

BLOGGER | DEBRA DARVICK

# A Sense of Place

the little things  
that make us feel  
rooted—like pink  
dogwood in spring



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**Each spring here** in Michigan, I ache in a small place I can't name. It's not simply that slogging through snow in April makes me long for the landscape of my Southern childhood. It's the realization that my kids and I do not share nature cues—those sensory memories that evoke home once we're grown and gone. For them, spring wafts in on chilly crab apple breezes in mid-May. I snip lilac branches and put them into nightstand vases to scent their dreams. When they were little, they played "catch the helicopters" as maple seedlings spiraled to earth. Magnolia blossoms? Honeysuckle? Forget about it. Nature has imprinted my children with a different beauty, different signs for home.

I still find these small details jarring. Transplanting is a funny business. I occasionally hear my kids slip in a "y'all" when calling out to their friends, but more often it's "you guys." Their A's are flat as Red Wing hockey ice. When they were toddlers, they'd say, "Deeaddy, help me with my p'jeeamas," and I'd cringe. Where were their drawls? I taught them to speak, but their ears have found other accents to mime.

How can I imbue my children with a sense of the South when we only visit once a year—especially since that trip is usually in December? The South means swinging in the backyard hammock; it's pine-straw fights and hearing their grandpa say, "C'mere, Bubba,

gimme some sugar." It's going coatless in winter and seeing velvety pansies planted by an intrepid gardener. It's hard, this passing on the sense of place. We can do the big stuff—religion, ethics. But it's the little things that root us.

By sheer luck and the yearning of the Southerner who owned our house before us, two dogwoods bloom outside my daughter's bedroom window: one pink, one white. Each spring, those delicate branches are the first thing she sees upon awakening and the last thing she sees before dreaming. My husband and I once toyed with moving to another neighborhood. "We can't!" Emma wailed. "What about my dogwoods?" My daughter, whose accent holds no trace of Georgia red clay, nevertheless waits for the dogwoods to bloom. That is enough for me.

Long ago I promised myself that if she were to stay close by and bless me with a granddaughter, I'd plant a dogwood outside her baby's window. And should she settle in a place alien to us both, like Montana or Washington State, I imagine we'll both be out in the garden—rooting into the earth not just flowering trees for springtime delight, but the essence of our childhoods as well. ■



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