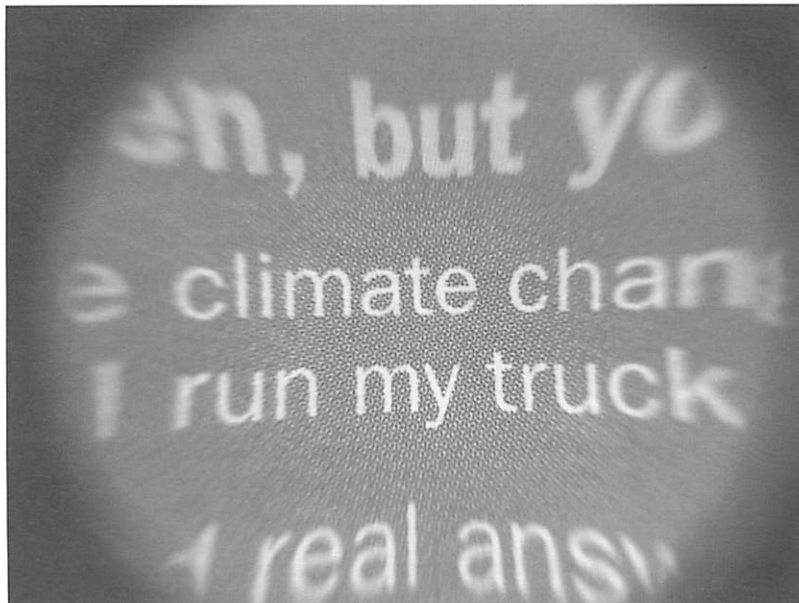




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CLIMATE CHANGE
zoey stites
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LAY OF THE LAND

Back in 1959, when the two boys were only ten, they lived in Newport. They'd grown up in Newport and had never even been to Providence, a forty-five minute drive away and the capital city of Rhode Island. There was no reason to leave Newport; it had the beaches in the summer and snow and hills to sled on in the winter. The falls were crisp and colorful and Little League sign-up was in the spring.

There was no Newport Bridge back then, only ferry service connecting Newport and Jamestown. That put you on the trail to New York, if you wanted to go to New York — which very few people did because everything you needed, especially if you were ten, was right here.

Today's excitement was the laying down of asphalt for the parking lot of the new Bellevue Avenue Shopping Center. The boys, straddling their bicycles and eating fudgesicles, watched from across the street. This was going to be the first shopping center that Newport ever had, and neither one of them had ever seen so much asphalt before, much less it going down so slick and steamy.

"It really smells," commented one of them.

"Yeah," agreed the other, both of them hypnotized, absorbing the event. In the background the big red ALMACS sign suddenly banged on then off. The letters stood tall atop the roof of what was going to be Newport's first supermarket, due to open any day now when the parking lot was finished.

"That was so cool!"

"Yeah....They must be testing it."

Thus was etched the geography of Heaven: a glowing Indian-summer day in early November, a fudgesicle in your mouth and a bicycle between your legs, watching the asphalt get laid. Could anything disrupt such a moment? Not really. Not when you were ten in Newport back before the bridge. Certainly not the big black Buick that slid up alongside the curb in front of them.

An electric window buzzed down (such glamour!) and they saw the occupants, a middle-aged man and woman. The woman had on a big fur coat and gold earrings and she said, "Excuse me, but can you tell us how to get to Buzzard's Bay?"

Buzzard's Bay? The boys had never heard of any Buzzard's Bay, so they figured it had to be out in Middletown, near Second or Third Beach. So, they told the woman to take the next right, on Memorial Boulevard, and go straight until they ran into it in about five minutes.

That was that and the boys forgot about it and went back to watching the asphalt. It was getting darker earlier now that the clocks had changed and they hung around longer than they might have, hoping that the ALMACS sign would be tested again so they could get the full effect. But it wasn't and finally they gave up and pedaled home for supper.

Years and years later, when the two boys had separate lives and didn't live across the field from each other, didn't even know each other anymore, one of them was driving with a friend out on Cape Cod for the first time and suddenly saw a sign that said, Buzzard's Bay.

"Wow...."

"Wow what?"

He told the story of the asphalt and the electric window and was amazed at how far off course the couple in the Buick had been — just the beginning of Cape Cod was a good hour or more from Newport. He also wondered what it must have been like when the couple figured it out. Looking around he added, "I don't know why people are always talking about 'the Cape' — it's not nearly as beautiful as Newport."