

BORDER Wars

BY LORRY MYERS



I WALKED into the bar wearing my favorite hoodie, the one that spells “Missouri” when it’s zipped. My husband and I had toiled the day away helping our daughters move; now we were tired and ready to relax.

This was the place to be.

Much to my surprise, my daughters became roommates again when they both landed jobs in the Kansas City area. That meant someone had to move Hilary from St. Louis and Mariah from Springfield into a split-level house in an up-and-coming Kansas town. Of all the places in that area to live, these college-educated girls chose Kansas.

Apparently, they’re still searching for a brain.

We’d had a long day moving mattresses and bins of breakables, and now we were ready to have a burger before calling it a day. As our entourage stepped into the neighborhood bar, a hush spread through the dinner crowd, and it appeared like every head turned our way. I had no idea why all eyes were on us. I only knew one thing for sure: we were a long way from home.

It was an awkward few minutes waiting for the hostess to seat us. The bar sported big screen TVs, and most of the patrons sported blue shirts that proclaimed their allegiance to Kansas. Then, there was me.

I am a fifth generation Missourian and not afraid to flaunt. My ancestors plucked their roots out of Ireland and Germany looking for a sunnier place to grow. From Ellis Island, they wandered into Ohio or down to Kentucky, a restless bunch of vagabonds searching for their home. They were equestrians and auctioneers, farmers and failures, stumbling into Missouri with nothing but their name. They stayed.

Missouri is my home. It says so on my sweatshirt.

The food finally arrived cold, which matched the stares from the blue shirts that filled the restaurant. We took the hint and didn’t linger long,

and when I paid our ticket, the cashier leaned in and gave me some free advice.

“You probably shouldn’t wear that in here.”

I know that Kansas and Missouri are rivals, but I wasn’t boasting a team logo or taunting with a tiger tail hanging out of my trunk. I was just wearing my black and gold, which apparently doesn’t coordinate well with Kansas blue.

I wasn’t in Missouri anymore.

The next day, my daughter called every person she knew in Kansas City and invited them to the neighborhood bar around the corner from her new house. It was pre-game when we started trickling in, and soon there were so many of us we had to drag tables and chairs from the other room. We were a rowdy pep squad of college and high school friends and family from every corner of the state, each wearing a piece of clothing that said it all. Go Missouri!

At first, it was the same old, cold shoulder, but then the cashier from the night before recognized me. We locked eyes, and she nodded her head acknowledging what she was seeing and why. That cashier knew without being told that her free advice had a price, and we were there to pay it.

I come from a long line of stubborn Missourians who didn’t raise me to leave Kansas with my tiger tail between my legs. Instead, my family took a bad night and turned it into a good day. We spent a lot of money, made new friends, and were even invited back. Most of all, our Show-Me shirts showed Kansas something they’d obviously forgotten: there’s no place like home.



LORRY MYERS

MEANT TO BE

BY LORRY MYERS

PARENTING CHILDREN

is serious business and requires constant attention. Drop off one kid here, pick up one there—our life was dictated by the schedule on the refrigerator. My husband and I were running so hard to keep up with three kids that we couldn't keep up with each other.

We needed a break.

In the fall, the grandparents came so Randy and I could leave all the bleachers and backpacks behind.

We would reprogram the radio, eat breakfast at little cafes, and have cocktails before dinner. We'd hold hands as we strolled, rub toes in the hot tub, and reconnect with the people we were before we became something else.

Before we became parents.

Of course, we got away late, ended up stuck in traffic, and had a big fight over nothing at all. So much of our married life had been focused on raising children that we'd forgotten what had brought us together in the first place.

This was going to be a very long weekend.

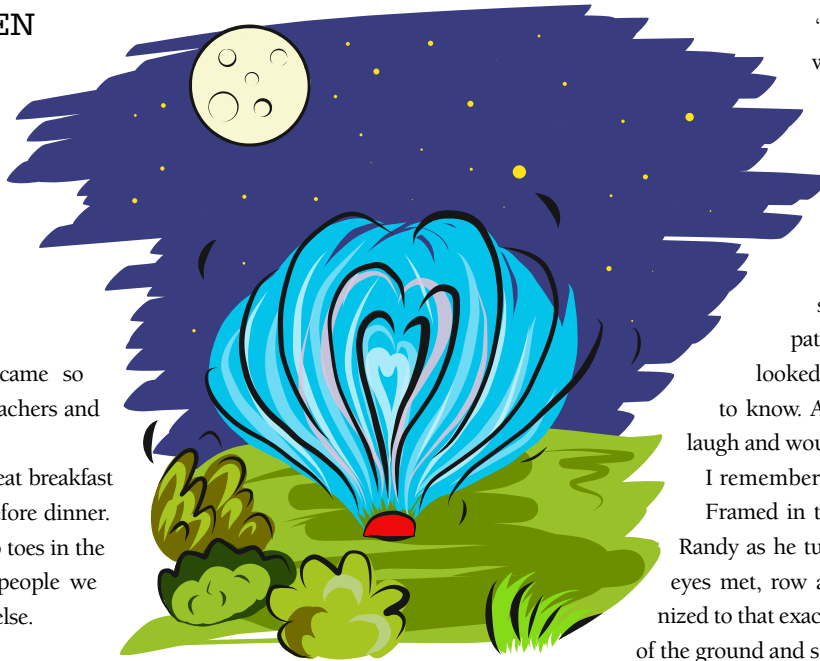
It was a lovely night in Branson when we crossed the busy tourist strip, the harvest moon low in the sky. From our hotel window, we could see an ice cream parlor right up the road, and someone decided we could walk there much faster than we could drive.

What was I thinking?

By the time we started back, both of us were tired and testy with each other. Our hotel was nestled right off the tourist strip with a driveway as long as a country mile. Randy and I stopped on the sidewalk to catch our breath, and noticed we were standing right in front of our hotel room, but to get there, we had to walk several more blocks to the entrance, and then up the drive. I stood there and gazed longingly at my hotel window.

So close, yet so far.

The moon and outdoor lighting illuminated the landscaping that surrounded the hotel. On the sidewalk, I noticed a pathway made of stepping stones that just might be a shortcut to our room. The moon cast shadows on the path so I couldn't see where it would take us. By then, I was over it and so was Randy, who—after all—wasn't the one who had wanted ice cream.



"Turn here," I said, like I knew what I was doing. I pointed Randy toward the stone pathway and, without question, he started down the steps assuming I would follow him anywhere.

Instead, I faltered just long enough for Randy to advance several stone steps down the path. Standing in the moonlight, he looked different, like someone I used to know. A long-haired boy who made me laugh and would follow me anywhere.

I remembered him.

Framed in the moonlight, I looked down at Randy as he turned back to me, and when our eyes met, row after row of sprinklers, synchronized to that exact moment in time, popped up out of the ground and started spraying away.

Like it was meant to be.

It was one of those beautiful moments in time that you carry with you forever. A moment of realization, recognition, and reconciliation. Really, what are the odds that two people would take the path less traveled at the precise second in time when something unexpected was scheduled to happen?

It was fate.

It was destiny.

It was hilarious!

There he was, the father of my children, hair plastered to his head by a gentle rain falling as if sent from heaven. Standing below me, the water droplets caught the moonlight, sprinkling Randy with golden sparkles. He looked up at me with his glasses dripping and his hands raised as if to say, "How did this happen?"

It was meant to be.

When the weekend was over, I would tell our children the story of two people who found themselves in an unlikely place at a predetermined moment in time when the planets aligned, and the earth tilted, and the sky opened from the ground up.

"Why me?" my husband moans every time I tell this story.

I am not sure he's talking about the sprinklers.



LORRY MYERS

HARRY KATZ

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAY

BY LORRY MYERS

LAUREN AND HILARY grew up together. Their mothers are sisters in a loud, proud family centered around doting grandparents. They were family first but became roommates when they both landed jobs in St. Louis.

To the girls—to all of us—family meant everything.

One tradition our family observed was that everyone must come home for the holiday.

Everyone.

Snow was forecast the night that my family was driving to central Missouri on its annual pilgrimage. Most were coming from the west; Hilary and Lauren and the snow were coming from the other direction. The two girls were riding together and no one was surprised when they got a late start.

The snow, however, was right on time.

Neither girl had extensive winter driving experience, so my sister and I were hoping that once on the interstate, our daughters would have a clean road home.

Then, we would have our holiday.

Back home at Grandma's, the house was filling up. The women worked in the kitchen while the men huddled around the TV, trying to find a ballgame. As each family member arrived, the noise level increased and so did the colorful circle of gifts under the tree, waiting for the last two to get home.

An hour later, my sister called Lauren to check on the girls' progress. Hilary quickly answered her cousin's phone, panic in her voice.

"The interstate is terrible and there are accidents up and down the exit ramps. We are afraid to turn around so we're just going to keep going."

Then ... nothing but static.

Our repeated calls went unanswered, so my sister and I stood at the window holding hands, watching the blowing snow. Neither of us wanted to acknowledge that our selfish family tradition had put our daughters in danger.

What kind of tradition is that?

By now, the men were pacing; the looks on their faces said it all. Our daughters had been on the road for hours and the snow had only intensified.

What if something had happened?

I called three times before Hilary answered. The line crackled with static but I could still hear the tears in her voice. "Mom," Hilary wailed. "I don't know where we are ... we're trying to get home!"



Then I heard my daughter cry out a warning; I couldn't make out her words but felt her fear down deep in my soul.

"Hilary! Hilary!"

The phone went silent.

By then, everyone had crowded around, the Christmas lights illuminating the worry filling the room. Someone turned off the TV and the food sat forgotten in the oven as we desperately tried calling back. The whole family—minus two—convened, huddling at the window, sitting close on the couch, or pacing a path around the room. An eerie quiet settled on the house, and we could almost feel the weight of the snow overhead.

"Okay," I shouted, preparing everyone in the room for something they might not like.

"We're going after them!"

Those four words were like a call to arms. The men gathered around, choosing the heaviest vehicles with the fullest gas tanks. The cousins collected boots and blankets, and the women called for road reports. My family was together all right, and we would do anything to bring our girls home.

We forgot about the holiday.

Suddenly, the door flew open and there they were. Our prodigal daughters were finally home. A cheer went up and the whole family stood crying and kissing and clinging to one another as if all our dreams had come true.

Everyone was home for the holiday.

Much later, the gifts were still unopened and the food in the oven stayed right where it was. We just closed the door to the world and sheltered together, celebrating a bond stronger than any tradition.

That blustery December night, my grateful family realized that the day would come when we couldn't all be together for the holiday but we would never be far apart.

Our holiday tradition changed after that snowstorm. Now, all we want for our family is what I wish for yours:

May everyone be safe for the holiday.

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