

Sunspots

By Heather Spurling

The sunspots on my face and arms always fascinated the infants I used to care for. I held their squishy little bodies tightly, sometimes one in each arm, and looked into their wide eyes, watching as they furrowed their tiny brows and reached with one finger to scratch off a brown circle on my cheek. I used to hate when anyone noticed them – they refused to fade away with foundation. Children always asked me why I had spots on my face and my cheeks would burn.

There are more of these brown circles on the right side of my body because of where I sat in the car as a child. We drove across the country from Maryland to California when I was seven for my daddy's job, because that's why we always moved. He rigged up a thick black laptop to play *The Wizard of Oz* for my brother and me as we drove and drove. The sun beat down through the right side of the car and kissed half of my face and one of my arms.

We drove from California to Alaska when I was ten. I used to look through the lightly tinted glass and create stories, never understanding why other children hated riding in the car. I daydreamed about a young woman who discovered dinosaur fossils in her backyard. Twelve days on the road taught me patience and how to use my imagination.

The sun marked me through the window and dotted my face with memories.

We stopped at the Olympic Park in Utah, and I knew I could never jump like the skiers down the massive, impossibly steep mountain that was an earthy green instead of white in the summer. I remember seeing bears every few hours once we hit Canada. They were friendlier looking than I expected, just meandering next to the road. Later I was still afraid they would get inside our tiny house with royal blue carpet in Soldotna, Alaska. I remember my brother scarfing down a hamburger for every single meal we ate on the road, and the tiny cans of Dr. Pepper that my mom would never allow us to have under normal circumstances. We stopped to make lunch in the middle of the Al-Can Highway because summer is the time for roadwork in a land where life still revolves around the seasons.

I remember my brother filling his hoodie pocket with so many turquoise and rust-colored rocks from a sacred waterfall in Glacier National Park that it hung down below his knees. We drove

all the way back to return them the next day, each and every one, because my mom didn't think it was right to steal rocks from a sacred Native American site. I remember the way my daddy laughed when my mom pointed emphatically at a mountain above us and said "There it is – that's the glacier!" when it was nothing more than an oblong patch of snow.

Now that I've had my license for a few years, the spots on my face have evened out a bit. There are still more on the right side though, and I hope there always will be. I wonder if the infants with their clear eyes sense this history and scratch the spots to reveal what they contain, or if it is only the discontinuity with the rest of my face that interests them. I wonder how their memories will mark them.