Subject &Strategy

A Writer's Reader

Paul Eschholz • Alfred Rosa

The Ducks on Corrigan's Pond
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I used to see them every morning from the school bus. They were decoys—three wooden mallards, anchored to the bottom. I watched them move across the surface of the pond. On windy days they were blown toward the reeds, where they stopped and leaned against their tethers. On calmer days they floated in the center, bobbing and changing their position in relation to one another. I never understood why they were there, for they never drew other ducks to the pond—they just turned in the breeze and weathered.

Driving by the other day, I noticed that the reeds had grown and the ducks were gone. No one was around, so I got out of my car and circled the pond to search for them. I found them anchored on the far side, water-heavy and stripped of their paint, but floating still. I could see their age in the cracks and the moss on their backs. As I sat on the bank and watched them bobbing purposelessly, my thoughts turned to the past, to growing up in this town.

Illustration: provides examples of what it was like growing up in a small town

I remembered the summers I spent riding my bike on the hot sidewalk under the storefront awnings on Main Street. Mr. Adams always waved from his egg truck, and I always waved back. Mrs. Wilkins was usually in her garden. I remembered the candy counter at Lackey's, the Reverend Hall, the Junior Prom. I remembered, also, every Memorial Day when I marched in the high school band down Maple Street. A few people stood on the sidewalk to watch, but most just fell in behind as we turned down Old Cemetery Road. Every year we went the same route, wore the same uniforms, played the same songs. We were always impatient to be done, to have the rest of the day off. But the veterans led the march, and they were old and walked slowly. We listened to the speech that we knew by heart, and watched while the old men stood as straight as they could when the guns were fired.

Feeling like a stuck decoy, writer decides to take wing

Somehow, I felt like one of those decoys on the pond. I was floating on the surface, yet anchored to the mud on the bottom. I wanted to escape the smallness here. I wanted more. When Andy Lockwood proposed marriage to me in the first grade, I accepted. When Heather Adams proposed that we run away in the sixth grade, I also accepted. Not until I was twenty, however, did I really leave. I took my car, my clothes, and four hundred dollars, and I escaped with my first serious boyfriend.

Analogy: explains why childhood friends stayed by comparing them to the decoys

In those days, I felt such contempt for my friends who stayed. Beth had Scott's child, and Laura had twins. Will worked in his father's store, and Larry worked the family farm. Ann and Dean were married; Bobby drove the school bus; Randy fixed the streets. Like the ducks, they were anchored here. They seemed mindlessly content to repeat their parents' lives, and I couldn't understand why they stayed.

Writer begins to understand why people stayed at home

But the longer I was away, the more I began to understand. They stayed for the same reason that eventually brought me back: they needed the comfort of the familiar, the security of everyday ritual. They wanted to raise their children the way they had been raised because they found satisfaction in the regularity of life here.

Conclusion: writer goes beyond analogy to understand herself better

I finally saw what I had missed before—that the ducks are here because they have to be, but the people are here by choice. Once I thought the people were as mindless as the ducks. Going away made me recognize that they are not. The ducks were anchored by some-one else; the people have anchored themselves. I've come back—back home—because I realize that I need Lackey's store and the Memorial Day parade. I need this town and the security of my past.

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