

Lazy Lizard Hostel in Moab, Utah (Summer, 2009)

Evan Steuber

It is next to a storage facility, and if you don't turn soon enough, you think it doesn't exist, that the website advertised a scam, that the guidebook was paid off to include it, that the sign is a ploy to rob you. Kayley called ahead, made sure we could get a space. "We don't take reservations on camping spots, just cabins," she was told. There are no marked spaces and we're not sure if we can park where we do. It is a barren yard of dirt, filled in with various temporary homes. The spots by the fence are taken, the ones that will shield the long-term guests from the harsh sun of the morning. We sign a registry and are given no further instruction. The impression is of arriving at a gathering without invitation. We are finding room; room is not made for us.

He was kicked out of rehab for using. His punishment was homelessness that led him to drift. We cook maple syrup flavored sausage in the morning and the smell brings him over. I offer him sausages, and fruit, and crackers. I show him our stash of non-perishables, bagging up the items he shows interest in. I offer more. I want to give him as much food as he wants because this is the first time a stranger has asked me for food and accepted food as a sufficient response to the request. I was sheltered in life, taught that hunger is only an excuse.

Reading and writing, she is sitting at the one picnic table with us, picking at some fruit while we tear into the sausage. "That sounds good. The maple syrup part, not the meat." She speaks extensively of her daughter in a loving, close way. I am confused when she tells us she has been living here for months, that she loves the desert, the sun, cats.

A man in the corner of the dirt yard collects. It is built up all around him. Empty cans of food, magazines, aluminum cans, books, plastic bottles, anything people normally throw away. It forms a home. In the afternoon he takes out his acoustic guitar and plays short riffs, never finishing a song.

At night, there are three generations of a Chinese family sharing the picnic table we claimed first. Not the table, but some of the space. We cook an easy meal on the grill, some beef hot dogs, but it is gourmet after days filled with noodles and dried foods on various hiking trails. We desire meat. As our meal continues, as we move from our first hot dog, to our second, to— why not?— our third, we are pushed closer and closer to the edge of the wooden boards. By our last hot dog we sit, teetering, our feet pressed out away from the table, our backs to the dinner that keeps growing in size. First the rice-cooker filled to the brim, then the vegetables, then the meat— it keeps coming, the courses and the people. They push us away. It's admirable how they bring their space with them, how they make this a home.

You wouldn't think you'd feel safe here, but I do. I get the impression that many of these people might be homeless, might have violent pasts, but it feels more like a quiet insane asylum, a restful void, than it does like an alleyway. This is a transitional place, and space is ill-defined.

Many of the guests talk to themselves, but in groups. "I spent a lot of time in France." "I have a daughter in Milwaukee." "I bet you wouldn't guess just how big Omaha is." They speak of places because we are all foreign here.

Arches National Park looks over the small hostel from down the road. It is a spectacle that has made the desert livable and brought the drifters and tourists to it. Kayley and I stay for sundown at Balanced Rock, a marvel with the egg-shaped pillar tipping off the edge, constantly

at the point of almost, of not-yet. We do not see sundown at the hostel, but I imagine it is remarkably unremarkable, the way in which the fence must block everything. The hostel has become a container for those who are uncontained. To presume understanding, it must be closed off, fenced-in in an effort to bring together the disparate parts. It is something of both beauty and sadness that the infinite can only be grasped within our rigid forms.

Evan Steuber hails from Kentucky where they spent their first twenty-some years working in restaurants and retail, meeting the love of their life, and getting educated. Evan's creative work has appeared in journals such as LUMINA Online, Apofenie, Crack the Spine, and The Gravity of the Thing. They recently received their PhD in the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago and can be found on Twitter @justevanjs