

59 Hartington Rd

A thesis by Laura Maier
Integrative Project 2015-2016

For my IP project, I created a book of illustrations and a large illustration that are based on my family's history book. This project is a reflection of my personal identity and ideas of home and family.

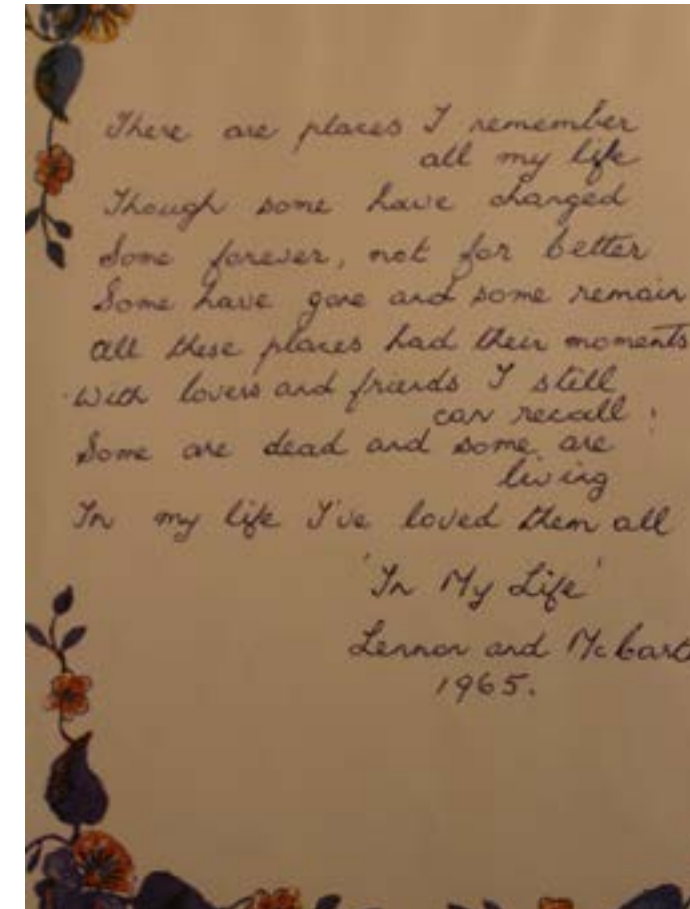
Before she passed, my grandmother wrote down all of the stories of her childhood growing up in England, World War II, as well as the stories of my mother and her sisters. Utilizing some of the anecdotes and historical stories from my grandmother's book, I created illustrations for my own book. By creating 59 Hartington Rd, I am the third generation of my family recounting the stories and adding to them. I also created a larger drawing, which represents my personal addition to the grouping of stories and incorporates other imagery from my childhood.

In the original book, grandmother also documented every house she and her family have lived in with photographs and addresses. I visited the sites of these homes, in Indiana, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and documented them myself. Through video and photograph, I was able to record the evolution of these spaces over the last sixty years. While embarking on a road trip to these locations with my mother, I was reliving the original act of my mother's family moving around after emigrating from England.

As I read my grandmother's book and studied the stories and places recorded, I began to notice some of the things that were missing. Most surprising to me was the misrepresentation of the locations listed by my grandmother of the places they have lived. While on my road trip, I spoke to one of my aunts often. As she is ten years older than my mom, my aunt has much more memory of the years after the family moved to America, and was able to give more insight into the stories. As I was speaking to her, I learned that there was a time period and location completely excluded from the list. According to my aunt, the family moved to Chicago for a period of around six months in the 1950's. This time was an extremely stressful one for the family – my grandfather had quit another one of his jobs, the family had very little money, and they once again had to uproot themselves. I found this total elimination interesting as it provided insight into how meticulously my grandmother curated her book to reflect her most pleasant memories. As she was nearing the end of her life, my grandmother chose to record only her most fond memories and stories she was proud to leave behind as her legacy. However, missing from the book is the many hardships of the family. These gaps in the stories of my grandmother are something I will be exploring visually in my illustrations.

These illustrations will examine what it means to reflect on family history and anecdotes as a third generation. The book touches on many important elements of history – war, immigration, and suburbia. My interpretation of the book in visual form will display a new realization of family history as well as self.

Research for my IP project began with the history of my own family. As I began to flip through the pages of my Nan's book, I absorbed the history embedded in each page. My Nan was born in 1924 in Liverpool, England. On one of the first pages, she discusses her "sickliness" as a child and her memories of dancing the Charleston with her mother at a young age. One statement that intrigued me in her story is, "Sometimes I think I can remember incidents as a child as young as three years old but again I listened to my mother and grandmother's stories about myself and perhaps they were so vivid I'm convinced I actually remember some of the events." I began thinking of the ways in which the work I am producing is based on memory, and how memories shape family and history.



In many ways, my Nan's binder of photographs and handwritten stories is her memoir. G. Thomas Couser, professor in English American Studies, writes in his book *Memoir: An Introduction*, "Unlike the novel, then, memoir is the literary face of a very common and fundamental human activity: the narration of our lives in our own terms. It is rooted in deep human needs, desires, and habitual practices" (Couser, 9). Although her book was written with the intentions to document stories and facts for our immediate family, my Nan's book still fits some descriptions of the modern-day memoir. As she began to near the end of her life, my Nan was fulfilling the "deep human need" to narrate her life as she saw it on her own terms. For my Nan, narrating her life based on her own terms included leaving out many of the important yet unpleasant life events of the family. In his book, Couser notes, "Today, memoirs often incorporate invented or enhanced material, and they often use novelistic techniques" (Couser, 15). Although the family history book may not utilize novelistic techniques, the material presented is often enhanced and airbrushes over what may have really happened. Nowhere in the history book is there mention of the negative events that were simultaneously taking place in the family such as alcoholism, mental illness, attempts of suicide, and my grandfather's stroke. These exclusions of events were what began to intrigue me.

Home and Stories

I also became fascinated in the act of storytelling and the need to share stories in our society. A Canadian filmmaker, Peter Wintonick wrote, "I believe we are genetically wired psychologically wired, from the time we are children, when we are sung or read bedtime stories, to look for completion. We need to attach stories to personalities, to humans."

I realized that by reading the stories of my Nan and studying the history of my family, I was searching for my own completion. As I had never met my Nan, I was discovering her voice through her anecdotes and small asides. Following her presentation of only the positive memories in her life,

My Nan recorded the homes the family lived in in the 1950's and 60's. She includes photographs that display the family gathered outside the suburban home, smiling joyfully and dressed in their finest clothing. Many of the artist work I have been inspired by include exploration of ideas of home and family, but also the imperfections behind them.

Artist Inspiration

Thomas Doyle

New York based artist Thomas Doyle creates humorous and slightly dark sculpture dioramas. The tiny sculptures of homes and domestic scenes provide surprising and unexpected glimpses of suburban life. The sculptures may seem playful and happy, but also have a sense of foreboding to them. As Doyle explains in his Hi-Fructose Volume 11 feature, "my work mines the debris of memory." He says, "the works depict the remnants of things past - whether major, transformational experiences, or the quieter moments that resonate loudly throughout life. In much the way the mind recalls events through the fog of time, the works distort reality through a warped and dreamlike lens." ("Thomas Doyle Presents New Dioramas in "If the Creek Don't Rise") One of Doyle's pieces, "Mire" presents a pristine, tiny blue home. The house has perfect white trim with a porch, and appears to have once resided in a suburban lot with a sidewalk leading up to it. However, this home has been lifted from the ground, leaving a gigantic hole in its place. The house appears to be flying through the air, while the family stands and stares at it together. Doyle's dioramas address the difficulties of the modern world by illustrating the longing for the stability of family and home. (Thomas Doyle's Surface to Air - Opening Night) This visual representation of the distortion of memory and the imperfections of home has informed my own work.



Thomas Doyle
Mire
mixed media / 2013

Mark McCoy

Similarly, Brooklyn artist Mark McCoy creates illustrations that depict the literal destruction of home. His highly detailed drawings in his work, "Hallows" present remnants of a home - a window frame, the top floor of a home falling to pieces. These depictions of the home in destruction helped me to create my own visual vocabulary to illustrate the imperfections of the home and family.

Pat Perry

Pat Perry creates surreal and calculated illustrations that display images of travel and the natural world. Some of his drawings appear to be the collision of both urban spaces and the nature of Michigan. His drawings create surreal, dreamlike scenes that evoke thought. Perry's sketchbook appears to be a kind of visual diary of his surroundings, as do his more finished drawings. Perry's documentation of home its distortion has informed my own illustrations.

Road Trip

In her book, my Nan recorded every house the family lived in after moving the United States. On each page there is a photograph of the house and an address and dates underneath it. The addresses were as follows:

1953: 182 Parrish St
Dallas, PA
1961: Skyview Dr
Liverpool, NY
1962: Oak Dr
Cedar Grove, NJ
1962: 140 Sterling Av
Dallas, PA

I had never been to any of these locations, and I began to wonder what these towns were like and whether or not these houses still exist today. I discussed these towns with my mom, and learned that she had little memory of the first three homes, as she was very young at the time. It became increasingly obvious to me that visiting these towns of my family's past was crucial in the development of my project. Through driving to these places, I would be able to fully immerse myself in the history while also observing the visual landscape of many of the images in my Nan's book.

From November 13th-16th, my mom and I embarked on this road trip, travelling over 3,000 miles in the four days. We successfully visited the four homes, in New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Our first stop was in Liverpool, New York. After a long day driving through Canada, we arrived outside of Liverpool and checked in to a hotel. The next day, we drove to find my mom's old house. I recorded most of the trip on my camera, through video and photograph. I noticed a lack of recognition on my mom's face as we drove down the street my Nan had recorded, and we compared houses to the photograph from the book, as my Nan had not written down a street address. Skyview Drive is a typical suburban street – relatively small homes squeezed together with flowerbeds and manicured lawns.

Once finding the house number, I used a small gardening trough and a mason jar to collect soil from the front yard. I decided to collect soil from each location as a way of recording my trip and my history. Soil is the physical piece of the home and allowed me to make comparisons between each of the locations. I found that I was drawing a lot of attention as I crouched in the street digging up dirt, so I resorted to sometimes taking the soil from a more discreet location nearby, rather than the front yard. Along the way, I collected the jars of soil and labeled each of them with the address of the house they were gathered at.



I recorded much of the landscape on my camera, and observed the monotony of the cities – noticing in many ways their similarities to my own visual language growing up in the suburbs of Michigan. Many of the images from my road trip of the homes, streets, and landscape appear in my drawings.

During the trip, I had many discussions with my mom about her past and her life growing up at these places. Due to her lack of memory of many of the locations, we often called my aunt, who at ten years older remembers much more of the places we were visiting than my mom did. I began to record these conversations on my phone, documenting the words of memory and recognition.



After arriving back in Michigan, I began the process of turning the soil I collected into a drawing material. I started by straining out all of the large material from the soil, as there were many rocks and twigs mixed in. Then, by mixing the soil with water I separated the thin, silt-like layer of soil at the top of the jar. I continued this process many times, trying to further refine the soil into a material that was finer and finer. After arriving at a pigment I was happy with, I laid out the material to dry. After drying, I ground up the pigment into an even finer material using a pestle and mortar. Then, I learned how to turn the pigment into a drawing pastel.

I used gum tragacanth powder as the binding agent for creating the pastel. I mixed the gum tragacanth powder with water, which created a gooey substance. Then, using a palette knife I mixed the gum tragacanth and water in combination with the soil to create the pastel mixture. Afterwards, I rolled the out the pastel into a usable shape. After a day or so, the mixture dried into a usable drawing pastel.

I began experimenting with using the soil pastels with graphite in my drawings. Through the addition of the soil pastel, I am able to add another layer of meaning to my illustrations, as the “earth” of home.



Gum tragacanth powder



Gum tragacanth powder mixed with water



Gum tragacanth mixed with water and soil pigment



Soil pastel over graphite

Work in Show

- 1) 59 Hartington Rd West, 2016, 8" x 10", book of drawings
- 2) 2164 Winding Oak trail, 2016, 2'x4', graphite and soil pastel



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The first component of my thesis project is the book of illustrations, 59 Hartington Rd. The book is 24 pages, hardcover with a dust jacket, and 8 by 10 inches. "59 Hartington Rd" is printed on the front cover as a scanned image of letterpress type.

I decided to incorporate the letterpress in the book while searching for a typeface that would fit the overall tone of the book. I wanted a typeface that is timeless, representing the handwritten and typewriter portions of my Nan's book, but also had a tactile, handmade aesthetic. Both "59 Hartington Rd" and the paragraph on the first page of the book were set and printed on the letterpress, then scanned.

The second typeface I used in the book is my own handwriting. Handwriting also fit with the hand-drawn, intimate aesthetic of the drawings. It also echoed the handwritten notes and stories of my Nan's that are being interpreted in *59 Hartington Rd*. My Nan's writing is in the letterpress typeface, while my own words and additions are in my handwriting.

The spine and inside covers of the dust cover give hints to the illustrations inside of the book. While the front cover of the book is relatively quiet, they lead the viewer to the illustrations inside of it.

Throughout the rest of the book, I present the viewer with illustrations of my own interpretations of my Nan's book. Each drawing has a hint of an idea from the original stories, whether it is an image from a photograph or a house my family once lived in. These images are presented literally, but then with an addition that is slightly surreal. These surreal, sometimes "floating" images illustrate the disparities in memory and what is presented as history. As explained earlier, my Nan left out many pieces of information from her original book. The large areas of darkness and graphite respond to the "unknown" of our history. In addition, the floating building materials, wood pieces, and windows depict the deconstruction of the home and the idealistic perfection of the past.

Depicted in the illustrations are images of my aunts, mom, Nan, sister, and myself. These images represent the three generations of women and history I am exploring in *59 Hartington Rd*.



The second component of my thesis is the final drawing, *2164 Winding Oak Trail*. This illustration is a supplement to the book of illustrations, as a culmination of the themes and imagery presented in the book. I wanted to not only have the printed media of the book, but also the imperfect, tactile presentation of a drawing. The drawing also includes the soil pastels made from the soil of the homes of my family members. These soil pastels add a hint of color to the illustrations, but also another layer of meaning. Through the addition of this soil medium, I am incorporating the literal earth and history of my family and their journey across the United States.



Conclusion

Through the completion of my book of illustrations, I was able to narrate the story of my family. Using the photographs and stories from my Nan's book I created *59 Hartington Rd*, which conveys the confusion of being a third generation and reflecting on history through curated memory.

Through telling the stories of my family using illustration, I was able to sort through the facts and created my own conclusions. Throughout the year, I developed my illustration skills as I brainstormed visually.

As I move forward as an artist, I would like to continue to explore ideas of home and family, and the deconstruction, through illustration. I also enjoyed the experience of creating and utilizing the soil pigment. In the future, I will continue to use alternative materials in my work.

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