

# Echoes of Laurentide

Katrina Hauer, University of Minnesota Duluth  
 Written for English 2800

Glaciers creak beneath my feet. Not literally, of course, not anymore for the last several thousand years, but I can feel their remaining chill hum in me. Each step I take whispers of the ice that shaped my home, shaped *me*. Who I am is so intertwined with where I'm from, so fused at the core of my soul, that separating them proves hopeless. Is that not one of the first questions asked at every introduction? Others may ask you to share your name and pronouns, perhaps an awkward fun fact that feels excruciatingly hard to come up with, and of course – where you are from. We must define each other by this fact far more than we realize.

Sunday mornings meant a twenty-minute drive to church, weaving through the curving back roads running between my town—the city of Stevens Point—and the neighboring town of Plover. The church taught me God gifted free will, but yet he also possesses foreknowledge of all that will be, having laid it out in a planned path. I don't understand this. Philosophical determinism describes how infinitely spiraling causalities—cause and effect—result in a species with less free will than we like to think. I cannot bring myself to believe my choices for the future are predetermined. I don't find myself able to believe in karma or fate; I see no deity personally guiding my way. But still, when every choice I make and every thought I have builds upon the previous ones, when the choices I'm even provided with in life are determined by circumstances building upon previous events, I'm left to conclude, at the very least, that nothing occurs in this world without the impact of another.

We are the products of this world, inheriting its legacy.

The last large ice age began 2.6 million years ago. This icy spell, known as the Pleistocene Epoch, continued until approximately 11,600 years ago. During this time, the Laurentide Ice Sheet operated as the primary glacier cover for the northern parts of North America, including the Great Lakes region. The terminal moraine of this glacier (the deposits from the farthest reaches of this icy giant) cut directly through my county. I can imagine how the ice must have creaked and moaned as it dragged its mass across the land, crawling at a pace of up to a kilometer a year, and towing sediment and boulders to deposit as it saw fit. Outwash plains flooded with glacial runoff and sediment. I can see the marks on the land. The surficial geology of my country divides into three different sections and is covered by three main regions of soil associations, all of which directly exist as remnants of the former glacial moraines. Each is considered prime farmland, one simply as is, and the other two after irrigation or drainage. Even the type of agriculture in the county bears the mark of the former ice. I grew up on a former

dairy-farm in a section of “prime farmland, if drained.” It’s easier to raise cattle than drain the land for crops. The milking pens at my farm were coated in rust from years of disuse, but dairy and beef still dominated the surrounding area. When I drive South, I see more vegetables grown, heavily irrigated in the sands of the former outwash plain.

Rich soils built up from the glacial deposits and soon a deep forest shadowed the land. It was here that the Mamaceqtaw (Menominee) lived for millennia before European arrival. With time, white people colonized the area. They took the land in so-called ‘peaceful’ treaties which were the result of federal pressure on tribes given little choice in the matter. The U.S. federal government procured the land of my hometown during the Treaty of the Cedars when the Mamaceqtaw lost legal claim to all land but the Wolf River reservation by 1854. Their story is not mine to tell, but I cannot tell my story without acknowledging theirs. Their ancestors moved in as the glacier retreated. Glacial meltwater across Wisconsin left the origins of a river still flowing today. It was this river I drove over every day traveling to school, passing the large mural of loggers on my way into town. After white people took over, they developed a massive logging industry, valuing the land for the profit it made. Lumber can be highly profitable. A crook in the river, a nice bend, left a convenient spot for loggers who used the river’s natural geography to jam their logs in place and hop onshore. My town’s name comes from this river. Originally the Mamaceqtaw people called this place *Pasīpahkīhnen*, meaning ‘it juts out as land’ or ‘point of land.’ Later, George Stevens opened a grocery and supply business for passing through loggers who began to refer to this place as Steven’s Point. This is the name I say during my introductions. I’m from Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Others nod as if that means anything to them, occasionally chiming in if the name rings familiarity.

From logging to forestry, my story begins with trees. University of Wisconsin Stevens Point’s forestry program brought my father to the area. A country boy from various rural Minnesotan towns, he attended agriculture school for two years before starting his forestry undergraduate. It was there my parents met, both drawn into the area for the college’s natural resource programs. Within the decade they would be married and living near the Twin Cities, where I emerged into the world twenty and a half years ago. By my third birthday, my parents moved our family back to the college town where they had met so my dad could begin the only job I’ve ever known him to have—as a professor of forestry. I grew up in those university hallways. My dad would sometimes deposit my sister and me in the classroom across from his office. The luxurious white board spanned the entire wall and four differently colored markers were enough to keep two children company. My parents taught me to love the earth. My sister and I played in the mud, and every vacation involved a hike. I soaked in climate news and found myself incapable of turning a blind eye. When it came time to search for schools, my mom’s coworker suggested checking out the University of Minnesota Duluth, it has wonderful environmental programs, she said. I agreed. If I reflect on my choices I must ask: how much of this was my own decision? I made the choice, yes, but I made it based upon thousands of factors predetermined for me.

Is this how free will and predetermined plans can coexist? Is free will actually free will if we make choices based upon factors we did not choose?

The Laurentide Ice Sheet shaped my life as intricately as the ground beneath it. It sculpted the land and river and deposited sediments from which forests grew, culminating in a logging industry and town, a university forestry program, a young couple meeting, and a baby. Me. It would be arrogant to believe this happened for me; no, I was never the plan. The Earth simply moves and as much as we would like to believe *we* shape the land, the land shapes us. A million and one factors influenced my life. A million and one choices and decisions went into me. But if you listen, can you hear it?

My ears ring from the echoes of the ice.

