



NORTH OF EDEN

MY YEAR ON A REMOTE POTATO FARM IN IDAHO

NORTH OF EDEN

Artist's Proof
Maren Hahnfeld



INTRODUCTION

When I was 16 years old, I had the chance to become an exchange student. As a teenager growing up in Hamburg, I was fascinated by the USA, so I chose North America as my destination. Like most students, I had dreamt of living in California or New York, and just like the vast majority of exchange students, I ended up somewhere in-between. Despite this initial upset, my year on a remote potato farm in the high desert of southern Idaho was an extraordinary experience.

My journey in 1989, a time before Google Earth and social media, was a jump into the unknown. On my way to Idaho, the planes rapidly reduced in size and the final flight from Boise to Twin Falls took place in an eight-seater plane.

As I looked out of the window, it suddenly dawned on me that I would live in the desert where farming was only made possible through irrigation with water from the snake river.

The photo album of my stay has been lost for many years. The only images I have left are a few snapshots taken by my hostmother. I returned to Idaho in the summer of 2015 to photograph the memories that had been lost alongside the photo album. My hostparents Keith and Sharon had moved North of Eden, even further into the desert, which enabled them to retire from potato farming and start a cattle-ranch. Also part of this project is their interview about hosting a 'foreigner' in 1989.

The Letter

You have sent me a letter
from a potato farm in Idaho. Idaho?
I grew up in Hamburg
Germany's largest industrial harbour
You picked me,
a German girl,
because of your German ancestors-
Your oldest daughter has left
so I'll sleep in her bed



July 30, 1988

Dear Maren,

We would like to welcome you to our family. We hope you will enjoy your stay with us.

The pictures of your home are very nice, you have decorated it in such good taste. Our home is a brick single family dwelling with three bedrooms upstairs and two bedrooms and a family room downstairs. It is just a simple home and we have way too much "junk" for the space we have. You will have your own room downstairs.

Sonya's room is downstairs too. She will be 20 years tomorrow and is a student at a college 20 miles from here. Our oldest daughter is 23 and she lives in Boise, Idaho. Heather is a senior in college majoring in office management. She has a parttime job at a bank

and is legally blind. Kara is 17 years and a senior in high school this year. Our high school is very small but offers many interests.

Hi! This is Kara typing now. I'm really looking forward to your arrival and having you live with us. Our volleyball season starts the first week of school so we start practices on August 10. If

you are interested in playing, the coach is looking forward to having you. I sure hope you like animals! One of our three dogs is mine. She's a beagle and I call her Lady. I also have 2 of the 12 cats.

We occasionally (depending on the season) ride our horses here around the farm and down to the river. It's really beautiful in the canyon. Your arrival will coincide with harvest here on the farm. I'm not sure if you have seen harvest in Germany, but we will sure let you experience it here! We have a couple of trips planned for this year. I know you'll love Anaheim, California,

Disneyland is there. *Continued next page.*

There is also the possibility of traveling to Washington, D.C.

I hope that your trip will be fun and I can't wait to meet you!!

Hi Maren, this is Sonya now. I also am looking forward to your staying with us. I'm sure you will have a good time. I know you wanted to go to some place that was big with lots to do, but I assure you, you will have fun here. We do live in a small community but we do have fun. I have lived in Boise, Idaho's capital for two years and I still enjoy coming home to the farm. We get really involved in school and activities on the farm. I hope you enjoy your stay with us.

We have a foster daughter who is 23 and lives and works in Vancouver, Washington. She is a high school teacher.

Our geography is varied. We live on a high mountain desert about 4,000' in elevation. 86 miles from us is Sun Valley, Idaho, a ski resort and winter sport area. The mountains are very beautiful there. 20 miles south of us are the South Hills which are low, rocky mountains with forests. 2 miles south of us is the Snake River Canyon. It has much geological, geographical and historic significance.

The old pioneer Oregon Trail passed two miles south of us. The Snake river supplies all our irrigation water for our crops and fills the Snake River Aquifer that provides our water table. Without the river our land would be useless. We are in our second year of drought in this area. Much snow is hoped for this winter.

We have a lot of wind in Idaho so bring a heavy winter coat and snow and rain boots. School dress is quite casual. Jeans and sweaters, skirts, pants, occasionally dresses. We have two dressy school dances where you would need a short or long formal dress. For special school occasions the students will dress up a little more.

Last Night In Germany

The big old faux-leather suitcase
the one for big trips,
it sits in the middle of my room
Heavy yet fragile
almost tipped over
with one gentle breath:
my mum's camera
favourite peach skirt
marzipan for the new family-
The big brown faux-leather suitcase
filled with expectation and fear



New Home

The house behind the trees-
my new home
Coyotes and rattlesnakes-
my new neighbours
My room is downstairs,
windowless,
wall-papered with rivers
and lush green forests-
I am a mole
each morning I ascend
gasping for light



Family

You took me into your midst
a stranger-
For one year I'm part of you
but not the daughter whose bed I sleep in-
I step on invisible toes
form unwise alliances
wander around in a cloud of uncertainty-
Nonetheless-
you tolerate my otherness
feed me French toast
make room for my toothbrush
and I feel at home





Sharon

Grandmother
animal lover
rodeo queen
photo taker
history buff
silent rebel

Keith

Grandfather
ice-tea drinker
cattle rancher
'Cowboys' fan
youth worker
speak-your-minder
believer



Breakfast

A pint of Diet Coke with ice
eaten while curling your hair
and painting your eyelashes

A far cry from breakfast at home:
The three of us, on wooden chairs
around a wooden table,
soft cheese on Schwarzbrot,
homemade jam and black tea

Anything is possible, I think







Car Journeys

A Volkswagen beetle in the desert-
going places, for hours on end
Early morning, late at night
I see your country
from the passenger seat of your old car
We travel together,
the potato farmer
and the child of hippies-
We debate God, marriage, the death penalty-
You listen to country
and I have an old Beatles tape-
Our discussions
like the never-ending landscape
go on and on



Church (1989)

Every Sunday
you dress up
go to church
meet your friends
and mingle over coffee and cake-
The pastor is young and enthusiastic,
a modern man in the Wild West
I do not believe in God
and make this clear
but nobody seems to care-
Later, when I lie in a coma,
you all pray for me

Church (2015)

Before my return,
I picture this church:
wooden
whitewashed
small bell tower
A lone building
in the vast plains of the American West-
Where is this church?
Blinded by the sun
I stand in the middle of the road
and scan the horizon-
The church of my mind
never existed
I refuse to photograph
the ordinary building
that stands in its place-
Something I later regret

Rodeo

I'd seen cowboy films before
but never realized
it was a way of life-
your way of life

Men go to church in cowboy hats

women shop in cowboy boots

my host-sister becomes rodeo queen

and falls in love with the rodeo clown-

Together they make rodeo babies

who in turn become rodeo cowboys-

The cowboy myth is your myth-

All this is new to me

Why sit on wild horses?



Oregon Trail

A piece of trampled grassland
in the middle of nowhere
means very little to me-
My history is cemented in
churches, castles and cathedrals,
not a faint path through the desert-
But it means a lot to you,
the Oregon Trail,
which brought your ancestors to the Northwest
Your story, your spirit, your history





History

You are so proud of your history,
the first settlers who came out West
Your pride makes it impossible
to accept the Native American narrative,
and the conflict and massacres that followed-
My questions are met by a wall of silence
almost always



Senior Picture

Today I have my official picture taken:
The one for the yearbook
the one for all senior pupils
the one to swap, for safekeeping-
I change in a small, dark room,
wrap the cloak around my shoulders
and dream of endless possibilities-
In front of the studio lights,
heavy cloth on naked skin,
I struggle to hold my smile-
Looking at the final photograph
I hardly recognise myself





Friends

I know in an instant
that you are different too:
wild hair, big smile, wicked laugh-
Together we steal street signs
ride through the snow on inner tubes
go 'cruising' on the local high street
Life seems easy-
You fall pregnant at 19
From a religious, farming family
you don't have a choice



Diary

Late at night
alone with my diary-
'Teenage passion
fear and self loathing,
a struggle with conformity
fast food and soft drinks
Future plans:
to cut my hair
to dye my hair
to shout my mind
to dance all night-
A rebellion planned in the desert,
in my dark, windowless room,
late at night





Accident

The road outside our house is deserted,
my family knows every car that drives past
So few cars and yet
I hit one of them-
My host mum Sharon
with me in minutes
aghast with fear-
Somebody else's daughter ... dead?
I was wearing my favourite jumper,
on which I had written 'Live Your Dream'
Soaked in blood
it had to be cut off my body
Once I recovered
I wrote 'Live Your Dream' on another jumper,
But somehow it never quite felt the same



Going Home

Last drive, last hug, last glimpse
heavy heart at check-out desk-
I fly into Hamburg airport
cowboy hat and short hair
That big faux leather suitcase
again, filled to the brim:
Smell of desert at dawn
even thuds of water sprinklers
and a handful of sky-
Has life in Germany stood still?
Everything so familiar
yet so different-
And like a cog
that no longer quite fits,
it doesn't take long
for me to decide that
I would leave again



Interview (2015)
Keith & Sharon

Keith: Oh my gosh! And...and... I'm kind of joking but I'm also kind of telling you the truth: I had a stereotype of what a German girl would look like and... you didn't fit the mold. I was expecting a bigger girl and here is this skinny little ... kid. We did know your age but still in my mind, I did think you'd be a little bit older.

Sharon: A lot of people don't want to come to ... a country they haven't heard about... *(laughs)*... "Idaho ... Where's that?"



Keith: My great grandfather came from Germany and so ... you were a key to opening up an answer to all the questions I have.

Sharon: A lot of my relatives came from Germany too and I thought of the mountains and the Rhein and ... all of that.... Of course, we were all in the war together and we're all past that.



Keith: The Holocaust was part of my knowledge and ... it was one of those things that ... personally I was very ... ashamed of, the fact that this could happen in my heritage country. And so ... I was looking for answers.



Sharon: We live in a very rural society, especially back then, very... extremely conservative. I think you have to listen to ideas, you don't have to adopt them ... but... you just have to learn to grow. You can't just stay stuck in one place ... but many people are stuck with the ideologies their parents had and their grandparents had.



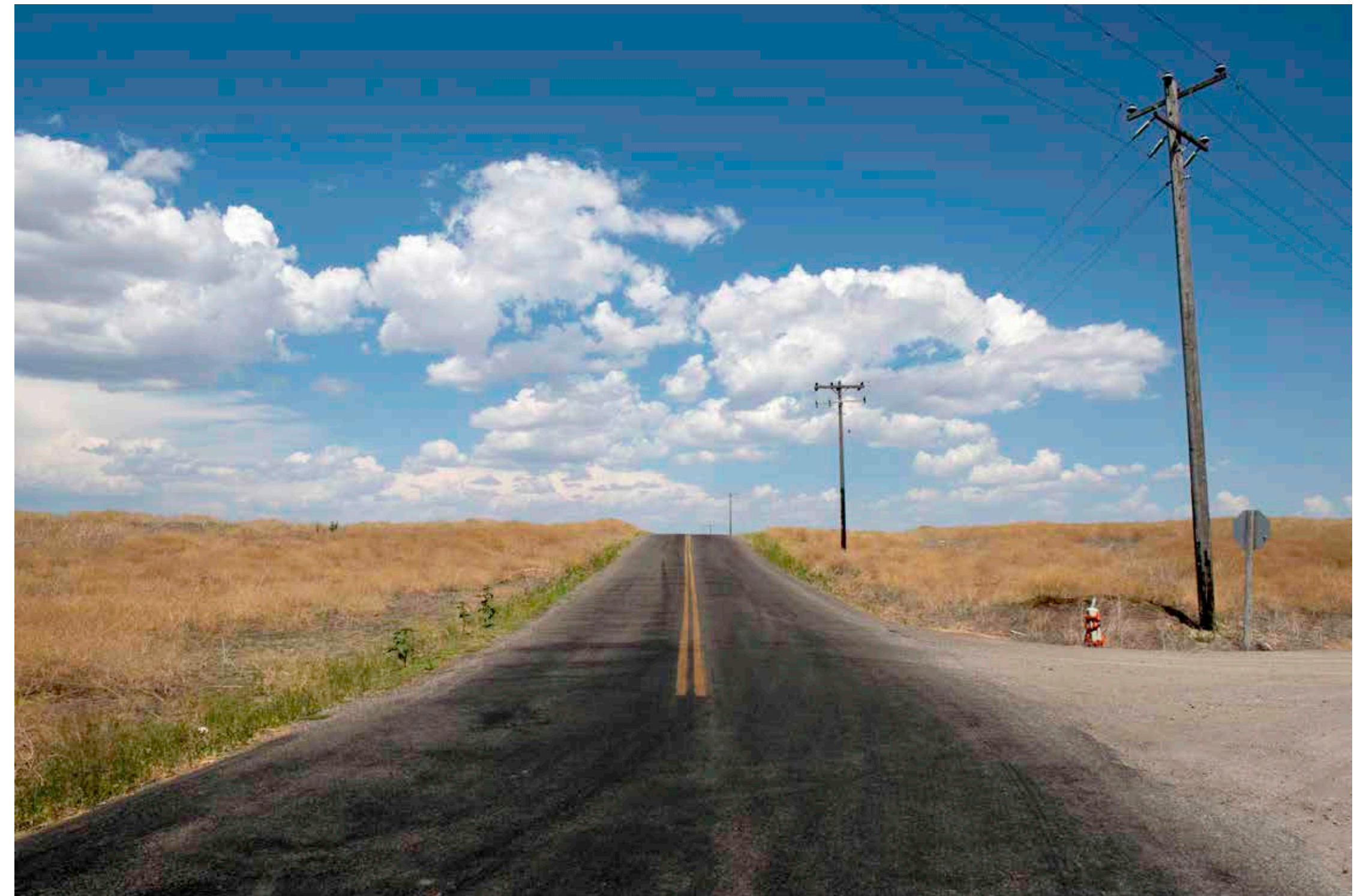
Keith: You were much different than what ... what we are.



Keith: And these discussion that we had, and some of them got ... ehh... I wouldn't say heated, but intense would be a good word. That was a wonderful adventure... Sometimes we were trying to convert the other person to our way of thinking, and other times we were just trying to, in the best way, explain: This is what I think or believe or feel because... and ... *can't you understand* what I'm saying!

Sharon: I was always kind of the odd man out. And I don't think I was really ... very liberal or whatever, you know I hate labels, I just hate it, I was just more of a moderate and I was never afraid of new ideas. ... I was never afraid to look beyond the talking points ... you know, this person is just throwing up smoke, why don't you look and see what he is actually going to do? Why don't you ask questions like 'What's his plan?' rather than just use hot-button-words. Many, many people never look beyond one tunnel they think they are supposed to go down. And I... I don't like tunnels.

Keith: I guess I learned from the fact that you and Sharon shared a lot of things in common as far as how you think and believe so ... our discussions, you and I, had an impact on our relationship, Sharon and my relationship, because in the process of getting to know you I got to know her.

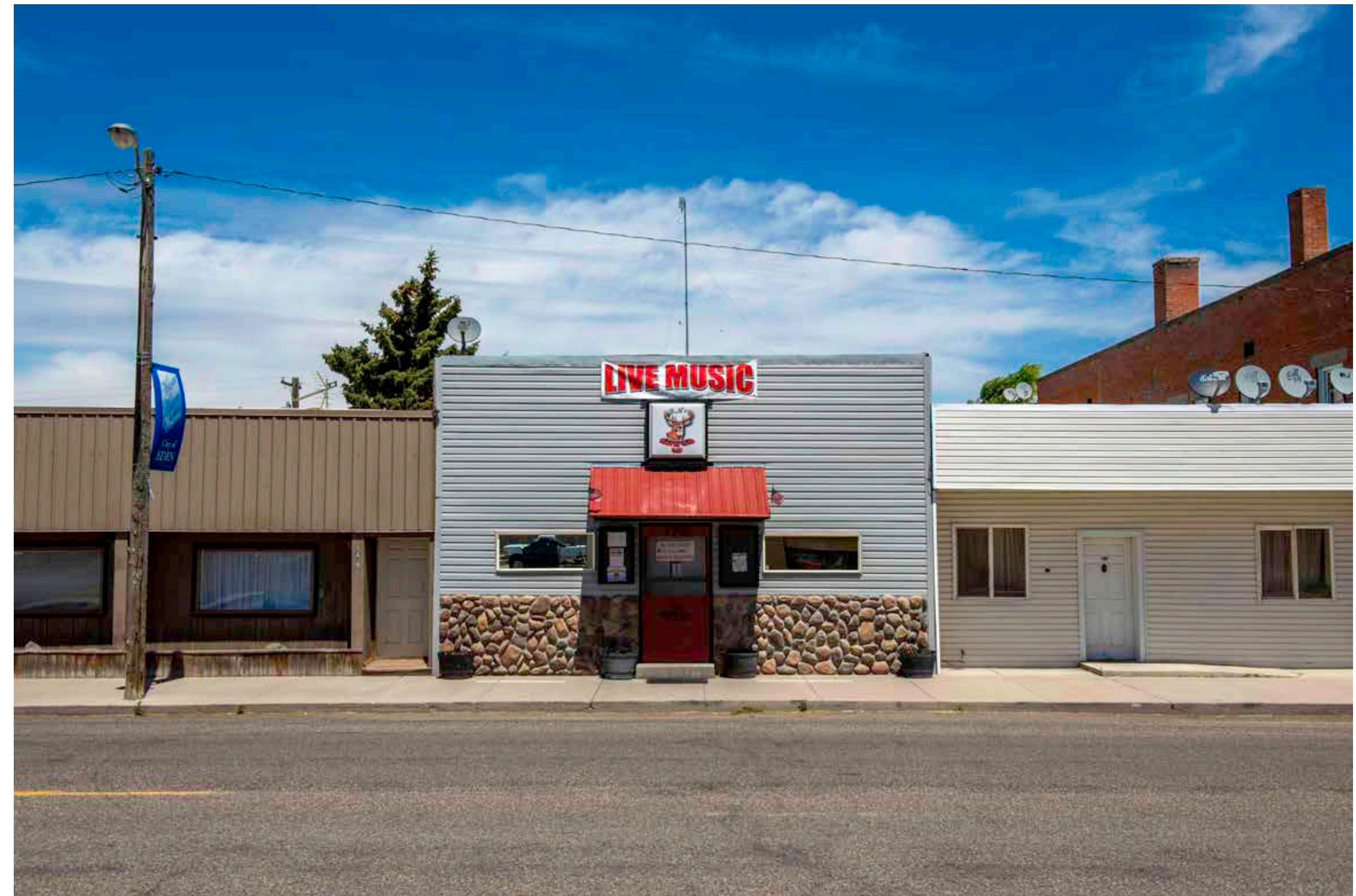


Keith: Most of the conservatism and ideas are around economics ... and in agriculture, especially in the days that you were here, we were just barely making it. So... your value system had to be in a very small box in order to be successful ... there wasn't room for any mistakes. And people ... were aware of the box and they were not willing to step out of the box in any shape or form.



Keith: When I was a child I did not know a black person. The first time I saw a black person ... it was probably embarrassing for the black person to have this little kid with big eyes looking at him because he's never seen anyone with darker skin before. The first person I remember was a shoe shine guy in Twin Falls, at the hotel. And the next black person I experienced was an athlete at the University of Idaho.

Keith: There was racism in our community. People had gone into the military or done something and came back and had experienced racism and they... they... expressed racism...



Keith: And, coming back to you, probably in my mind in dealing with racism, it was easier with somebody like a German, than it would have been than with somebody from Africa or Asia, coming into our home. It was an easier step.... the community would have not have been able to do it. And I was very aware of what the community thought.

Keith: We were being watched, because of the fact that you were there. The whole community was watching. Oh... and... you know... I had people coming up and saying... 'I couldn't do what you're doing, I couldn't invite a foreigner'.



Keith: Even though you considered me a very conservative person, I actually was very liberal, in the fact, that I would allow you into my environment.



Keith: There was a little bit of challenge with our children because ... eh... you took some of the attention away that they would have had. The challenge for me was that you were a handful... in that ... you demanded more of my time than I expected I'd have to give to you because of our conversations...

Sharon: But that was a very good thing. Other than being in the army, he's never travelled. I travelled all over the United States and ... I always wanted to go travelling (with him) and he never wanted to till he got onto the school-board and than he had to...



LOUD CRASH

Keith & Sharon: Awful!

Keith: I thought you died. I really thought you died. Cause you were knocked out.

Sharon: I just was... it was just... awful.



Sharon: Someone came to the house that was right there on the corner and I happened to be home that day, so we went out and called the ambulance and they came... and... the police came... and ... the man who hit you didn't speak any English ... and he was crying, and the man with him was crying... and ...they were just sitting next to their car and they were sobbing, because they all thought you were dead.

Sharon: I knew you weren't dead but I just thought... oh my ... I just... didn't know what... with head injuries you never know.

Keith: You were lucky because... the vehicle the guy was driving didn't have a bumper and so... there were two holes in the side of the car which softened the impact.



Keith: Discovering how different you are, that was very interesting and very ... stretching... I'm more accepting of people I think now, you know, after living with you for a year... because you were much different than what we are.

Keith: Just being with your kids yesterday, is a best. And... I consider them my grandchildren.



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www.marenhahnfeld.co.uk

Contact: maren@madasafish.com

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