

BALANCE

INSIGHT AND
REFLECTIONS
ON MAKING IT
ALL **WORK** IN
THE **MODERN**
WORLD



ESSAY

Under the eggshell sky, 1976

For a 6-year-old, this was a magical city of lights, mysterious voids and basketball — the stuff memories are made of

BY GREG BLAKE MILLER

What is this place, where the world has only just cracked open? These canyons bleeding, these expanses of sand and black stone, the yucca puncturing the land like fallen arrows. What is this hovering eggshell sky, its shattered edges jagged all around us? If I could fly, would I be able to touch its cool surface? They say that beneath it, purple on the horizon ... they say those are mountains. And at certain times, on certain days, I'm sure they're right.

But as the sun fades on this day (let's call it Sunday) of some month (perhaps March) of a year they call 1976, I am rolling along in the back seat of a tan Ford sedan, looking out the window, and I see quite clearly that those are not mountains at all, but a shimmering void beneath the eggshell. The void is shrouded in silver-violet mist. I want to go there, to bathe in the twilight haze, to discover what is hidden within and what lies beyond. Instead I roll on, in that Ford, through my seventh year on this Earth, surrendering to the wheels, to the decisions of the front-seat grownups.

But even from a distance, the void brings magic to my afternoons. I am thrilled by the idea of a land that ends. When something ends, there is something else beyond, and the unseen beyond belongs to my imagination alone. The shimmer of the edge, the unstable illumination of 6 p.m. skies, casts mystery across the whole valley. The street is called Flamingo; if we drive far enough we will see feathers of pink neon and, beyond the feathers, a palace glowing green-blue through a web of white stone. On another corner, a marquee invites me to something called the Dome of the Sea. How wonderful it is to be on this street and newly able to read! A sea with a dome—it sounds a lot like my beloved eggshell sky, just served over water. I want to go to the Dome of the Sea, but somehow, deep down—no, not deep down; in some shallower space!—somehow I know that the Dome of the Sea is a fish restaurant, and that I do not like fish. The shallower space likes to whisper bitter wisdom, to dispel my violet haze with what is said to be real. I listen only when absolutely necessary.

The edge: We live with a glowing city on one side of us and raw desert on the other. The street names sum it up: Pearl and Sandhill. If you hop our backyard wall, you'll land on a ranch, and on the ranch you'll find buffalo. I spend my time beneath the big sky on the backyard lawn, lounging with my brown brindle boxer, then stirring us both to action and sprinting in circles in the sun. We call it the Kentucky Dog Derby. My dog is undefeated here on her home soil. We have a cement slab, and a basketball pole — a real playground basketball pole, thick and embedded in the slab. My mother called all over the school district to find out where they ordered their playground hoops, and then she ordered one for my brother and me. She is that kind of mother, and it is that kind of school district, and that kind of city.



April 25 Nevada Public Radio Recycling Day *Bring all your recyclables, old electronics, gently used clothing, confidential documents and unused medication.*



May 2015 'Rita Las Vegas Pub Crawl

Throughout the month of May, join us at different locations for a featured margarita.



May 28 Desert Companion Photo Showcase & Award Presentation

Feast your eyes on beautiful photography from our photo contest.

July 2015 A Tasting of DEALicious Meals Issue Party *Join us for a tasting of DEALicious meals from past and present.*



August 2015 Health & Medicine Issue Party *Celebrate Southern Nevada's top doctors with a lively evening of hors d'oeuvres, cocktails and great company.*

September 2015 Desert Companion on Tour with Norm Schilling *Get expert tips on all your fall planting needs from horticulturist guru, Norm Schilling at Star Nursery.*

November 15 Nevada Public Radio Recycling Day *Bring your recyclables, old electronics, gently used clothing, confidential documents and unused medication.*



More information at
desertcompanion.com


She asked a question, and it was answered, and the answer was local, and the solution was available. When my parents speak of friends, of gatherings and dinner parties, they speak of handymen and doctors and decorators and housepainters and used-car salesmen and state senators. They all eat the same roast beef over the same tables at the same dinner parties in the same homes. They are neighbors.

At the back of the basketball slab, we have a brown wooden gate with two small openings shaped like the stars on the Stardust sign. My dog can jump over the fence, but I have seen something even more remarkable: water, six feet high, flowing through those starbursts and over the gate. I cannot pin down the moment when I saw this, and I have no proof that it ever happened. But when I hear my parents talking about Richard Nixon, this is the picture in my head. Elections are approaching: There is the man named after our car, there is Ronald Reagan, who, I hear around our Republican dinner table, "wants to start World War III," and there is Jimmy Carter, who wants to convert us all to Christianity. We decide on the man named after our car. Elections arrive, and he loses, though we remain Jewish. Just this past summer, my big sister finished her first summer as a counselor at the Temple Beth Shalom Kinder Kamp. On lucky days, I was in her group, and we sat cross-legged on the lawn while she strummed her guitar and sang "One Tin Soldier." Across the street: Griffith Methodist Church, where I and a bunch of other Jewish kids had, a few years earlier, gone to our first year of nursery school, learning under the dazzling gaze of Miss Melody. How we loved the roller coaster whitewashed roof, the sloping tower, the stained glass. How we Jewish kids loved that church! It was that kind of city. That was back when I was 3. Afterward, I missed Miss Melody, her eyes, her long brown hair, her musical name. I saw her one more time, at Lake Mead Marina, where my mother had taken me into the ladies' room. It was not the reunion I had been hoping for.

But enough with childish memories! It is November, the elections are over, I am in first grade, and I have been told that I am

finally old enough to go to a Rebels game. We pile into the car, Mom and Dad and my sister and brother and I, we roll down Flamingo, we make a sudden turn down Paradise — I have never yet been down Paradise. The Convention Center Rotunda: a flying saucer, pale green, hovering over a parking lot, ready to take us someplace wonderful. We board. Inside, the seats are deep-cushioned, a sort of rusty orange. A sign: "Welcome to Tark's Shark Tank." Below — the players in red-and-white warmup suits, their names on separate swatches of fabric, snapped to their backs. The suits come off: White uniforms, a red stripe down the side. Number 10 — Robert Smith. Number 11 — Eddie Owens. Larry Moffett, number 42. Sam Smith, number 40. And there's the one who, as soon as the game starts, is on the floor, scrambling for a loose ball, bounding to his feet, diving into the second row, pulling down a rebound with three opponents clinging to him. That's number 25, Glen Gondrezick, and all at once he merges with my city, as surely as if he had just stepped out of the violet void, the magic still clinging to his skin.

The Rebels charge toward the basket as if mounted on invisible steeds — they seem at once above and below and around and beyond their opponents. In my vision of their otherworldly flotation lurks the phantom of another Saturday blue-collar hero, this one from the early mornings: Aquaman, aboard his giant seahorse. You know, it's really hard to hold your breath. I like this strange combination of frictionless motion and the effortful grind that makes it possible: That's Gondo, at once smooth and jagged, the eggshell and the mist. That's Las Vegas, the handyman and the buffalo and the wild desert lots right next to the supermarket and the lizards who can lose their tails and grow them right back and the dancing lights and the words suspended overhead, spelling themselves out in the soft neon night.

One morning I will read this in the sports section: That the fans of another team, the one in Provo, Utah, see Las Vegas as "Sin City on the edge of hell." How can I possibly explain to them what the edge of this valley really means, and how close to heaven it really is? 

Ask about our
two-way **15%** referral tuition
discount!

Start Early. Start Right.

Challenger School offers uniquely fun and academic classes for preschool to eighth grade students.

Our students learn to think for themselves and to value independence.

The results are unmatched at any price!

Come see for yourself. Observe our classrooms any time — no appointment needed.



CHALLENGER®
SCHOOL

Green Valley 990-7300
1725 East Serene Avenue

Los Prados 839-1900
5150 N. Jones Boulevard

Summerlin 878-6418
9900 Isaac Newton Way

Because You Know the Value of Education
An independent private school offering preschool through eighth grade

© 2015, Challenger Schools • Challenger School admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.