

St. Petersburg, Florida

ILIVE IN A CITY littered with middens. Most of the mounds, made from shellfish discarded by the Tocobaga Indians, became road fill. Those that survive carry a certain mystique—the aura of a “real” Florida not overrun by theme parks, golf courses, and Yankee transplants like myself.

The middens usually have historical markers. Most of the markers are wrong. My favorite mismarked site is Pinellas Point, or the “Princess Mound,” a twenty-foot platform mound tucked into a lush corner of the state. Here, the waters of Tampa Bay mingle with the Gulf; early boosters called this neighborhood “the healthiest place on Earth.” On the mound's north side, white-gloved Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) erected a marker that claimed the site for Princess Hirrihigua, the descendent of a Timucan chieftain who rescued a survivor of a 1528 colonial expedition. Some Floridians say this story inspired the Pocahontas myth, but a second marker, set on the mound's south face by a rival DAR chapter, linked the site to Fray Luis Cancer de Barbastro, a Dominican killed in 1549 on a “friendship-seeking” mission.

For decades, kids rode their bikes down Princess Mound. Teenagers came here to drink, smoke, fornicate. Tired of used condoms and bike ruts defacing a sacred place, the Pinellas Point Civic Asso-



Paige Fisher

Morochos, Ecuador

ciation lobbied to reinterpret the mound and landscape the surrounding park. The city moved the older markers and added two more in 2010. A newer sign now downplays the earlier interpretations, and the local native plant society introduced beautyberry, coontie, and calcium-hungry marlberry to the shelly topsoil.

Historically, though, the mound was bare. Early ethnographic accounts mention scrub pine and not much else. The hardwood understory plants that now thrive on the midden are native, but not quite right for this corner of Pinellas County, which is a dynamic landscape shaped by fire. Fire, though, has no place among six-figure homes and irrigated lawns. The park today honors both ancient heritage and modern property values, and it's a reminder that plants can fib, just like signs.

Anna Dursztman

New York, New York

WHEN I WAS six years old Manhattan's Hayden Planetarium was my favorite place. In my humble opinion, it was the best building in New York City. Every time I waited in line for a showing of one of its big-screen tours of the universe, my heart raced. By the time I took my seat inside the great dome, I was giddy. The lights would dim, the stars would appear, and the narrated video would take us back in time and through our galaxy.

But the show was over all too soon, and I quickly found myself back on the bustling streets of Manhattan, where at night the lights were so bright there was nothing to be seen but the edges of skyscrapers.

When I moved out of The Big Apple and into the suburb of Scarsdale, I discovered the stars with my own eyes. They weren't a projection, but real balls of fire many light years away. I could stare into space a limitless number of times, and for much longer than permitted by the twenty-minute movie at the planetarium.



Ashley Nedeau-Owen

West Point, Wisconsin

WEST POINT is a place with two seasons of morning fog. In one season, when the temperature reaches forty-eight degrees, I go outside in shorts and a t-shirt and celebrate a point more than halfway to the seasonal high. I notice how difficult it is to see my breath against the dawn. In the other season, when the temperature reaches the same point, I force myself outside, scrunched up and shivering in shorts and a t-shirt, knowing we're not yet halfway to the seasonal low. I look away when I see my breath against the dawn. It's officially jacket weather.

But the median temperature is

climbing. The iris bloomed twice in each of the last three years, and sandhill cranes linger into November. Optimistic, I left the calla corms in the ground last foggy fall. But I have no callas to dig up this year. When I tell my friend Dave about my callas, he laughs and sends me e-mails about global cooling and the climate-change hoax.

Dave and I each think the other's reading preferences keep them from seeing what is really happening. I encourage him to come into the fog with me, to see what I see, feel what I feel. The fog of faith, the fog of science—each is clearly waiting for some fresh sun to warm the other to what we know.

Orion's Belt, the Big Dipper, the moon—I gazed up at them in awe, almost unaware of the cold snow beneath me or the steam that appeared with every breath.

In the winter, my red sled accompanied me regardless of the weather, and I'd trek as far as I could from street lamps and house lights. The same pictures appeared

overhead night after night, though they shifted slowly, and the moon, my favorite night light, grew and shrank but always seemed to have a smile on his face.

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