Looking for Home

As long as humans have been around, we've had to move in order to survive. Early hunter-gatherer cultures had to follow the food source, leaving an area when it had become overpicked or overhunted, allowing the plants and animals to regenerate. In more recent times, whole groups of people have been forced to leave home to survive. Irish immigrants left home during the 1845 potato famine; Oklahoma farmers left home for California in the 1930s; and throughout the twentieth century alone, Mexican farmworkers have had to follow the harvest across California, Oregon, Washington, Texas, even into Minnesota, searching for work. When the economies of a region—the water, the crops, or the industries—no longer support a people's existence, inhabitants are faced with a very simple choice: leave home or die. Under the looming threat of globalization, some communities are creating a third choice by developing locally owned, sustainable economies. These structures give people more control over their lives, more control over the social and environmental practices of businesses. They allow people to "stay put."

A migrant of a different sort, I moved to Bellingham, Washington, for work, hoping to find home. After five years of a weekly commute through farmlands, forests, and lakes stretching 150 miles between my partner's house in Minneapolis and my job in Duluth, both Shawn and I wanted a home together. We imagined somewhere with mountains and pine trees, progressive culture and activism, work and career opportunities, friends