

My List

By Lana Olarte, 10th Grade

Durham School of the Arts, Durham, North Carolina

At fifteen years old, I have already made some places of my own, carved out a few scattered spaces in the universe where I have allowed myself to belong. Where I really fit, no matter what:

#1: My mama's arms.

She gave me the first hug of my life, when I was minutes old and my face was red and scrunched up and scream-crying, my little hands curled into wrinkled fists. She pressed me against her chest, and despite the fact that I have grown in size and shape, I know that I still fit in her embrace as perfectly as I did when I was born.

She says that when I was a baby, my smile would illuminate the room until she or my dad stepped out, then I would cry and cry until she could swear I'd dry myself out. "You put up such a fight," she told me once, "but all you wanted was to be with us. I think you learned to talk so early just so you could ask for attention." (Then she pulled me close and blew raspberries in my cheek while I nearly toppled over with giggles.)

My mom believes in God, and when she hugs me tight and I bury my face in the softness of her skin, I'm disinclined to argue. It feels like I was made to be held by her. Maybe it wouldn't be such a perfect fit if I loved her a little less, but a life of taking comfort in her arms must have worn out a space in both of us, like how rivers sculpt the canyons they run through.

#2: The kitchen table.

It's round and wide, and no table cloth we have fits just right on it, but we eat at it for breakfast and dinner everyday. I always sit in the same seat, closest to the living room and between my dad and younger brother. There are scratches in the wood from accidentally-dropped knives, and stains from spilled beverages that we didn't clean up in time. My dog sits waiting under our chairs, hoping for fallen food or pity scraps. We yell a lot, primarily out of excitement and the fact that most of us have never gone without talking for more than a few minutes at a time. Different conversations overlap and interlace like the stitching of a blanket while we try to simultaneously say our piece and process everyone else's ideas.

The wood soaks up our words like a sponge, and now it's imbued with our names and voices and memories. It shares secrets with the floor and gossips with the walls.

#3: Alone.

When no one's piercing eyes can poke holes in my skin, I seem to fit my body a little better. My mirror doesn't make faces at me from the wall, and my cats don't appear to care if the lap they sit on is too fat or too thin.

I turn my music up just loud enough to drown out my thoughts, then drape myself across the bed as the vibrations rattle my bones. I imagine I have magic and try to make myself levitate. No one is there to tell me it doesn't work, that I'm not special or powerful after all, and so I get to hold on to the illusion that I am. My room is the world, and I dictate its laws.

#4:

My list is too short right now, but I still have time to add to it... ~~Right?~~

So here is a second one—

Places where I deserve to belong:

#1: Anywhere I am and everywhere I go.