

LOOK HOMEWARD

Can you see it differently?

BY SARA CAMP MILAM

AS THIS ISSUE OF *GRAVY* GOES TO press, I am seven months pregnant. Any sense of comfort I normally feel in my own body is fading quickly. If I recall correctly, things are going to get worse before they get better. Where I'd really like to be, much of the time, is at home on my couch. There, I can recline to an angle that's almost comfortable, with only my anxiety and my heartburn to keep me company.

When I go on maternity leave, my fantasy will become a reality of sorts. I'll be physically at home a lot. To keep a healthy outlook, I will sometimes need to get away. Or I will need to find a new way to see familiar surroundings. I relate to these lessons in the most literal sense, for I learned them during my first maternity leave three years ago. Editing this issue, I recognized that such shifts in place and perspective are also the kinds of tricks that the best writers use.

Working with these writers, I thought often of home and the various ideas we

develop about the places we call home. You'll read about the homes we are born into, the homes we adopt, and the ones we leave and return to. Food and cooking are often central to home-making. But not always. Back in June at our Bentonville Field Trip, *Oxford American* senior editor Jay Jennings gave a beautiful talk about his native state. Quoting his friend and colleague Charles Portis, Jennings described himself as an Arkansan who had "failed to achieve escape velocity." He left Little Rock after high school, only to move back decades later. Jay shared the deep personal and professional

Willie J. Allen Jr.



The Griffin Heights neighborhood in Tallahassee, Florida

satisfaction he's found since returning to his hometown. That talk, which we've adapted for this issue, is not a food piece. And I'm not sorry. It's exactly the kind of thoughtful, incisive writing I admire and want to share with you, *Gravy* reader.

Elsewhere in this issue, Rosalind Bentley returns to the Tallahassee neighborhood where she grew up. As the expansion of Florida State University drives gentrification, Bentley asks, what will be lost when the old neighbors are gone? Priya Krishna and Mayukh Sen both explore the Indian diaspora in the American South. Their pieces celebrate the

home cooks and restaurant chefs who have forged new homes in this region. (Speaking of home, both Krishna and Sen quote Vish Bhatt, the chef of my favorite hometown restaurant, Snackbar.)

Here in *Gravy*, I hope you find opportunities to consider your home, neighborhood, region, or nation in different lights. Maybe, reflecting on the homes you've claimed, you'll see an image that you had nearly forgotten, or smell a long-lost dish on the stove. Maybe you'll step out of your kitchen to consider life from your neighbor's perspective. As you read, I wish you a comfortable couch and no heartburn. 🐔