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# Lifestyle Migration

Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences

Edited by

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ASHGATE

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## Chapter 3

# Pursuing the Good Life: American Narratives of Travel and a Search for Refuge

Brian A. Hoey

I came home from New York City to ... a little house on a little road. I needed land and country around me so I could feel I belonged to something bigger than myself. I needed birds and trees and the observable minutiae of seasons so I could feel my life as a stream of little movements. (Stocking 1990, ix, xxvvi)

Based on five years of ethnographic fieldwork in the mid-western United States among downsized and downshifting middle-class American workers relocating from metropolitan areas to rural northern Michigan, this chapter explores a contemporary search for personal forms of refuge.<sup>1</sup> It describes how, in the face of uncertainty in the world of work, these migrants use their act of relocation to personally meaningful places as a way of redefining themselves and regaining a sense of control (see O'Reilly and Benson this volume). In the wake of voluntary or involuntary career change, they attend to reordering work, family and personal priorities according to an idealized lifestyle. The self-defining narratives of these lifestyle migrants involve what may be new expressions of old American dreams, understandings and ideals.

My research has focused on a category of lifestyle migrant for which work has failed to provide a reliable foundation on which to build personally meaningful

<sup>1</sup> The majority of data collection took place from early 2000 to early 2002 in the adjoining counties of Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Antrim and Benzie that together incorporate an area known as Grand Traverse that extends roughly 25 miles in radius from the social and economic hub at Traverse City, Michigan. Foundational data for this chapter were gathered through in-depth, open-ended ethnographic interviews with 128 in-migrants to these counties. Interviews emphasized personal background, reasons for leaving a job and relocating, the process of relocation decision-making and the consequences of this move for individual and family identity. Free-form conversations with minimal interruption allowed migrants to present detailed narrative constructions, often in extended monologues. The large number of stories gathered in this manner allowed me to consider a wide range of personal backgrounds and relocation experiences. From this large set, I eventually focused on 12 representative cases. Over two years, I deepened my understanding of lifestyle migration through frequent contact with four individuals and eight families who relocated during the previous five years. This involved extended follow-up conversations as well as participant-observation in everyday work and family life, spending time in the workplaces and homes of this core group of participants. Pseudonyms are used for participants.

identity. Relocation to romanticized rural places high in natural amenities, in which they have frequently vacationed, is a moral project concerned with 'starting over' and 'finding themselves' through purposeful place-attachment. Entrepreneurial tendencies are strong among these migrants given their desire to claim a sense of control over the domain of work while financing personal commitments to improving their quality of life. In these respects, my work may be situated in the context of migration research concerned with identity and place-consumption (e.g. O'Reilly 2000), attachment to a rural ideal (e.g. Buller and Hoggart 1994), or natural amenities (e.g. Green et al. 2005) as well as tourism-related migration (e.g. Hall and Williams 2002) and travel-inspired entrepreneurship (e.g. Snepenger et al. 1995; Stone and Stubbs 2007).

Focusing on the importance of place to personhood, individual identity and personal well-being, this chapter will discuss how, over the last 120 years, the landscape of the study area known as the Grand Traverse region has become both a literal and figurative *asylum* for the remaking of the person. This history ranges from mentally ill persons relocated here to receive what was then known as 'moral treatment' beginning in the last two decades of the nineteenth century to what some have called 'corporate refugees' who came during the last two decades of the twentieth century, attempting to leave behind unsatisfying personal and professional lives lived within crumbling, industrial areas and suburban sprawl (see also Benson this volume).

The accounts of lifestyle migrants resonate strongly with prototypical American narratives of travel, accompanied by oft-analogous references to religious *conversion* (e.g. see Rambo 1993) and wrapped in themes of the 'frontier' (e.g. see Turner 1966[1893]; Limerick 1994; Jasper 2000). Laid-off workers, together with those who voluntarily end an objectively successful career in order to lead a subjectively more fulfilling life – what Saltzman (1991) refers to as 'downshifting' – pass through personally transformative periods of *liminality*. They venture to redefine themselves by relocating to places that they believe will provide the creative inspiration and supportive refuge to realize an idealized vision of self, a 'potential self' (Hochschild 1997; cf. Hoey 2005; 2006) that becomes an inspirational roadmap to what they hope will be more fulfilling, harmonious and authentic lives lived in consciously chosen geographic places.

This chapter illustrates how the stories of lifestyle migrants echo themes of personal crisis and transformation basic to the genre of American travel writing. Motivation and meaning behind this form of urban-to-rural migration are revealed in the accounts of lifestyle migrants. Together with my analysis of the text of an early tourist brochure, these accounts are presented in an ethnographic and historical approach to therapeutic landscape and its place in construction of the self- and place-defining narratives.

In my examination of a locally produced tourist brochure from the 1920s, I will show how its authors achieve their place-marketing goals through presenting a compelling and iconic narrative of personal transformation told as travel story. The story helps create an image of refuge while describing the refuge-seeking behaviour

of a young family. The decision by local leaders at the end of the nineteenth century to frame the region's physical environment as a restorative escape was intended to shift economic focus from natural resource extraction in the timber and fishing industries, which were in precipitous decline from overexploitation. Despite this refocus, their plans continued a well-established pattern of place *consumption* – though in different form. Through analysis of this pioneering brochure, I aim to reinforce my assertion that central principles and themes at work in the telling of this travel story are essential to the composition of contemporary relocation narratives constructed by urban-to-rural migrants moving to the region nearly a century later.

### Historical Background

For nearly a century, the Grand Traverse area of northwestern lower Michigan in the United States' Great Lakes region has attracted people seeking recuperative rest through time spent on vacation. While many rural places have long been attractive seasonal retreats, due to year-round refuge-seekers my study area has become a rare pocket of in-migration-induced growth in a northern region otherwise losing population to warmer and dryer southwestern parts of the country (cf. Bonner 1997; Murdoch et al. 1998; Jobs 2000). This in-migration stands against a longstanding trend of population loss to urban areas from rural counties where agriculture and natural resource extraction have historically dominated local economies (Jobs et al. 1992; Boyle and Halfacree 1998; Pandit and Withers 1999).

Beginning over a century ago, local leaders marketed the area as a kind of 'therapeutic landscape', to borrow a term from the relatively new field of *health geography* (Gesler 1992). This helped secure an economically important project when Traverse City became the site of the Northern Michigan Asylum for the Insane, which was completed in 1885. These same strategies later helped leaders define Grand Traverse as a tourist destination for a burgeoning American middle class in the rapidly industrializing Midwest. For my part, reflection on core principles underpinning the asylum's design and early operation provides a useful set of ideas for analysing and interpreting the behaviour of lifestyle migration. The asylum has served as trope with which to discuss dual themes of refuge-creating and refuge-seeking. I understand both these behaviours as social and individual responses to uncertainty and anxiety in the wake of widespread cultural and structural change at two different but related historical junctures: the period of industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century and late twentieth and early twenty-first century's deindustrialization in the United States.

In its early days, the Northern Michigan Asylum reflected the 'moral treatment' plan that characterized a mid- to late-nineteenth-century institutional approach to mental illness (Hoey 2007; see also Grob 1973; Edginton 1997). During this period, a range of mental health policy reformers located the roots of psychological disease in what they perceived to be the increasing fluidity and loosened bonds of

American life – its growing individualism, anomie and placelessness (Rothman 1971). Their therapeutic focus on ‘remoralization’ was intended as intervention into a crisis of personhood generated by the chaotic effects of a rapidly changing world. Not a moralist critique of changing culture and society, here ‘the moral’ was meant to refer to the mind, emotions and character of the person. It suggested a non-material self that they believed could be intentionally shaped through daily routines and sensory impressions afforded by the purposeful experience of particular places treated as therapeutic landscapes. The ideals of lifestyle migrants to northern Michigan today echo this understanding.

### Personal Quests to Therapeutic Landscapes told in Narratives of Travel

In order to understand the phenomenon of lifestyle migration, we must consider how recurrent themes emerge in the play of individual accounts of relocation. This involves listening to how people engage in personal meaning-making through storytelling. In creating and telling moral narratives of self, people concurrently describe and construct their identity as well as establish how their life experiences are collected to create a comprehensible and communicable biography (Hoey 2005; 2006). Narrative embodies the inescapable temporality of life experience. Life stories grow out of everyday practice and our literal as well as figurative movement through time and space. They are thus naturally stories of travel. As Richard Sennett (1998), who speaks of the integrity of personal ‘character’ in ‘sustainable’ narratives of self, virtue ethicist Alisdair MacIntyre finds that harmony in a person’s life and continuity in sense of self ‘resides in the unity of narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end’ (1984, 205). In a review of anthropological approaches to narrative, Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996) conclude that narrative and self are inseparable as narrative arises out of everyday experience even as it gives shape to that experience. By giving an intelligible order to the events of life, narrative creates temporal continuity from the past into future, imagined lives while acting as a critical interface between self and society.

Narrative orders events in a particular orientation, temporally and spatially (Ricoeur 1980). Focusing on narrative calls our attention to lived experience in both dimensions. Structures of the narratives of individuals, according to the geographer Michel de Certeau, ‘have the status of spatial syntaxes ... [such that] every story is a travel story – a spatial practice’ (1984, 115). Linguist Barbara Johnstone (1990, 5) notes that people’s sense of self and place is ‘rooted in narration’ and that ‘there is a basic connection between stories and places’. She explains that in human experience places themselves ‘are narrative constructions’ and that ‘stories are suggested by places’ (ibid., 134). Autobiographies become intimately connected with places as people create and hold onto their own landscapes (Gray and Butrym 1989). Lifestyle migrants recognize the essential role of place in creating a lasting sense of self. They self-consciously engaged in this process, choosing particular places as personally therapeutic landscapes. Following uncertainty

and dissatisfaction with working lives prior to relocation, they make purposeful connections with these places as a more stable and personally meaningful anchor for identity than what they could make in a world of work turned upside down by post-industrial economic change.

Lifestyle migrants in their late forties, Peter and Joan moved to the study area from the Detroit suburbs in the mid-1990s. Over a decade earlier, they had bought a small plot of land on the Leelanau Peninsula with an idea of one day retiring on it. But when the nature of Peter’s chosen career unexpectedly changed to the extent that he felt unable to pursue his individual calling as a television journalist, he felt free to follow their dream of intimately connecting with this place on a daily basis. They would find work after the move. Through Peter’s words, we see how place becomes an intimate part of his sense of self through an ‘existential insiderness’ (Relph 1976).

I must tell you that there are not fewer than five days in a week where I come in and say to my wife, ‘God damn, I feel loved.’ Really, I do say that. I can walk for one mile from my back door and never run into another house. I don’t hear people out there. I walk every day for long distances. I live in the Bend in the Eagle Highway. That’s where I live. How’s that for an address. You know, Eagle Highway actually makes a bend just like that [gestures with his arm, indicating his elbow] right at its northern edge. That’s the address we use. I see eagles<sup>4</sup> from my porch. None actually live on my land but I’ll give them the chance if they want. I love seeing wild turkeys. I’ve seen two bobcats in the past six months. Those are joys. I work very hard on the place I’m at – the Bend in the Eagle Highway – to know who first farmed it and when it was bought and the successive owners there were and what the stone house was used for. There is a stone house on the property, an old milk shed ... the walls are that thick [gestures a foot in thickness]. That kept the temperature at an even 60 in the summer time so that it can keep the milk cool. This is an unusual country. Leelanau is an unusual place.

In accounts like this, personal identity is entwined with the process of place-making which entails the use of local artefacts, landforms and the place-based stories tied to these objects as narrative constructions that delineate intimate areas of familiarity. In this way, these constructs organize and make meaningful one’s surroundings. As historian and folklorist Mary Hufford asserts, these narrative strategies in life stories provide ways for people to ‘surround themselves with evidence that they are at home, in a place with a usable past’ (Hufford 1986, 74). Place-making, specifically the use of informal and unofficial names, such as Peter and Joan’s self-proclaimed address at ‘the Bend in the Eagle Highway’, provide a sense of belonging. This state of existential insiderness is achieved, in part, through the use of encoded messages both in discursive form as well as by recognized landscape features that serve as grammatical units, as signs, that are mostly meaningless and typically unknown to the outsider (Ryden 1993).

Familiarity and intimate knowledge of place can provide the basis of an implicit or explicit claim of possession of certain landscapes not merely in the form of personal property but more importantly as a basic part of self in the same way that one might claim property in one's own body (cf. Radin 1987). I asked a single woman in her late thirties to clarify what she meant when she used the word 'place'. Susan grew up in the Midwest and set out in the 1990s with the goal of 'finding' herself through a job in a software firm located in Silicon Valley. In our conversations, she spoke of place when describing how she chose to leave behind a fast-paced, high-paying corporate life for one less well financially compensated but rooted deliberately in the physical landscape of the study area. Here she relates her experience of place in the study area:

The water and the dunes, the open space, the seasons ... you feel part of the outdoors up here. More so than any place I've ever lived. You feel like your life is not your home, the footprint of your house, your work. You realize that it's bigger than that. It's a lot bigger than that. Your life expands. It expands even into that old boat stored back in the woods.

Susan's description expresses how her life became a literal part of place, how she claims ownership as a basic part of self. As expressed in the opening quote to this chapter by local writer Kathleen Stocking, Susan explains how it is possible to feel that your life is 'bigger' than your home and work – how your psychic space can be purposefully enlarged. Personhood and place are entwined in embodied experience where an old boat stored back in the woods becomes an acknowledged element of self. Like many lifestyle migrants, Susan is talking in part about feeling a kind of integration in various elements of her life. As with many others, she spoke of how this feeling of connectedness with particular places might have happened before her decision to relocate to the study area during intense moments of *letting go*, such as on vacation, but that these brief experiences amounted to a small 'compartment' in a mostly fragmented life. In descriptions of sense of place told by lifestyle migrants, we see how key symbolic places provide narrative structures for shaping a sense of identity and making a life story, and thus person, whole.

As in persistent waves of migration throughout United States history, lifestyle migrants set their sights on the promise of something more, of greater fulfillment and meaning within a real or imagined frontier. While America cannot now claim a physical frontier, an arguably essential part of its nationhood, a powerfully motivating sense that geographic mobility can offer personal growth and renewal endures within national meta-narratives together with the simple but captivating allure of new places (cf. Turner 1966[1893]; Morrison and Wheeler 1978; Limerick 1994; Jasper 2000). Following this theme of starting over through the experience of new places in the pursuit of personal frontiers, research on lifestyle migrants suggests a meaningful connection between their experiences and the narrative forms within American travel writing. In a nation with a love affair with the automobile and the open road, many well-known contemporary examples in the genre of travelogues

in the United States involve unfolding maps, getting behind the wheel of a motor vehicle and driving off to meet whatever emerges on an ever-broadening horizon.

These classic American travel stories are frequently spun around a quest for finding or rediscovering the presumed nature or essential character of America through a journey of miles that weaves through small towns and close-knit communities along back roads away from the anonymity of cities and interstates. Popular examples include John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* (1962) and William Least Heat Moon's (1982) personal odyssey on and through the back road recounted in *Blue Highways*. A more recent illustration is Brad Herzog's *States of Mind* (1999). Herzog's book is literally the description of an on-the-road search for elements of the presumed authentic American character including 'harmony', 'unity' and 'freedom' lived as everyday attributes in hamlets that have these as their actual place names. Lying in Benzie County at the southern extent of my study area, the tiny town of Honor, Michigan, thus earned a visit from the Herzogs on their coast-to-coast odyssey. And yes, 'honour' was found in Honor.

The central character in these contemporary American travel stories typically 'hits the road' in the wake of a personal crisis of faith about the direction of his or her life, the meaning of work, family and community, and the mythic promise of an 'American Dream'. In the Herzogs' case, it was a sense that they were 'trading a life for a living' and needed to both 'cleanse' their souls and restore their confidence in this promise through travel (Herzog 1999). In the process of connecting or reconnecting with what are assumed to be more intimate, 'authentic' and generally rural places, there is also an inward journey of personal growth and discovery, discovering or rediscovering one's own essential nature or character. It is then a search not merely for distinct places, but for the kinds of potentially transformative, therapeutic experiences enabled by being in these places.

The guiding belief motivating lifestyle migrants is that through immersion in a new kind of existence, relocation to a place of personal refuge, the intentional changing of daily routine and a deliberate refocusing of personal goals and relationship to work, they might get reoriented, find a new bearing towards achievement of greater personal harmony and emotional well-being. This *therapeutic ideal* emerges strongly in the words of the downsized or downshifting lifestyle migrant (Bellah et al. 1996; cf. Skolnick 1991 on 'psychological gentrification' and a therapeutically conceived form of self-fulfilment). Relocating to personal places of refuge may become an act of defensive 'self-help' for deliberately enhancing individual mental health through a kind of renormalization akin to the original ideal of the Northern Michigan Asylum.

### Place-Marketing and Constructing 'Up North' as Therapeutic Landscape

The Grand Traverse region is an hour's drive from the nearest interstate and approximately 400km northwest of Detroit, Michigan – the ailing US auto industry's geographic centre; its rolling countryside is defined by a deep, glacially-dug bay.

Lumbermen were once attracted to this area by vast stands of white pine and numerous rivers and lakes that provided easy water transport and power for milling. The local timber industry began in earnest in 1847 when a wealthy Illinois farmer started his sawmill at the base of Grand Traverse Bay. Between 1851 and 1886 the mill harvested more than 120 million meters of pine lumber. Shipped primarily by boat to Chicago, some of this lumber rebuilt that city after the Great Fire of 1871. Most of the area not regenerated forest today is either idle or active farmland.

Once the site of wanton destruction through overexploitation of timber and other natural resources, local leaders reframed the rolling hills, towering sand dunes and miles of Grand Traverse lakeshore as objects of personal reflection with the power to enchant and heal. As noted in the introduction, they intentionally 'revisited' the region as a restorative sanctuary in two separate but closely related projects. The first of these was the siting and construction of an institution for the mentally ill in the 1880s. Some 40 years later, the region's natural amenities were marketed once again as refuge, but this time to a growing middle class eagerly seeking quiet retreat from the crush of life in an ever more urban America by journeying to relatively remote places of great natural beauty.

In many rural areas of the United States in economic decline at the end of natural-resource-extraction-based 'booms' but still rich with natural beauty, tourism has offered the promise of economic salvation (e.g. see McGranahan 1999). In the history of the Grand Traverse region, tourism picked up where the Northern Michigan Asylum for the Insane's economic benefits left off. The region's self-promotion as destination became increasingly earnest in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In 1924, a fledgling organization known as the Leelanau County Association of Commerce produced a compelling story of change through a developing relationship with, and eventual attachment to, the spirit of place.

Presenting a tale of an overland journey via increasingly common and reliable automobiles travelling steadily improving state highways, the booklet became an early entry to the modern genre of American travel stories centred on *driving* places. Unlike today's glitzy tourist brochures that focus on short, sensationalized description and evocative graphics, this brochure is nothing less than a complete travel narrative, albeit in abbreviated form. Beyond being an account of a family's physical journey, it is also a story of how our protagonist achieves a kind of *reorientation* to 'the good' (Taylor 1989) through personal transformation. Here this early corporate refugee uncovers what we are encouraged to see as an authentic self through substantial change of routine and surroundings (cf. MacCannell 1992). No doubt intended to capitalize on the growing romance and cachet of an imagined frontier journey to a place that today is still home to native Americans such as the Ottawa and Chippewa, it was given the title 'The Captives: Being the story of a family's vacation in Leelanau County, the Land of Delight' (Leelanau County Association of Commerce 1924) (see Figure 3.1).

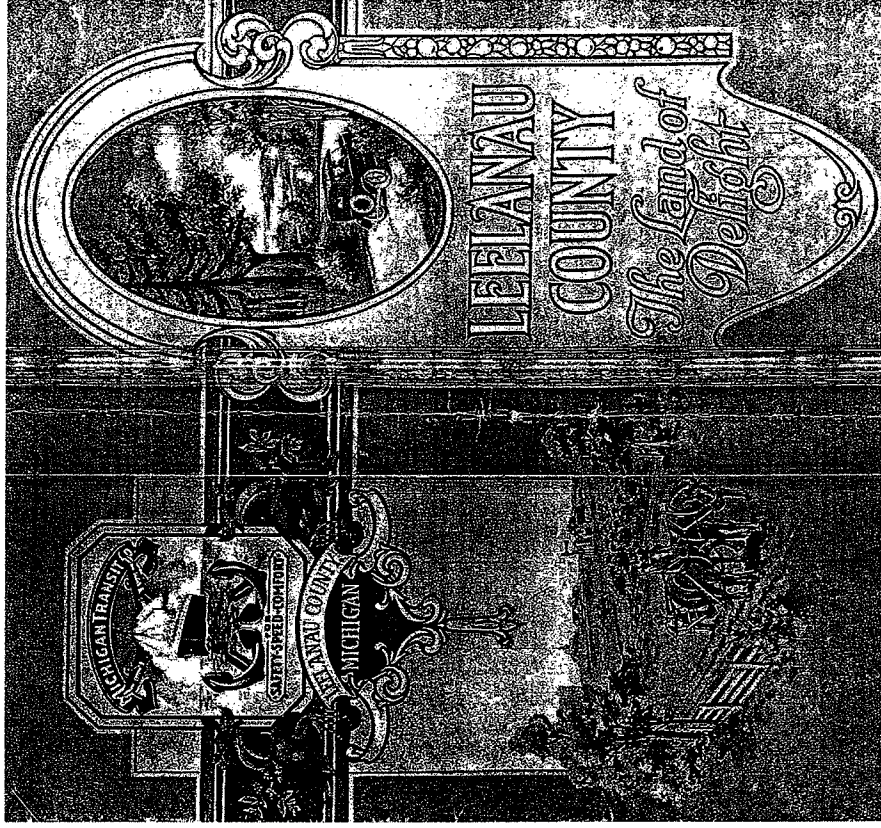


Figure 3.1 Cover of travel brochure 'The Captives' produced by the Leelanau County Association of Commerce in 1924

In the wake of changes in daily life precipitated by the Industrial Revolution and its broad impact on the social and cultural world, by the 1920s there was growing public apprehension in the United States over the opportunity and ability to take recreative 'time out'. Among those with means, much discussion centred on the need to embark on purposeful quests with the intent to, in some manner, personally *re-enchant* the world (Aron 1999; Löfgren 1999). For this illustrative family, a personal quest for enchantment begins without expectation as a family vacation: 'The Cyrus Howards were burning up Michigan's Trunk Line Eleven, which follows the lake along the state's western boundary. For three days the motor had

been roaring, the car swaying, the trailer following like a kite tail as they sped from their sweltering Corn Belt home to the cool Northland.'

In this opening scene, the promise of the 'Northland' is quickly established and set apart dramatically, not only from the reach of scorching heat but also from less tangible undesirables in the urbanized regions to the south. Residents of the Great Lakes today more commonly refer to what is called Northland here as 'Up North'. This designation serves not only as a geographic distinction but even more as a state of being, a way of literally locating or orienting oneself. In Michigan, the term Up North is used to distinguish the northern reaches of the state from the heavily urban and suburbanized 'Down State', an area south of an imagined 'line' of latitude that appears, in the perception of many residents, to divide the state into two distinct regions (cf. Clark and Officer 1962).

The story's central character, Cyrus, is a prosperous factory owner. Like any upwardly mobile middle-class capitalist, he has not allowed himself a moment of true, personally recreative rest in all his working life. As we follow the unfolding story, we find that even while supposedly taking time for leisure with his family on vacation, Cyrus cannot let go of a persistent and self-consuming drive to 'get ahead'.

Cyrus sat at the wheel, brows drawn, jaw set, driving as though fire and water rushed savagely in his wake. The siren wailed, the car ahead edged over and bellowing through the dust cloud they swung into the left and swept past. Mother spoke, 'Oh Cy, WHY such a rush? ... For thirty years we've rushed like this!' Mother went on. 'You've burned yourself up to get to where we are. Now there's enough to educate the children, enough for us to live on.'

Aside from illustrating a plausible story allowing would-be vacationers to imagine other, better selves through seeking a kind of personal refuge in this place, the brochure's story is ultimately intended to recast the region as civilized nature – safe and accessible while still distant from the troubles of urban life. Although initially aiming for more well-established vacation retreats, Cyrus begrudgingly alters course at the frequent and fervent pleadings of his road-weary family in order to take a turn down a road less travelled.

When the engine begins to sputter, although obsessed with the potential of being taken advantage of as comparatively well-heeled city folk by what he imagines are predatory locals, Cyrus unexpectedly finds a helpful man who directs them to a reliable service station. For purposes of the tale, this welcoming stranger is meant to embody characteristics of what the authors wish to convey about place itself. He is described in the tale as 'neither old nor frowsy. His hair and beard were gray but his eyes were as blue as the lake itself and in them was friendliness and tolerance. His hands were browned and hardened but they were clean. He was a rugged fellow with many years on his shoulders but he had the smile of a boy and his voice was like a fresh wind blowing.' Specifically, the reader is asked to envision the landscape as somewhat frontier rough but possessed of a fresh

and rejuvenating hardy health and an authentic goodness expressed in child-like innocence.

Wherever they go, the *old-young* man appears. On one of their rambles through the countryside, the Howards spot him ambling beside the road, 'Oh, Neighbor!' calls Cyrus, using the term of address by then adopted for their Good Samaritan. 'What're you doing up here?' Neighbor responds to his query by way of a folksy history of the area. His account is spun so that the Howards are made part of a long line of seekers who have *quested* in response not only to economic opportunity, such as in exploitation of natural resources, but also to what might be characterized as 'higher callings' in creating and seeking refuge in this place. In this way, the authors carefully construct a literary bridge in the narrative that spans two worlds: the production-oriented economy of the region's past based on resource extraction and a more recent service-based, consumption-oriented economy dependent on aesthetic appreciation of nature. Speaking as *embodied place*, Neighbor explains,

'[I've been] waiting for you to come and get close to the Almighty ... now you've got a start at a sunburn and are ready to rest in the Land of Delight. That's what Leelanau means in Injun,' he explained to Mother. 'They lived here and hunted and fished and was happy. Father Marquette [a 17th century French missionary] and those other old fellers was here a lot and history showed they liked it. The fur traders come and our grandfathers followed them and in the late forties [1840s] commenced to build their homes. Folks've been comin' ever since to settle and now city folks've found out that we've got better roads and we're off the beaten trail and they've come to find contentment ... like you have, friend.'

By the story's close, the Howards learn Neighbor's true nature as personification of the inner character of place itself: 'I'm what you'd call the Spirit of Leelanau, I guess. I'm old but I'm young. I'm a son of the frontier but I've got over being rough.' His *liminal character*, both born of the frontier yet civilized, is precisely what place-marketing in this brochure is aimed to illustrate. As a sales pitch, it is targeted to consumers looking for some small adventure while also seeking wholesome goodness and refuge, the best of 'both worlds', as well as a place where a family might experience togetherness and even find their 'authentic' selves in the embrace of therapeutic landscape.

In the United States today, refuge continues to be sought in the realm of 'the rural', both real and imagined, as the presumed cultural repository of authenticity, community and nature (cf. Benson this volume). Murdoch et al. (1998) argue that the rural has become an object of social actors seeking stability within the context of increasingly uncertain global forms and relations. As people quest for refuge, they engage in reproducing understandings contained in a culturally informed notion of the rural in American society as a basic element of the 'good' or 'simple' life (see Shi 1985, 1986; Hummon 1990). Through decades of exodus from the very rural communities that have embodied much of the national identity for



generations, many 'have retained a strong attachment to the rural ideal' (Johnson and Beale 1998, 23). In what can be applied to the American condition, Raymond Williams comments that in twentieth-century Britain there was a near 'inverse proportion ... between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas' (1973, 248).

Aron's (1999; cf. Lofgren 1999) study of domestic tourist travel in the United States, *Working at Play*, explains how those places with unique natural beauty typically found in the countryside have long become some of America's most 'sacred' places. Embarking on a trip as a tourist to spend time in one of these places became a secular form of pilgrimage. By the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when the urban seemed increasingly less civil and often categorically inhumane, the rural came to be seen as 'authentic', a more natural as well as civilized retreat from the ills of city life. This culturally prescribed role literally came to life in the Howard family's travel story as 'Neighbor'. The young-old man simultaneously displays frontier roughness and authenticity with a socially accepted gentility.

I learned from the narratives of lifestyle migrants that short-term travel on vacation may serve as a search for temporary refuge from the habits of everyday life defined in large part by routines of work. Consistent with research by Snepenger et al. (1995) that documents how tourist travel may stimulate entrepreneurial migration, I found that a majority of project participants had previous vacation experience in the study area (see also O'Reilly and Benson this volume), whether as children or adults, which provided a positive sense of place attachment to the area. Vacations may serve as a brief but meaningful break, a chance to 'step outside' one's ordinary life. As evidenced by tourism research, people may experience other dimensions of self in these moments as they engage in new and different activities while vacationing within physical and social settings a world apart from their everyday lives (Galani-Moutafi 2000; Noy 2004; cf. Neuman 1992). Finding a personal place of refuge or asylum – whether short or long term – is essential at certain crucial, watershed points in the lives of lifestyle migrants. As we shall hear in coming accounts, reaching this watershed, for many lifestyle migrants, is a matter of lost faith and failed devotion to the world of work for providing a predictable, meaningful place of attachment and source of personal identity.

### Liminality in Lifestyle Migration to Therapeutic Landscapes

Regardless of age, many lifestyle migrants appear to reach a turning point that we may liken to the crisis of identity and challenge to self most Americans associate with self-doubt and second-guessing in mid-life – the so-called mid-life crisis. This crisis in the middle suggests an in-between or 'interstructural' state of *liminality* (Turner 1967, 1974). Lifestyle migrants relocate at seemingly pivotal points in their lives (Hoey 2005, 2006). These include those shaped by such events as serious illness, a birth or death in the family, a marriage or divorce, and job loss or

other major employment changes. As the anthropologist Victor Turner noted in his later work, a state of liminality can play a vital role in a 'process of regenerative renewal' (1985, 159). While Turner spoke specifically of rejuvenation at the societal level, what many lifestyle migrants retrospectively come to call personal 'crossroads' or 'watersheds' opened up possibilities for reconsidering where they were going as individuals and who they might become.

Speaking of the mid-life crisis as a taken-for-granted rite of passage (for American males, in particular), Gail Sheehy, author of *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* (1977), discusses this mid-life transition of modern American life (cf. Shweder 1998 on the cultural construction of mid-life). In the process, she invokes the 'flexibility' that stands as a core guiding principle of the so-called New Economy (cf. Martin 1994, 1999). As in Ruth Luban's (2001) image of the corporate refugee, cast out or self-exiled from one world, disoriented and forced to find their way through unknown territories toward asylum in what she calls the 'New Land', Sheehy serves up another *self-help*, American travel story where the individual is properly and unabashedly captain of her own destiny:

Let go. Let it happen to you ... Let the feelings. Let the changes. You can't take everything with you when you leave on your midlife journey. You are moving away. Away from institutional claims and other people's agenda. Away from external valuations and accreditations, in search of an inner validation. You are moving out of roles and into the self. If I could give everyone a gift for the send-off on this journey, it would be a tent. A tent for tentativeness. The gift of portable roots. To reach the clearing beyond, we must stay with the weightless journey through uncertainty. Whatever counterfeit safety we hold from over-investments in people and institutions must be given up. The inner custodian must be unseated from the controls. No foreign power can direct your journey from now on. It is for each of us to find a course that is valid by our own reckoning. (Sheehy 1977, 364)

As related earlier, Susan rejected the lifestyle that came with her economically rewarding Silicon Valley job. She made her decision after the firm lost sight of what made the work meaningful. Like other downshifting lifestyle migrants, Susan felt that with her rejection she had embarked on a journey of personal growth, rediscovery and renewal (see also Korpela this volume). Her passage entailed an attempt to completely 'let go' (as she put it) of external valuations and accreditations, in search of her own inner validation where she might be guided by an inner compass on a course set by her own reckoning. Moving to a small town in the study area, Susan underwent a process of what she described as 'shedding layers', layers of social expectations, in order to expose what she understands to be a more authentic self. This presumed inner-self serves as source of moral orientation and direction for lifestyle migrants.

One of the few memories I have of being little is that feeling [that] world is just totally possible and I'm going to be great in it [but] ... then you lose that along the way. I spent ... years trying to become things. Whether its successful in your career or having a title or a salary or a label, it was always, 'I am this' or 'I am that' or 'I did this' or 'This is who I am' sort of thing. Part of my struggle career wise was collecting titles and jobs and thinking that would make me somebody. (Now) I landed in Leelanau County and nobody cares about any of that stuff I've done before or the places I've been or the friends I've had. I thought those kinds of things made me interesting, but they didn't. I mean, nobody cared. So how much money I made before didn't matter. The job experience, the degrees I have don't matter. It's like, 'wow', then what does matter? That's what I've been trying to find out. Something drove me to put myself in a position ... to find a place ... where I'd be forced to do that.

Much like the 'Organization Man' of my father's generation explored in Whyte's (1956) classic work, many lifestyle migrants describe how as they participated in corporate work they found themselves adhering to a system of beliefs with near religious qualities (Hoey 2006). For many Americans, answers to historically religious questions now seem sought in wholly secular activities and attachments including those made in the workplace. As Susan suggests, these are such fundamental inquires as 'Who am I?' and 'Where should my life be going?' Even in an increasingly suspicious atmosphere between workers and employers, I found examples of devotion in the stories of lifestyle migrants. One especially illustrative case is that of Jim. He is a middle-aged man who experienced a brutal and personally motivated layoff from a small but highly successful software company in southeastern Michigan a few years earlier. During one of our early meetings, his Goldwing touring motorcycle was being worked on at a busy shop off a rural highway. As we met in a smoky roadside diner just down the road, he explained that his relationship to work in this company had become akin to that of a cult member, 'I had been drinking the Kool Aid. It was like the Jim Jones gang. I was drinking the corporate Kool Aid [and] believing that this was the way. I mean, believing that this work was the way to an honourable life.'

Jim's story of being laid off after years of loyal and productive service relates the drama of his own breach and turning point particularly well. He describes a brutal discharge from the software company that he helped build. The experience gave both he and Karen, his wife, the opportunity to pause and reflect on possibilities. Like many others, Jim and Karen used pre-existing connections to the study area as a way of 'falling back' in order to recover, to regroup. They owned a small, rural cottage Up North that became an intentionally utilized place of refuge and healing. Within days after Jim's dismissal, they put their suburban home on the market. The family cottage became a personal asylum as Jim licked his wounds. Ultimately, they expanded the cottage into a full-time residence including space for a home-based consulting business that now supports them. Lifestyle migrants like Jim and Karen needed to find their own personally meaningful refuge in order to redirect

the course of their lives in the wake of the sudden collapse of a work life that had underpinned not only their household economy but also their family identity.

### Conclusion

As evidenced by reference to enduring American themes such as the frontier, stories of relocation told by downsized and displaced lifestyle migrants speak to us in a discourse of nostalgia. Nevertheless, a search for authenticity expressed in the questing behaviour of lifestyle migrants is not exclusively nostalgic. Rather, it is most importantly about restoring faith in an essential meta-narrative of the modern that encourages American workers to believe in the potential for progress. Lifestyle migrants in this project typically describe experiences in a world of work that led them to a loss of faith in the assumptions of the American Dream as an expression of this meta-narrative as well as a moral horizon that orients and promises future reward for hard work and self-sacrifice. Restored faith in this context comes through being able to purposefully work towards self-betterment and personal fulfilment (see also O'Reilly and Benson this volume). As illustrated in the Howards' story, modern American narratives of domestic travel typically express a quest to recover or re-entice what appears lost to sweeping changes brought by modernity and, through this re-entice, to find greater personal meaning. Redemption here is not only about the recovery of things past, but also an affirmation of progress as expressed in the individual attempt to realize potential selves. For lifestyle migrants who frame their relocation as motivated by a sense of moral disorientation as they engaged in careers and lifestyles that seemed to violate what they understood as their 'true' or potential selves, redemption evokes travel tales not only of 'getting back' something lost but also of 'escape' from physically and psychologically harmful practices.

With parallels to longstanding, if now typically marginalized, American traditions of pursuing the 'simple life' (cf. Shi 1985) and getting 'back to basics', lifestyle migration involves seeking refuge in therapeutic landscapes seen to resonate with and sustain an individual lifestyle commitment to putting family first (see also O'Reilly this volume) and creating a greater sense of control over one's life (see also Korpela this volume; Nudrati and O'Reilly this volume).<sup>2</sup> Through relocation to these places, lifestyle migrants attempt to reposition themselves within culturally informed notions of the good life.

2 As the now acknowledged recession has deepened in the United States since the end of 2008, themes of 'simplicity', 'thrif' and even 'starting over' have burst into public discourse and splashed the covers of such popular magazines as *Time* with its 6 April 2009 issue titled 'The End of Excess'. Consistent with a widespread yearning to find an upside to the economic downturn, the cover includes the tagline 'Why this crisis is good for America' and features a large, red 'reset' button. The notion of a kind of national reset whereby we collectively plot our reinvention in accordance to idealized visions, here of a leaner, greener America, parallels the narratives of lifestyle migrants documented here.

This chapter has examined a contemporary search for personal forms of refuge through relocation to particular geographic places at watershed moments in the individual lives of lifestyle migrants. Downsized and downshifting middle-class workers make commitments that serve as individual guides to personal renewal. They attempt to keep these promises by relocating to a place they believe will enable them to realize potential selves. This lifestyle migration is a form of urban-to-rural migration and the so-called rural rebound that began in many parts of the United States 30 years ago. Like many long-time seasonal destinations within largely rural environments hours from the nearest metropolitan centre, my study area has become a place of year-round residence for many seeking to start over. I have discussed how this region has served as both literal and figurative asylum, beginning with the mentally ill brought here over a century ago for moral treatment to today's corporate refugees and others on a quest to remake themselves through sheer force of will and determination to make meaningful connections through remoralization and rootedness to a particular physical place.

A pioneering and locally produced tourist brochure of the 1920s presents us with both an iconic American travel story and a case of the place-marketing that would drive the economies of so many regions during the twentieth century. I argue that the central principles and themes at work in the telling of its iconic travel story, analogous to the philosophical underpinnings of the asylum's moral treatment approach, are essential to the composition of contemporary relocation narratives constructed by urban-to-rural migrants moving to the region a century later. In consideration of this story, we see how the relocation stories of lifestyle migrants are constructed and shared in the form of narratives of travel as well as how a notion of the curative power of therapeutic landscapes is an enduring ideal refashioned and used today in the construction of self- and place-defining narratives. Contributing to narrative approaches in the study of place, this chapter suggests how the therapeutic landscape concept can inform inquiry into the subject of lifestyle migration and place-based constructions of self, particularly in the case of economic displacement.

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## Chapter 4

# Romance Tourists, Foreign Wives or Retirement Migrants? Cross-cultural Marriage in Florence, Italy

Catherine Trundle

### Introduction

'*Moglie e boui dei paesi toui*.' Francesca repeated it to me twice as I sat in her small *studio legale* (lawyer's office) on the outskirts of Florence – wives and cattle from your own village. It was an Italian proverb I had not heard before. She explained its meaning, 'People here think you have to get wives and cows from your country, your village, otherwise you don't understand each other.' As an Italian family lawyer, Francesca had many female 'Anglo' clients.<sup>1</sup> She specialized in divorce. With such diverse backgrounds, Francesca explained, Italian men and Anglo women often struggled to reconcile their different expectations of marriage, gender roles and child-rearing once the honeymoon period ended.

Despite this warning, hundreds of Anglo women from the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand travel to Florence, Italy, and meet, fall in love and marry Italian men. This chapter will explore the narratives of a range of female Anglo migrants, tracing their transitions from romantic, touristic encounters to marriage and motherhood, and sometimes to divorce, widowhood and retirement. The aim of this chapter is to question how useful the 'lifestyle migration' category is for understanding such a migration trend.

This chapter is based on 15 months of participant observation within Anglo women's groups in Florence, Italy, as well as 25 semi-structured interviews accompanied by a questionnaire, and one focus group. The majority of the interviewees were American;<sup>2</sup> yet two Canadian, one New Zealander, two Australians, three English, and a Scottish woman were also interviewed. While this

1 The category 'Anglo' was used widely by English-speaking migrants to describe their community and its institutions. While it is normal in migration studies to focus on one national group, in this study I make use of my participants' own category, which placed more emphasis on a perceived common cultural background and shared mother tongue.

2 For ease of expression, I am using the ethnographic category used by my participants, 'American' to refer to people born in the United States of America, and not to refer to any other nationality from the Americas.