Twenty Miles

Moving a mere twenty miles changed my life. At the start of high school, I moved from a medium-sized town to a town with a population of roughly two thousand people. This seemingly insignificant move shoved me into a small country town that happened to be no bigger than my previous middle school. On a crisp Tuesday morning, I slowly allow myself to zone out on my routine drive to school. I'm fortunate enough to experience what I would describe as a breathtaking view on my drive to class every morning. My favorite portion of this drive feels surreal to the point where I wonder if the horizon may simply be a painting, specifically in the fall. I pass a familiar blissful instance where the row of burnt red fall leaves perfectly contrast the endless green fields. I shift my gaze upwards, taking in the sunrise casting across the Cascade mountains and the clouds cluttering the sky.

Out of nowhere, a jacked-up Ford truck roars past, engulfing me in a black plume of smoke. The coal fumes seep into my Subaru and my hectic thoughts come crashing back through my skull. I'm forced to snap back to harsh reality, my most valued five seconds of the morning cut short. I gripped my steering wheel a little tighter and thought back to the beginning. According to my freshman self, I had stepped into a town in which my values were abnormal. I found myself struggling to see past the narrow lens I thought my peers viewed the world through. My mindset and my future both shifted the day I moved for the better, but at the time I could only comprehend our differences.

As a freshman, I could only comprehend surface-level differences like the common school attire being cowboy boots paired with wide brimmed hats. That alone felt like a culture shock to the city girl growing inside of me. More importantly, I began to note how people thought and even how they acted. Younger me perceived this new small-town

ideology in a negative light. I struggled to find myself in a town that my young mind viewed as unrelatable.

As years passed, I slowly became aware that I was not only impacting my true identity but disrespecting the value of the small community. It didn't happen overnight, but I gradually began to push myself out of my comfort zone despite my fear. I worked to find comfort in difficult situations and before I knew it, I began to crave it, allowing myself to chase after the woman I wanted to become. For years I viewed growing up in an uncomfortable environment as a setback, but as I reflect on it, I know it was a necessary challenge that helped create who I am today. Facing this challenge was necessary, in order to broaden my perspective and distinguish my values.

Although I was reality checked by an obnoxious F150 who made the questionable decision to roll coal past me this morning, that doesn't take away the value of the small town I've grown up in. Although I don't agree with everyone at my small school, I love the person it's given me the opportunity to become and the broad way it has allowed me to view ideas and take on the world around me. Not only have I found my voice and my perspective here, but I've grown to face any challenge no matter the size, head on. As I walk into school for the day, I know that I will take a piece of my small hometown with me through every aspect of my much-anticipated college experience.