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Roots

by Elda Abramson

Home was far away and a long time ago. Home was not hearth, walls, or rooms, home was belonging to a place. Home was an awakening. And a longing to be back to that place once left behind.

As I sat in the sun of California, I did not feel its warmth. Like just about everything else in the town of Palo Alto in the early sixties, sun was aspirational. With liberal use of suntan oil on my body and lemon juice in my hair, I too might become a tanned blonde beauty, like the other girls. But my heart wasn't in it. This period was the beginning of the phenomenon of Silicone Valley and bright young minds from all over America and beyond uprooted, ambitious to create a techno world. Soon enough they were rewarded with wealth and acquired new identities and a veneer of sophistication befitting this new breed.

But I was fifteen and home was in Alabama before this move to the West Coast. There were summer nights, the earthy warmth, and the sensuality that laid heavy in the flower-scented air- the magnolias, the gardenias and the honeysuckle that drugged and ripened us, heightening our senses and just being was enough.

What a shock to fold myself in against cool California.

There is California sun and Alabama sun and there is California cool and Alabama cool. The memory of tasting cool water from a metal dipper, under a tree in the middle of a cotton field at lunchtime was and is exquisite. This was after a morning that had become increasingly hot, dragging a six foot sack along the rows.

The soft clouds of cotton were lifted from the hard spikey boles that held them, and slowly, very slowly in my case, I filled the sack. The weigh-in on the scales behind the truck, the overseer marking the weight at two cents a pound, there was magic even in that. I was thirteen and all was new. I became rooted into this place where there was fertile soil and rootedness was a way of life.

Not wanting to fit in and be a California girl, feeling the emptiness of it, there was no end to my longing to be back home. When I reached the age of sixteen I drove across America alone. I was followed, stalked all through Kentucky (it was those California licence plates), but the trailing stopped once I crossed the Mississippi state line.

When I got back to Alabama it was bittersweet. California, for all my resistance, had changed me. The rhythm of my life had changed. Home was still in the South but now was only held in my memory, no matter how vivid. I came to think about it this way; once upon a time I moved to Alabama and as a young sapling, took root. The uprooted young tree had some difficulty with transplantation and never properly took root on the West Coast. But there were many, many more plantings to come in this world's earth.