

THE GRAVEL ROAD OF TIME

Mike Halkitis

[Assignment: Compare your recollections of a place or a person you knew well at an earlier time in your life with the changes time has made in your subject. Use words that give your reader sharp, clear images and convey your emotional reaction to these changes.]

(1) We were finally driving down the old gravel road. The sound of rocks being crushed between the radial tires and the hard ground could be heard as clouds of dust rose behind the car. The familiar tall grassy field came into view. This particular summer had made the fields a vibrant green unlike any other time of the year. I attempted to look further down the road, past the open space by which I was completely surrounded. I gained a glimpse of my great-grandparents' house. This wasn't just any house, at least not to a four foot tall, seven year old boy. There were so many rooms to explore, objects to find, and places to hide. This was a place where many memories could be made. The sight of the old white two-story home sent a chill through my spine. This was my great-grandparents' house in Grand Haven, Michigan. I knew that within moments my great-grandmother would come running through the rattly screen door exclaiming, "Oh my Lord, the kids are finally here!"

(2) While visiting my great-grandparents I would often help in some of their daily duties, specifically picking blueberries. Their orchard, about half the size of a football field, was a mere step out the back door. The day would begin in the early morning while the sun was just starting to rise. The height of the blueberry bushes blocked the sun's rays from absorbing the dew which rested on the ground. Soon the moisture would penetrate my shoes and finally my socks. Nevertheless, I would shift my attention toward the tedious task of picking the blueberries and meeting my quota of filling one bucket. The job could easily be accomplished if so many weren't consumed, as often was the case. At the end of the day the bucket would often contain enough to produce a homemade blueberry pie or batch of muffins for my own enjoyment.

(3) Two months before arriving at college, I had the chance to once again visit my great-grandparents. Unfortunately, the visit was a little clouded because my great-grandfather had passed away. But I still looked forward to the visit, sure that when I was there I could relax and take a break from all my problems.

(4) It had been ten years since I had gone down that gravel road, and I sensed the difference. I could no longer hear the sound of the rocks being crushed between the tires and the ground nor could I see the clouds of dust behind the car. The small road had been paved because of a recent commercialization in the area. The

open fields of green grass had been replaced on one side by a Pontiac dealership and the other with a Ponderosa steak house. Business was expanding and this turned out to be the prime location. When we arrived, my great-grandmother didn't come running out of the screen door. In fact, she could hardly walk: you see, in those ten years, arthritis and old age took their toll on her body, often making it difficult for her to climb up and down stairs.

(5) So many changes had occurred over the course of ten short years. The land, once natural and open, was now completely surrounded by fast-food chains, shopping malls, and convenience stores. I was shocked to learn that only one year earlier my great-grandparents had sold their house to the car dealership. They were allowed to live in the house until both passed away, which in my great-grandfather's case was not very long. And yes, even the old white two-story had changed. The paint was peeling and signs of a sagging roof were vividly present. The next morning I was ready to pick blueberries. However, this was also no longer part of the day's regular agenda. The condition of the blueberry orchard had deteriorated and it was overgrown with weeds. The bushes still produced fruit but not abundantly as in earlier times. So no one thought it worth the while to pick them anymore.

(6) Time certainly has its effect. It can change people, the environment, and even a person's attitude towards life. I know now that Grand Haven, Michigan will no longer be a place for me to pick blueberries, visit relatives, or escape from "problems." Instead, it will be only a place in my mind where I can hold the many memories of the time spent with my great-grandparents.