

Our Family Farm

Our farm is a homestead and is located on 120 acres of land in the heart of West Central Wisconsin, which is dairy country. It has been in our family for as long as I can remember. My Grandpa Zwiefelhofer lived, worked, and raised a family there for many years, and my dad was actually born in the farmhouse. And my great-grandma died in that old house. There is a rich sense of history linking me to the house, the buildings, and the land. No matter where I go, or who lives on the farm, I will always feel that it is my rightful home. And I will always be convinced that it belongs eternally to my family and know that our roots go so deep that it will never truly be home to anyone else.

The way to the farm is north, winding along many back roads. It is not the easiest place to find, unless you know exactly where you are going. Not surprisingly, I know the way like the back of my hand.

As I enter Chippewa County, I can sense the difference immediately, a sensation I get nowhere else in the world; a feeling of homecoming. In fact, I am so strongly aware of it that I think I could be blindfolded and still have that feeling.

The road leading to the farm is long and hilly, lined with trees and bushes that wave in the wind and whisper to one another. Farms dot the landscape, and cows lazily graze in the pastures. An occasional rabbit or deer shoots across the road in front of my car, and the birds soar through the air like kites. I smell the soft, fresh country air and watch the huge, puffy clouds float across the sky. I feel the tension draining from my shoulders as I imagine lying on one of those clouds, which look softer than the fluffiest cotton ball. Then, as my car rolls over the last hill, I get a glimpse of my childhood home. First, I see a long, curving driveway leading to a blue-roofed, pale yellow house, proudly standing atop a lush, green hill. The lawn, which frames the house, is sprinkled with many kinds of trees, and the barn, the silos and the outbuildings are protectively grouped behind. The pastures surround them all and ripple down around the hill like folds of green velvet. Small creeks meander playfully through the pastures, bypassing the only tree; a beautiful willow, bent, gnarled, and swaying in the breeze like a lonely old ballerina. Cows speckled with black and white are scattered here and there, plaintively lowing to one another, and my nose wrinkles as I catch a whiff of one of the country's less inviting odors: the unmistakable smell of cow dung. Last, but certainly not least, I drink in a sight that never ceases to fascinate me. Stretching across the horizon from one end of the farm to the other, breaking only for the farm buildings in between, is a row of graceful pine trees. They always remind me of proud, silent soldiers standing in formation, the guardians of our little paradise.

As I turn onto the driveway, I notice the dust of the gravel road filtering into my car through the open windows, and the acrid taste on my tongue. As I carefully negotiate the gently sloping drive, I see our Border Collie coming to welcome me home.

Freddy is a large dog with flowing waves of black hair, splotched here and there with streaks of white. He is a happy boy with laughing eyes and always seems to be smiling. Fred fairly dances in his joy to see me, rocking back and forth like a frolicking lamb, and runs perilously close to my car. When I open the door he pushes his cold, wet nose against me and whines his pleasure that we are together again. I stroke the soft spot under his muzzle, and his whines grow more plaintive as he presses closer to me. I step out of the car, and as I look around the peaceful countryside from my vantage point on top of our hill, I feel like a queen ruling over all I survey.

As the fiery setting sun starts to dip below the western horizon, I slip my shoes off my feet and cross the lawn to the swing set. The grass feels cool and damp beneath my bare soles, and I feel a sense of being connected to the earth. I perch upon a swing facing the landscape with Freddy at my feet and watch as the bright sky turns into the darkest, silkiest blue. The frogs begin their nightly chorus, and the stars appear one by one, sparkling and shimmering throughout the night sky. I know that they will never shine

as brightly anywhere else; and I know that I am really home and that this place will always be a part of me.

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