

There's a bridge back in Mississippi that joins my parent's property with that of my cousin's. Growing up in the country there were not a lot of other houses nearby and certainly a shortage of other children. The bridge was just an old log but I would sit with my legs dangling off the edge for hours, or pretend to balance across as some hero, traversing a dangerous space. That old log was an exciting place because it meant something was about to happen. It was either a precursor to or the conduit of play.

The gully that the log crossed was packed on either sides and above with brush and other obstacles. You crossed through it, not just over it. On either side lay open fields dotted with trees and the very occasional bushes. On my side was a veritable minefield of forts I had constructed from various debris from my dad's workshop. There were also a lot of great trees for climbing. Unfortunately combining the two things never really seemed to work out so well. I was so envious of my elementary school best friend, whose dad worked professionally as a carpenter and built with him the sort of tree houses you only see on Television. One of them actually did have a television set in it.

Across the log was more like a sports center: a basketball goal, a set of makeshift bases for softball, and a well-worn path for an old used go-cart that my cousins ran as if the fate of the world depended on it. It was probably the only time in my life I really enjoyed anything approximating sports. In reality, when I crossed the log it was just as likely they were digging in the mud as playing sports— quite literally. I in turn really hated playing in the mud. Too dirty. I was as likely to turn around and go home to clean my room to feel better as anything.

The strangest time to traverse the log was the holidays. Despite our economic status, my parents always broke the bank on Christmas. But my cousin's Christmas was about nothing but extravagance. I remember walking into the living room and feeling so overwhelmed as to wish to flee. I wondered where their parents hid all of it or how they even got it all into that room. I also remember how all of it was so *pink*. Even as a child, in my small way, I thought about how strange it was that they always received

such gendered gifts, especially after watching them spend the year blowing them up with fireworks.

The three of us rarely fought but there was certainly a time where I did not like crossing the log: when my cousins traveled. They were always gone in mid-summer, visiting family in Alabama (my parents would not allow me to go until I was older). I would walk across the bridge over and over but felt only sadness and loneliness. It was like a deactivated, dead portal that I desperately needed to power on. But as soon as they returned at the end of summer the magic resumed. They would bring with them souvenirs, photographs, and home videos of the trip. They came back changed, replete with new experiences and stories.

Sometime around 1994 there was a huge ice storm that came through. We still refer to it as "The Icestorm" because true winter weather is about as common in the South as igloos. There was a mix of snow and ice for a prolonged period, followed by just enough warming to soften everything enough to refreeze as a solid sheet of ice when the temps dropped again. We were isolated, trapped inside for two weeks because we lived in such a remote location. We had no power but luckily did not want for water due to an old well (we call it "the overflow well" still). I wasn't allowed outside, let alone anywhere near my favorite bridge or trees. When I finally did cross, it was because my cousins got power back before we did. I didn't get to play on the log but I did get to catch the new episode of *Blossom* that week.

The log-bridge survived the harsh winter weather. Since moving out of my parent's house I don't see these places so often, especially not since I moved to Oregon. The last time I visited I walked out toward the gully and decided to use the old log instead of the paved road which adult-me would normally use. I was startled to notice it was gone and I could barely tell where it had been anymore. The growth around it had overtaken it and hidden the gateway. Later, I asked my dad what had happened to it. He said it had simply got too old; no one had used it in years so there was no reason to keep it up. It had rotted away and collapsed.