Coastlines

Eminent Domain
(Memoir, by Lori Beth Stewart)

As I look back on my life as a child, I remember my friends; and the dynamics of the lives we lived. Once we all lived on the same road, now we all live in the same state. We didn’t spread out too far, but far enough to lose what we had, family. We were all together from birth. We learned to crawl, walk, and talk on this long, winding road. Our parents went to parties together; they took turns babysitting us so they could work. If we did something wrong, you better believe there was a chain of phone calls to be made. We had our spats, we had our cliques for the moment, and the boys chased us girls. I spent my days doing school work and riding horses, I was homeschooled, anything to pass the time till bus 182 rolled around the corner to our cul-de-sac.

We spent our evenings playing in the street; we never did anything too terribly bad, but when we did, we were found out. We ran through fields, we played baseball; we raced each other from the cul-de-sac to the speed limit sign, at that age it seemed such a great distance. I remember every time I went to my best friend’s house her mother was always at the kitchen table, coffee and cigarettes always at hand. That smell of coffee and cigarettes is the smell I always associated with my friend, till this day anytime I walk into a Waffle House, I think of her mother. My other mother. Believe me; if I did wrong, she got me. We would always go and sit in her kitchen to escape the boys; they didn’t dare intrude upon us.

The other boys that lived in the neighborhood, Allen and Eric, didn’t have a very nice family. We never felt welcomed there, and I am not sure that they did either. Their mom was always leaving their father for another man, most of the time they were left to depend on themselves or the other moms in the neighborhood. Mom always made sure
they had what they needed. That was how my mom was. She was a mother to all of us. If we were hungry, she fixed us
snacks, if we needed anything she was there. At that age it was like everything was perfect, for me, I never wanted my
world to change. Life in fact wasn’t something I could always control, and I learned this at an early age. We overheard
Jillian’s mom, my other mom, talking to my grandparents. The state was offering them money for their property. There
was to be a new highway put in, and they had no choice but to accept the offer. My best friend was going to move.

Our families fought for about a year to avoid this travesty, because that is what it was to all of us the end of the
world. We did not want to be separated. We had our own little private world on Barton Drive. But change was
inevitable. The road would tear our families apart. The day came for a moving van; it was to take Jillian and all of her
possessions away. At that age it seemed so far away, no longer could I walk to my best friend’s house. As I look back,
ten miles seemed so far, but now it just seems silly. Although I was homeschooled, there was no more waiting on the bus,
they all went to another school now. New friends were made, school activities became important, out with the old and in
with the new. I felt abandoned; mom no longer let me wander down what was left of our road. The highway was not
safe. I could only ride horses on the seven acres my grandparents owned, and the five that my parents owned.

We had spent what is now the equivalent of half our lives together. Eventually all communication faded. It was as
if they had moved to Mars. Rarely did my other mother come to sit and drink coffee and smoke cigarettes with my
grandparents. Soon she became sick and passed; this only divided our families further. Looking back, it all seems so
surreal. Eventually I married and moved away. But I came back, unlike the others. There was nowhere for them to come
back to. I used to drive down the road and imagine us still playing together, but that memory is too faded to see now.
The land that once belonged to my parents was divided when
my father passed. So now it is me and my sisters, but still our children are limited to our property, because the highway is just too dangerous.