



Home is where the heart is.

Having grown up in Ottawa County, I moved back thinking I knew what to expect and in some ways I was right. I understood the weather; the bitter cold of waiting for the bus at the end of your gravel road with the humid wind freezing you from the inside out. The summers of showering, toweling off, and then realizing the drying-off portion of your day was a wasted effort. The flip-side was building snowmen the size of houses, igloo worlds under snow piles and skiing down hills that do not divide the continent. You cannot forget enjoying the cool breeze as you lay at the beach, walking a minute or two and finding another body of water, and green... oh the green.

The winter of 2014 has been none-to-kind in welcoming me back *home* – but I have probably deserved it. I “ran away” from home in 1997; off to “greener” pastures. So what if the pastures were usually brown; the Rocky Mountains welcomed me in and enveloped me for seventeen years. I enjoyed the beauty of a mountainous backdrop and hoofed it to nearly three miles above sea level on too-rare occasions. I established a life, a family of my own, and grew while away.

What I did not expect is the song Ottawa County would begin to sing to me after my son was born. The song of family values and recreation was sweet. I was able to mute the tunes for several years but once I realized my life in Colorado was void of true family – the ones bound to you by blood – the music began to crescendo. The call of sailing and kayaking, of beaches and boardwalks, became undeniable.

You see, marriages grow and go sometimes. Some relationships are meant to be and some simply serve a purpose either as a learning tool or a reality check. I have known both. It took a failed marriage for me to realize Ottawa County held a place for me. It held my blood. It held my past. It held my future. I chastised friends and acquaintances who never left Michigan and who married their high school sweetheart. Yet I return to find my heart never left his.

I followed a few careers paths while away, but Ottawa County drew me back with the map to get off of the path and onto the career highway. A position in a field I believe in; with challenges, frustrations, and reward. A position I am perfectly educated for and suited to fill. The county position is wrought with bureaucracy and budget limitations, but reward and fulfillment help cut the red tape.

I spent 25 years leaving home and 17 returning. Some will never understand the deliberation necessary to decide the reward is greater than the risk. Some will criticize. Some will chastise. They have never experienced the Ottawa County Way. There is a time to stretch out from the small town but frequently there is also a time retract and return. Family is home. Home is Ottawa County.

There's no place like home.

You can never go home again, but the truth is you can never leave home, so it's all right. ~Maya

Angelou