[Assignment: For this essay, you begin by writing three lists—-a list of people, a list of places, and a list of things—that your world could hardly have existed without, and certainly not well. Once you have compiled your list, consider which item on one of your lists you better write about now because who knows if you will ever get that chance again. Perhaps your Uncle Mike is so weirdly wonderful he belongs in a museum. Perhaps your father’s beige ’66 Volkswagon Bug with sunroof has led a charmed existence, and when that engine roars to life your mind fills with stories about it and your father. Perhaps there was a hamburger joint in your hometown that represents to you everything that was glorious about being seventeen. Once you have chosen that person, place, or thing to immortalize, write a profile about it that will communicate to your reader what makes your subject worth thinking and writing about, and why the very existence of that person, place, or thing is worth celebrating.]

There are places in this world that have a special place in your heart. Places you have fond memories of, and that will last in your memory forever. Places where you would love to be, and places you never want to leave. For me this place is New Berlin, Illinois.

This small farming town of about 840 people lies fifteen miles southwest of Springfield, with fields of corn on all sides. Its streets are filled by day with people going about their business, just like in the large, metropolitan city, only on a smaller scale. By night the streets are illuminated by only the light from the moon and stars in the sky, and the occasional street light.

New Berlin is a friendly town, one you wouldn’t mind living in. The feeling you get tells you that, from the way people greet you as you walk down the street, to the way you can start a pleasant conversation with anyone just by saying hello. It’s like the song from the television show “Cheers” says, “Aren’t you glad there’s one place in the world, where everybody knows your name. And they’re always glad you came.”

Everyone knows everybody else’s name, and there is always a warm handshake, or a wave to go along with a “hello.” On Sunday, the farmers bring in your eggs for you fresh off the farm. After church people stay around for a while just so they have a chance to say a few words to everyone who came. They’re the kind of people who take pride in what they do, and the kind of people who get their joys from helping others and seeing them happy.

There are people like Bob Long. He’s retired from the Post Office now, but you couldn’t tell. Bob still voluntarily goes in and helps out once in a while with the work, and he still gives a friendly smile to everyone who walks through the Post Office door.

Then there is Bob’s brother Ray, a farmer. Like every farmer from coast to coast, he puts in his long hours doing what needs to be done around the farm. Even after a long day, in the hot air, you can still find Ray laughing and even telling a joke to whoever he is talking to.
New Berlin itself doesn’t look like anything special, and it really isn’t that big. In fact, if you are driving through it and blink, most likely you’ll miss it. But, nonetheless, it has everything you could ever want. Along the one main street, there are two gas stations, two banks, and a building that contains the town restaurant, video store, and ice cream parlor. There are two churches, a high school, one grocery store, and the county fair grounds. Train tracks run through town, with towering silos filled with corn standing next to them.

It’s the kind of town where you can go to bed at night and not have to lock the doors and turn on your burglar alarm. There is no need to own two two-hundred-pound pit bulls to guard your house. It’s the kind of town where people trust you, and don’t look over their shoulder afraid of who is behind them. It’s the kind of town where you can walk the streets at night and feel safe.

I lived in a red brick house that served as the parsonage for the church where my dad was pastor. Next to it was the school. It was a two story structure, with one story somewhat sunk down. There were two teachers for grades kindergarten to eight, each grade having about five or six students in it, but that was all that was needed. Mary Ann and Ron Krohse care about their students, and it shows when you talk to them. They know everything about their students. Their students are their friends, and their friends are their students. The same two teachers are still there today, teaching the same way, caring for each of their students, and making sure that each one gets a good education.

Next to the school lies the church that we attended. It isn’t very large or impressive when compared to the great churches in the world, but it serves its purpose. It is constructed of dark red brick, with stained glass windows on both sides. There is a bell tower in the front that rises above the rest of the structure, and the bells in it greet the worshippers every Sunday morning. The inside doesn’t have beautiful paintings on the ceiling, or any “catch-your-eye” decorations, and there isn’t a massive organ belting out the tunes so they can be heard for miles around. But what it does have is sufficient for those who worship there. In fact, the church has been there for over a hundred years. To many in New Berlin, it is the center of their life. To them, it is the grandest structure of all.

We moved away only because my father got a call to another church some ways away. I was four years old, but I can still vaguely remember the last few days there. The movers had emptied our house of all the furnishings so we were unable to stay there. But that wasn’t a problem. We stayed at a church member’s house that night. They welcomed us in with open arms, typical of the town.

Although I have changed since that day some fourteen years ago, New Berlin hasn’t changed that much. The same families still live in town, in the same houses that they occupied when I was there. The bells still greet worshippers every Sunday, and there still aren’t any fancy decorations that make the church unique. The trains still stop next to the towering silos to fill up with the corn brought in from the farms that surround town, and Bob Long can still occasionally be seen smiling at people as they walk through the Post Office doors.
It's the town that I was born in, and the town where I first lived. It was here that I spent the first four years of my life, and it is here that I have visited, and felt at home. The people still know my name, and still have a warm handshake to greet me. It's the town I'm still fond of, the town that holds a special place in my heart, and the town whose memory will last forever. The town? It's New Berlin, Illinois.