



# Portable Prairie: Confessions of an Unsettled Midwesterner

*M. J. Andersen*

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## Portable Prairie: Confessions of an Unsettled Midwesterner M. J. Andersen

In a moving and bittersweet story, M.J. Andersen chronicles her childhood and adolescence in South Dakota, her departure to forge her own life, and her persistent longing for the landscape she left behind. Her hometown, given the fictional name of Plainville, is so quiet that one local family regularly parks by the tracks to watch the train pass through. Yet small-town life and, especially, the prairie prove to be fertile ground for Andersen's imagination. Exploring subjects as seemingly unrelated as Roy Rogers and Tolstoy's beloved Anna Karenina, she repeatedly locates a transcendent connection with South Dakota's broad horizon.

Andersen introduces us to her hardworking newspaper family, which produces one of Plainville's two competing weeklies; to Job's Daughters, a Christian association intended to prepare young women for adversity (Plainville's chapter assumes the added responsibility of throwing the town's best teen dances); and even to a local variety of hardy alfalfa, to which her best friend has a surprising kinship.

Leaving behind her physical home, Andersen travels East for college, remaining to begin a journalism career. With her husband she eventually settles into her first house, a beautiful Victorian that, though loved, somehow does not feel like home in the way she had anticipated. Through subsequent travels, memories, and a meditation on Tolstoy's complex relationship to his ancestral home, she arrives at a new idea of what home is -- one that should resonate with every American who has ever had to pull up stakes.



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