

IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMEWHERE
by Jody Reale

My dad, Frank, was born in Denver in 1925, and grew up in what is now American Furniture Warehouse territory. When he says things like, “We used to play ball on I-25,” we’re spellbound over our plates of Sunday spaghetti, especially Alex, my New Yorker husband, who looks like he may as well be watching a holographic re-run of *Bonanza* in which Little Joe passes one of us the salad. “I used to drive over Berthoud Pass in all kinds of weather, to deliver the lettuce from our satellite farm in Granby to market in Denver,” he says. “A lot of I-70 was dirt then.”

He’s been a farmer, a truck driver, a construction worker and traveling whiskey slinger. He was the proprietor of the family bar and liquor store, where a robber once tied him to a chair in the back room. Before they were married, he found my mom writing a check with what she thought was a ballpoint pen. “You’d better be careful,” he warned her, exchanging it with another, “that thing might go off.” Soon after, he used that very zip gun disguised as a pen to defend himself in a holdup by shooting a man in the eye.

My hope is that, by the time I’m also in my eighties, some of the things I’ve been, had and done may seem as colorful—and less armed—as Dad’s. My fear is that I don’t see how it’s possible. I was born just prior to the summer of love, and came home from St. Joseph’s Hospital to the house where my parents still live. While the music of the day suggests that it was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, it was still around midnight in our pocket of unincorporated Adams County with the Denver address.

I attended Ranum High School, a school no one's ever heard of, with a class of about 300; I made no plans there whatsoever. "What's it called?" is what another cocktail partygoer is guaranteed to say over the music, "Random?" I nod my head in agreement about 99% of the time instead of repeating myself. Oh, it was random all right.

I enrolled at CSU after that, where I learned firsthand that even though there may only be four girls competing in a wet tee shirt contest, it's still possible to come in sixth. I had an equal amount of success with my coursework. "Dick left town on a train traveling 20 miles an hour at 4:00," the math placement test said. Based on the rest of the numbers, I was expected to finish the sentence, "Jane is..."

I wrote, "Glad he's going back to California."

Somehow I graduated, but what of it? It wasn't as if I was going to pack up for Times Square; I was going back to Denver, tops. My classmates and I, a bunch of natives, we had no Bruce Springsteen complex about how *this town rips the bones from your back/It's a death trap, it's a suicide rap/We gotta get out while we're young*. Like my parents, and their parents, I'd never considered living anywhere but here, in a state that's literally in the middle of things and also in the middle of nowhere and I can't say that I'm sorry.

Circa 1995, when the news anchors began wailing that, "The East Coasters are coming!" I knew the times were changing. I wasn't exactly agreeable about the influx of fast-talking city slickers right away; as a young adult with a degree I couldn't use, trying to find work in a bleak job market, I was at first a little *verklemt*. "But that's how I met your father," I can tell Sophie someday.

Alex, several of his friends from the tri-state area, and their mountain bikes swept over the Rocky Mountains like The Donald's comb-over, and their enthusiasm for the places they rode swept me up too. Alex and I spent our courtship in the nooks and crannies away from my southeast Denver townhouse, in the mountains and beyond—places I hadn't seen since Mom and Dad packed me up to see them before I was wired well enough to appreciate them.

And, it's through Alex's eyes that I get a gander at Denver's weaknesses; after all, the city in the middle of a middle state is bound to have, like middle children, kind of an attitude problem. It's an awkward place that can't get its identity straight, and it isn't as friendly as all that. But compared to the land of my in-laws, where the skies are all cloudy all day, and where the fortresses of bygone companies stand in ruins, I'll take it.

I'm an exotic creature there in Alex's home state of New York, regarded as a hearty mountain woman who must ski like an Olympian and climb like a goat. Of course, I do neither, but that'll be our secret. I'm the girl who grew up with a thousand cousins on a swath of the old family land, most of which is now occupied by various industrial concerns. Instead of the stables and vegetable gardens that used to flank the property, my dad's sister is still nestled there, between the Serta Mattress Factory Warehouse and Checker Auto Parts' Western Distribution Center. With the endless parade of semi trucks filling up at the Diesel n' Go gas station across the street, my cousins and I still swim in her pool, just like we have all our lives, pretending that we're not 200 yards from the exit that takes furniture seekers to the kingdom of Jake Jabs and his lions and tigers and leather sectionals.

That's my Denver—where my beginning was, and now at nearly forty, it's where my middle is. For dinnertime entertainment's sake, I'm hoping that this middle goes on to somewhere interesting, and that that somewhere is relatively close to home.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jody Reale is an award-winning essayist, national grant recipient, and literary gadfly. Her work has appeared in *Boulder Weekly*, *Wazee: New Independent Writing*, Santa Fe Writers Project Literary Journal, *Progenitor*, *SinglesFAQ.com*, *Lit.Org*, Sites and Services, *Northwest Denver News*, Tuesday Shorts and *Quillbillies*. She was the co-creator of the Web 'zine Saucy Chicks and continues to contribute regularly to her blog, [Kill Your Lunch Hour](#), and her Web site, [JodyReale.com](#). She lives in Colorado with her husband, daughter, and too many dogs.