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Lord Fairfax Community College's mascot is a lion. With that in mind, several years ago the journal's student editorial board chose the name "Growl" – the lion's voice -- for the publication's title.

Professional illustrator, Kent State University professor and LFCC alumnus Chad Lewis has provided our cover's images since *Growl's* inception. This year, in recognition of our pandemic lockdown – the editorial board selected the theme, "Home." Chad was inspired by that theme for this year's cover.

Growl

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and
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Creative Writing Students,
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2020-2021

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Letters from *Growl's* Co-Editors

Hello Reader,

On behalf of *Growl's* editorial team, we'd like to thank all the students and faculty who submitted their works to bring this journal to life. We'd also like to thank everyone who worked behind the scenes to pull everything together. We hope that it makes you feel a little closer to home during these times and brings you some joy. Thank you for your support and we hope you enjoy!

Sincerely,



Lindsey Flickinger



Dear Reader:

“Home” was chosen as the theme this year due to the changes and restrictions put upon us due to the pandemic. But why “Home”? Why not something perhaps equally impacted, such as loss of socialization or economic losses? For the simple reason that more than anything else, our home environment affects us more than we realize. Being home or having a home helps influence us in subtle ways; not only in the here and now, but also has an influence on what we might want to see and hope for in our own future. How does this have an impact on you? How do you explain or strive to describe this feeling and emotion surrounding your home and the continual shifting in dynamics? There is no one answer that addresses everything to everybody. Only individuals can answer what it means to them.

Our heart is in our home, our personalities are influenced by our home. Home is a refuge in these trying times, home is where we want to be. “There is no

place like home” is a very famous quote that expresses how we all feel.

I wish to thank the authors of these pieces for sharing their perceptions of home. I would hope that reading these will give the reader a true perspective of what their home is and will continue to be.

Respectfully,

Cheryl Treadway

Cheryl Treadway



Home

Leigh-Anne Verberg

Paper plates and plastic bowls
The stories are starting to get old
My first house was never my home.

I live the unconventional, apologize for the unintentional
I keep my head down, but my heart on my sleeve
Cliches are my pet peeve.

My heart is my ambassador
My mind is an open door
Church taught me to love unconditionally,
And that's the way it goes, traditionally

Paper napkins, plastic forks
The antique wood table is set
The milk was forgotten, yet another thing we need to get

Tensions are rising, which isn't surprising.
My home is where my heart is, but my first house wasn't
my home.



Home Library

Lindsey Flickinger

The sword sliced into my adversary. I stepped in close, meeting eyes with the monster that had tormented me and my family for years. Soulless grey pools stared back at me. The snarl on its face curled its lips away from jagged, yellow teeth. One might expect a creature like this, with decaying flesh falling from elongated limbs, to smell like rot. But it didn't. It didn't smell like anything, nor did it make any noise. Not even as I ripped the sword up through its chest, leaving a ragged rip in the flesh. The monster staggered back, clawed hands moving to the wound as grey blood oozed from it.

The creature turned its attention back to me, and finally let out a shriek of fury. The sound echoed through the silent woods, high pitched and piercing, sending any nearby animals fleeing in terror. The sound immediately made me feel ill. Nausea rolled in

my stomach and my throat tightened with fear. Chills crept down my limbs and caused my hair to stand at attention. I had never heard anything so...demonic. The sword slipped from my hand as I rushed to cover my ears, but they were already ringing.

With that final noise, the only sound I'd ever heard it make, the monster crumpled. Long, grey limbs twitching like spiders' legs as it died. Finally. It's finally over. I let my knees buckle, and I rested my hands on the ground. Relieved, and slightly hysterical, laughter spilled out of me as tears of relief burned my eyes. Years of torment finally over. Before the joy could fully set in, another shriek sounded in the distance.

Then another.

And another.

Lindsey:

“What? What kind of ending is that?”

My voice startles the sleeping kitten on the bed across from me. I close the book with an annoyed snap and set it on the shelf next to me. *How is that a stand alone? There should be another book!* I sigh and rest my head back against the back of my chair, hitting it

slightly against the bookshelf behind me. I'm no longer in an autumn forest hunting monsters. I'm just sitting in my room. Still. The patchworked oranges and reds of fall leaves are replaced by my lime green walls and a white ceiling. The dead grass under my feet is now plain, beige carpet. I'm sitting in a chair instead of standing over the body of a horrific creature. I close my eyes to envision the forest again, but the rhythmic click of my ceiling fan keeps me from drifting back into the book world. *Damn. I've had enough of this room.* While I much prefer being home than anywhere else, even I have my limits, and months of quarantine has caused me to reach those.

At least I have books. I can vicariously live out grand adventures through the characters and be somewhere other than my room for a few hours. I smooth my hand over the cover of the book I just finished and scan the shelves for the next adventure I want to set out on. *Hmm. Maybe dragons this time.* I pull a book from the shelf and slip a bookmark between two random pages.

After selecting the next book, I get up, my back cracking as I straighten from my vulture-esque position. I drape the white, floral blanket that had been

across my lap over my blue butterfly chair, which is tucked away in a corner of my room. I stretch and enjoy my nook for a minute. It's a little, fantastical sanctuary surrounded by books, away from the rest of the world. Two tall, white bookshelves line the wall behind me, and two shorter bookshelves line the adjacent wall to the right, creating the base of my nook. My bed makes a room divider at the end of the short shelves, and a white desk sits against the side of the tall shelves, blocking the rest of the room. The shelves are filled with books. Even after adding a new shelf there's only a small space left for my ever-growing collection. There is also an assortment of items on every shelf. Mostly they're small things that remind me of certain books, some I've even made myself. The wall above the short shelves is covered in a collection of pictures and prints. Most of them bright splashes of color over white canvases.

Stepping out of the nook, I glance at my phone and realize it's far later than I thought it was. I quietly go through the steps of getting ready for bed: brush teeth, wash face, put on pj's, pet cat. I settle into bed and pull the covers over me. My kitten joins me, crawling onto my chest and curling up. I close my

eyes, but just before sleep pulls me away, I think I hear the faint rustle of book pages turning.

Nova:

I peer out from the edges of the book pages, making sure she's fully asleep before slipping out of the book. I smile fondly at the tangle of brown hair poking out from under a fuzzy, white duvet. Thankfully, the kitten stays sleeping tonight, finally used to our appearance. I shuffle along the top shelf of one of the tall bookshelves, and others join me. Characters flood from their books and make their way along the shelves, conversing with each other. As I watch, a confused heroine makes her way out of the book our reader just finished for the first time, and a few others go to her to explain.

I stay put, remembering my first time venturing out into this room. A lot of people started my book, but most didn't finish it, leaving me in a half-imagined limbo for long stretches of time. My book was passed around by many people, and I was reimagined many times.

Readers turn us from a jumble of words, just personality traits and vague descriptions from the

authors, into fully imagined characters that can survive outside of their books. It only works once our books are finished though.

I recall how long I was trapped at certain points in my book, struggling through the trauma of my world until our reader finally finished the story. I remember her reading the last line, one that seemed to resonate with her judging by how long she looked at it. She talked about my book a long time after she finished it, especially how much she wanted to experience my world over again. That, I found, was a truly ironic point. She finds her adventures in our worlds, escaping from the confines of hers, yet we can't wait to be released from them. She spends hours battling evil beasts, flying on dragons, navigating space, solving mysteries, and outwitting villains, whereas we find safety here. She cares for our books carefully, taping ripped pages, repainting damaged covers, and keeping the delicate paper safe from harm. This in turn keeps us safe and healthy and allows us to easily travel between worlds. We can spend nights out in her world, enjoying the peace and camaraderie of being around other characters. Some of the characters, a lot having come from previous homes, feel safe here. *I get it. I*

was like that too. I've finally found a sanctuary to call home, and a reader who cherishes my story. I'm pulled from my thoughts by a noise.

We all turn as a rustling comes from the newly finished book. Spindly, long limbs emerge from the pages. Another aspect that comes with our reader's incredible imagination; she imagines the monsters and villains in great detail too.

We all brace ourselves, most of us having faced our own monsters, and create a defensive line protecting our reader. We'll always defend her; no harm will ever reach her. She's our sanctuary. We all finally have a loving home.

And I'll be damned if this monster destroys it.



A Place Called Home

Grace Bandercan

Home is neither here nor there

It is lost between this endless expanse

Inches feet miles meters

Some piece of land out there

A road here and a road there

A million miles away

But so close you feel as if you stayed

I left that place without a trace

An endless bounty between time and space

Seconds minutes hours days

A street here and a street there

Somewhere not everywhere

I am neither here nor there

Home my prison cell that holds my freedom

Home the place that shackles me yet follows with a warm
embrace

Home the place that is somehow a world within its own
space

Home the place where one can truly feel alone

This space you speak of

I'm still in search of

A place called home



Feeling Home

Cheryl Treadway

I am at the time in my life where I should be settled. I am supposed to have dug in my heels, planted my feet down in one spot and grown roots. I am supposed to have figured out where, and what, home is. I have never felt “home.” Home has always been my mother’s place, or my sister’s place, but never MY place.

When I bought my house, I told myself, “Finally, this is it. This is HOME. Here is where I will raise my son. Here is where I will die.” Now, years later, I am looking beyond the privacy fence, searching the horizon for whatever befalls me. I saw my son, Dan, leaving, searching out his new home with the Army; for myself, I saw a new home and a life reborn in the Sonoran Desert.

What was prompting this migration? How could I possibly give up this contented, sedate way of life here in Arkansas? I could spew forth several reasons,

all of them perfectly sane, all of them perfectly crazy. I am looking homeward. I was looking for the inner calm I once found in the desert.

I discovered the desert when my parents moved to Tucson in the mid-70's. They were pioneers – they left behind the Ozarks where the family had spread through all subsequent generations. When I visited, I immediately fell in love. I loved the heat, the scorpions, the cacti. These things spoke to me of hearth and home. I never wanted to leave. I wanted to die there. But while I did not die, I did leave only to return. I wanted my children to fall in love with this strange, alien topography as quickly as I did. They, too, enjoyed wandering through the sand dunes, crouching under the giant arms of the Saguaro, avoiding the long, spiny arms of the Octillo. They quickly became “desert rats” browning in the sun much like the bread I used to bake browned in the oven. Baking their souls, as it were, to a healthy golden glow.

There has always been something about barren, deserted landscape that appealed to me. Somehow all tension and stress were stripped from my carcass, leaving bare bones, bleached white, resembling a cow

skull stripped clean by vultures. This sandy, extreme world. You either love it or you hate it. No in-between, no indecisiveness. This is its appeal. It's an "all or nothing" kind of place.

So why did I leave Tucson? Love, marriage, still seeking a place to call home were the magnets pulling me back to the Ozarks. Once here, I achieved success in all I attempted, but still, I had no place that felt "home". As I aged, I realized that "home" was not "where" I was physically but "where" I was mentally.

My mental persona has never left the desert. I am still there on days when the 125-degree summer sun scorches everything into brittle gingersnaps. I am still there when the night temperatures drop into the 30's and you pray for midday. Pray for relief from the extremes. What am I seeking through these prayers?

Am I seeking justification for these decisions that took me back and forth across this country? Do I want approval for the major life changes caused by the decisions I made? I think I am seeking a new life, perhaps a refreshed purpose to my life. A return to my mental home. Leaving behind a house in a land

suffocating with green for another house surrounded by cacti and scorpions.

Once there, settling into this new life, this new perspective, would I stay? Did I find what I was seeking? Or will I, after a few years, again feel that tug, that yearning to search alien places? I don't know. I should let that inner calm I found in the desert pull my soul down through my feet and root it in sand. I must allow this calm to flicker and grow in the heat, allow the monsoons to drench it with rains, and inhale deeply of desert flowers in the springtime. My soul should wax and wane with the seasons, having time to become fixed, rooted in permanence. But will I?

There will be adventures to come and other souls to meet. Will this happen? Where will it happen? When will it happen? I don't know. I just hope and trust that one single experience will be strong enough to make me feel like I am home.



Home

Alexandria Moon

Is a home where you rest your head at night?

Is a home where someone holds you tight?

Is a home where you want to be?

Is a home where you feel free?

A home is where your soul is.

A home is where your mind lives.

A home is where your kin are.

A home is a place you know in your heart.



Still Home

Nola Hensley

For us, the living room is the center of the home. It is where we gather, where we talk, where all life outside of our home is paused in a frozen frame. Only the warm laughter of friendly faces keeps playing. Some homes are measured by the vastness of their floor plan or coziness of their couch cushions. But my living room was always measured by the memories ingrained in the walls, stuffed between the couch cushions, and woven into the scratchy throw blankets knitted by some ancestor's hands.

Everything in my living room has a meaning. Being twice the size of my flatscreen, the glass pane in the center of the front wall boasts a twenty-four-hour episode of the humble happenings of Warbler Drive. Twenty years old, and our couch is still functioning. The middle cushion lost the perky bounce it once had, but it's still sittable. I cannot count the times I have fallen asleep in the Blue Chair. The name fits that aged recliner perfectly. Many late nights I drowned in its

warmth, or early A.M. hours I was rocked to sleep in it as a baby.

We had to get rid of that old coffee table. It was chipped and scratched from exuberant dance parties, and countless tap-dance productions that found its modest surface worthy of a stage. It was Broadway's equivalent. Though the years may have changed the residents, the color on the walls, or the scent of the slowly crackling candles, the living room is home. Home is not supposed to change. It has seen happiness of growing children for 16 years, it has watched us laugh and giggle, but home is not always about laughter.

At first, I did not want to let myself acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, the chance that something evil could be destroying what I knew as home. Home is supposed to be a place of comfort and static peace. Home is supposed to be a sanctuary where time stops, where the stresses of the outside world freeze. With every entrance of a new medical product, colostomy bag, I.V. stand, I knew it was going to be hard to shield myself from the impact of cancer, even in this sanctuary. For so many years I had seen that living room as a place of love and laughter; I would not let

myself see it as a hospital. I refused the change. I delighted in my childish blindness. It is hard to be blind to reality when you are eighteen.

Her sickness started off gradually. I was not happy that my mom could no longer take long walks and needed naps daily, but I knew infusions were comparable to torture with only the slight possibility of slowing down the disease. Soon we knew that after her flight home from M.D. Anderson, the couch in the living room would become her place of rest.

It was a bizarre experience being home alone. As oldest of four, trying to keep the home happy as well as functional while our parents were in Texas was one of the video chats that happened from the crowded couch to the hotel room in Texas brightened our minds. Still, I would not let this suffering change my home.

Each time they returned and crashed on the welcoming furniture after a long trip my home was restored. Cancer had no place here. My mother was a fighter. If she could fight travelling from hospital to hospital, on planes, and in blank, mind washing infusion rooms then we could fight at home. Though the discomfort of having my home altered, pieces missing, was a load no eighteen-year-old should ever

have to bear, my family fought together. Soon she took up residence in the Blue Chair. We would pray in the living room at night for her weakness to allow her to take stronger steps in order to get her back on a plane or even down the hall. There was a peace having both parents back in my home. I refused to realize this meant the end was inevitable.

I sat on the ottoman. It was plaid and matched the sinking couch and chair my mother sat in. Her delicate frame now almost smaller than mine seemed to melt into the chair. She was pale with a curly crop cut short by brutal treatments, but her eyes still twinkled with life. She smiled as we welcomed guests into our home, but I did not want them there. I was inspired, somehow in her state of constant pain, she was still so welcoming. With every smiling, teary eyed relative entered the gravity began to creep into my soul even though I had tried to barricade the walls around my home from change for so long. As the family members got more and more distant the sting of truth stabbed deeper into my soul tearing away at the home that I knew was normal.

The Hospice nurse took a seat in our living room on the couch. The afternoon sun streamed through the

windows bathing the entire room in a hazy orange glow. They began to talk business. In my mind I travelled to the days of play. The days when epic Barbie games and thrilling movie nights took place in this very living room. Or the Mother's Day we gave my mom a homemade spa and a show. Yet, here she sat, same room, same chair, but where was the joy? Still, I tried to ignore the truth she had contently accepted. I would not let this meeting in my living room ruin my home. I got up and left.

Soon my mom took up permanent residence in the living room surrounded constantly by us. I shuddered when they brought the hospital bed in. The old couch was moved, and the frail person who was my mother was gently transported from the comfort of the blue recliner she had rocked me in as an infant, to the support of a hospital bed. The intimidatingly cold of the metal frame of a dismal hospital bed cradled the weak but smiling figure of my forty-year-old mother. This was not the centerpiece I ever wanted to feature in my home. Despite the intense darkness cancer had brought into my home, soon love washed over us like a wave.

Every day my living room, now filled with tubes and needles, hospital sheets, and colostomy supplies,

also held friends. Loving people entered my home. They sat on my furniture and put their shoes in front of my door. The living room became the center of everything. Cards of sympathy and prayer, a new kind of decoration, began to fill any end table or hard surface available in that room. Many tears of happiness and grief were cried in the living room. Visitors brought gifts, food, music and encouraging words as they said their goodbyes as happily as possible. I still blindly basked in their love, refusing to believe this was the end and that my home was changing. As I sat in the middle of that sinking couch I watched through steamy vision as my mother slept peacefully. How did we get here? I would not let this change my home.

I have seen things in my home no other person my age could imagine. Things no one should ever have to watch. I have woken up to the sounds of weeping in my living room. I have witnessed nurses of all sorts crowding into my house caring for my mother, the one who had cared for me. I have seen the strongest men in my life weep like children as they sat in my chairs. I have heard prayers of church and family members kneeling in my living room. Prayers that were so powerful I had to sneak a look at my front door to see if

an angel had decided to slip in. I have fallen asleep to the smells of death lingering like a heavy fog over my face suffocating me and poisoning my dreams as I try to forget the intense change. And I have watched, as cancer stole from my mother the rest of her life. A life that her body wanted to live, but cancer would not let it. I watched as there, in my home, she was robbed of years of memories and joy most people take for granted. What was happening to my home? To my joyous childhood home of bliss and freedom. Death was coming early, and it was trying to ruin my home.

When the sun warms up the glistening panes of the large front window at about three o' clock, the dust floats around in the warm sun beams and the calm quiet of the living room is blanketed in a haze of soft orange. Everything is still. The thin fronds of a struggling houseplant sway gently in the breeze of the gas fireplace as it hums. The color of the room feels the same as the warmth the fire is giving off. The mid-day light plays in the creases and folds of a hand knitted blanket that was lazily draped over the plaid couch cushions, they were flattened more from the recent visits of many friends and relatives. The worn family photo albums stuck clumsily out from under an end

table against the couch. A few more albums with crinkly brittle pages were sprawled across the room randomly sprinkled as if someone had been dwelling on memories long gone but magical to remember.

The room seems incomplete with the absence of hospital bed. That is not something I ever thought I would say. The ticking of the bronze clock hanging straight on the dusty, blue wall is the only thing to make a sound. A slow, but consistent, tick. It seems to echo through the whole house once filled with flamboyant laughter and sweet swinging. All is silent. This is my home. My home has changed, my mother is gone. I shudder at the memories of her pain still, but this is my home. The living room, calm and surreal seems, unlike anything else in my life, it is unchanged, and I do believe that is what makes it home still



Stay Home

Lauren Phillips

“To protect those around you, stay home,”
So, they tell us.
But have we forgotten
Home is not a house?
Home is not a building filled with things.
It is, however,
An embrace from your grandma,
Sharing a meal with your family,
Staying at a friend’s house,
Talking late into the night,
Because no one wants to go to bed.
The people I love are my home;
I will protect them by staying in my house.



The Whole House Should be a Kitchen

Shannon Parente

You might think this a strange thing to say, but I announced it one evening while my father, two of my six brothers, and I were laughing together in that sacred room. My words immediately triggered another round of merriment, as the males in my family began to turn my suggestion literal and make jokes about its impracticality. I laughed along. Not only had I said it, but I had meant it, though maybe not in the way they had in mind.

You see, in our house, there is no room quite like the kitchen. Perhaps here you are rolling your eyes and thinking, *No way, Shannon, really?* I'm not talking about the fact that it's the only room with a refrigerator, oven, and microwave. If I were, then yes, I deserve the eyeroll. Rather, our kitchen brings people together in a particularly special way. I don't think I'd mind if more places were like that.

What does your kitchen look like? you may wonder. A hallway splits the room in two, separating

our appliances from the pantry and the three windows looking out into our front yard. On one side of the hall, the walls are a deep wine color. On the other, they are covered in brown-tinged, beige paint and the remains of wallpaper styled with bunches of grapes. The appliances are silver, but the inside of the oven is purple. We call it the Purple People-Eater. This is where my mother bakes her award-winning, homemade honey wheat bread. It's best when just taken from the heat, adorned with melting butter, and consumed by me, you, and Mom, like sharing a secret store of new-found pirate gold. Years ago, Dad cut a large window in the wall between the kitchen and the dining room. It's framed by white trim, and we use it to pass dishes and utensils between the two rooms. Perhaps, someday, we will replace the green-and-white-flecked counters with real granite, but the plastic top serves its purpose well enough for now. White cabinets hang above the appliances and counters but leave a gap over Dad's window to the dining room.

Ours is not a world-class kitchen. There isn't a lot of territory: four moving adults in the "baking area" struggle to operate effectively; five make a crowd. If there are more than that, you'd better hope people are

standing around in a semi-circle chatting. It's one of the more popular rooms in the house.

Naturally, a significant part of the kitchen's allure lies in its food. It's where my brother brews beer, where my sisters bake, and where I mixed up baking powder with baking soda in a recipe for lemon squares. It's where my father and his daughters prepare chicken cutlets for Christmas Eve dinner every year. And, of course, one of the best parts of the kitchen is when you walk in while somebody is making chocolate chip cookie dough, and they tell you to grab a spoon. However, if food were the only underlying bond between the individuals who loiter in our kitchen, there should be a similar attachment to our dining room as well. But there isn't. The kitchen takes the cake for the favorite room in the house. There just has to be something more in the kitchen than food alone. So, what's the secret ingredient?

The magic charm is the people. It's one of the primary places where all the older kids, now young adults, in my family hang out in the evenings while we're on break. Twice a year, it's filled to overflowing as we host our Memorial Day and Christmas parties. When well over one hundred people pack into our

house and the 4-acre yard. I still remember our parish priest, Fr. Dobbins, whisper-shouting concernedly to me when our dishwasher opened and started spewing steam at such a gathering.

The kitchen has held all of the meals other families made for us when we gained or lost a member of the family. We've danced there: rhumba, hustle, simple waltz, Irish step. It's where my sisters and I belt out country music playing from our dining room speaker while we wash the dishes. School supplies, diapers, Christmas trees, photos, artwork, a poster welcoming Mom and Dad home from a trip—there have been many things in that room over the years. However, nothing as wonderful as the people inside it. A full kitchen means family, friends, teamwork, and too many people underfoot. Most importantly, it means love.

I'm not saying it's a perfect room. It can be frustrating if we don't clean it every day. The counters quickly clutter, and towers of plates ward off aspiring cooks. Disgusting dishes pile up in the sink, so that when you turn the water on, it ricochets back out and the droplets flick a firework design across your shirt. Yet, for all that, the kitchen is a satisfying room, because you can easily see your progress once you

begin to wash, dry, and put away the debris. Then, when the counters are cleared, you feel that you can breathe.

It's not always apple pie for everyone in the kitchen either. We have used the microwave timer to mark time-outs. My little brother once spat his milk all over the kitchen floor as revenge for my bossy demand that he drink it. Perhaps the most obvious disagreements that have occurred here, were heated debates about who needed to help clean, and how well it had to be done, before we could proceed to more desirable activities. We've yelled, cried, complained, and criticized each other here. We've had serious discussions about where we were in life and what we wanted to do. Sometimes, our lives are more cluttered than the counters. Sometimes, when you can't take one more piece of bad news, someone else is standing in the kitchen with you, gently inquiring what they can do to help.

I love our kitchen. Yes, it's just a room in the house, and yes, it can be a mess like us. However, it fills our house with warmth in a way no other room does. It allows us to share ideas, love, and quality, homemade meals. I hope you find some place that

brings you together with the people you love. As for me, I stand by my statement. The whole house should be a kitchen.



guardians

Richard Follett

in these trying times of viral fear and social distancing
the question no one dares speak is:
when is a town no longer a town?

but Signal Knob knows
and the Shenandoah answers:
*to be a town, you need simply to be here
as we have been since the time of the first settlers*

*it is we who watch over you –
binding your spirits one to another
all for the beauty of this timeless land*

this town

this valley

this sacred place

it *is* us

it is *in* us

even as we are in it ...

it is home

to us all.



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