

Interstates: San Francisco to Chicago to Los Angeles to Mojave Desert to High Desert to Painted Desert

written by Jen Fitzgerald | August 8, 2016



Week Four of a Six Week Series
4,837 Miles



What does it mean to see? Sight, perception, vision, context, and communication. There is a plurality of experience we can tap into as voyeurs of life. Point of view, the lens by which we see and transmit, is our voice. I am learning to completely inhabit this. I know what I want to say, but am pulled in the many directions of guilt, shame, family, and opinion. I meter truth and it is tiring.

It was late, I was tired, not from the flight but from the way anxiety has the ability to exhaust you. This was my third time in Chicago and I felt the absence of my mother and daughter as I took a taxi to the hotel.



The next morning I walked to the Poetry Foundation building to take part in the first “Poetry Incubator” for poets who seek to give back to the communities from which they came. I have no idea who/what/where my community is. But I was open to finding out.



Point of View

Chicago Block Party:

How can I be both inside and outside my own experiences? It is too soon to know what I think about my place here, my labor here, and my honesty here. I pull out my camera to put up the small, but safe wall between me and reality. This is my lens. The images I capture will help me better understand who I was in those moments and who I need to be in future moments. This writing is process.

Community is beautiful. I am inside and outside of it. I have purged myself to be open to it.



After three days, I was relieved to be returning to my family. A not-so-small part of me wished I was flying back to Maryland. This is not because I wanted to be *home*, but the thousands of miles still ahead of me hung like lead around my neck and shoulders.

Jessica flew into the Los Angeles airport an hour before me. She was with my mother and daughter at the baggage claim. There is too much in the history of our 15 year relationship to sum up in a single, short, essay. Jessica and I have practiced all versions of our humanness on one another. I will show you what I can.



Point of View

Santa Monica:

The pier was like Coney Island without the bite of Atlantic air and historical context. The crowds, the heat, the sand— you do not have to have been to a place to know it. We met up with good people there, people I think are my community, because although I had never spent significant time with them, I *knew* them. I could talk to them and feel understood. Maybe working class poets are my community. Maybe I don't have a community, but will be blessed, occasionally, as a tourist in other communities.

Jessica's only request for her portion of the trip was that she get to put her feet in the Pacific, the *other ocean* to her coastal life. I watched as she grabbed Elizabeth's hand and their cuffed up pants legs marched into the ocean.



Point of View

The Mojave Desert:

Emptied. Evicted. Purged. Anything that had been left in me was pulled out in the 113 degree heat. Any idea I had of strength, endurance, or ability was dragged from my body through every pore. I felt like I had been wiped clean somehow. The desert requires respect. It sustains, but will think nothing of extinguishing a life that does not come to the altar prepared. I felt at peace. All decisions had already been made. All I had to do was survive.



Point of View

Las Vegas:

Times Square of the desert. No, it is more complicated than that. This is a place where people go with intent. We were just passing through. The Luxor had a great deal on a room. We had no idea what to expect. Elizabeth marveled over the M & M and Hershey stores. I watched the “but we’re in Vegas” mentality play out in the people around me. *Because we’re in Vegas, only because we’re in Vegas, because this is Vegas.* What is it that we are looking to shed when we come to a place like this? Do we expect to go home with more or less of ourselves?



Point of View

Sedona:

When we pulled on to the Red Rock Scenic highway, Elizabeth lit up, “I am supposed to live here!” I understood the sentiment. I had been here before, I was bringing both Jessica and Elizabeth to a place where I had experienced profound healing.

I resented their presence at times. I resented sharing in a way I had not anticipated, as though their experiences there would detract from my own, past and present. If their paths did not completely conform to my own, I got agitated. What is it about understanding that can crawl under the skin?

Elizabeth pulled out her sketch pad and recreated what she saw from our view point up Bell Rock. As she sat with her crayons, I understood how infinite experience and memory can be. Mine was compounded as I entered hers. I would be two dimensional in her memory until experience could offer her context. I am not entitled to that control.



Point of View

Meteor Crater:

I understand how this is just a hole in the ground. It truly is. But a vacancy formed by such impact, by utterly extraterrestrial, explosive impact is a thing to behold. I wanted to feel small again—after this country had compressed before me and under my wheels. Somehow, this crater felt larger than the entire United States. Somehow, this crater, kept empty, showed that not everything needs filling. The absence is history. The absence is beauty. It is all in how you see it.



Point of View

Painted Desert:

Elizabeth wanted me to play The Black Keys. She wanted her window open— closed her eyes as the wind whipped her hair around. She opened her eyes briefly to take in the purples and reds and pinks of The Painted Desert. She closed her eyes again, singing “Little Black Submarines” like she had written the words herself. I remember the constrictions of childhood. I remember the frustration rising to unmanageable levels when I wasn’t understood or couldn’t get what I needed. I saw, in her, a feeling of freedom. I hope she can tap into that whenever she needs it. I hope that I have shown her, at six, that the mind can make the body weightless and the wind pulsing through a car window can pull us outside of ourselves for live-saving moments.

