



Catastrophe, Crisis, and Other Family Traditions

Jessamyn Lovell

1975	mommy injured	june 1994	start dating first boyfriend, louis get summer job at renaissance faire	feb. 1999	mommy gets septicemia, , brought to er	nov. 2004	mommy gets out of nursing home and returns home (day before thanksgiving)
mar. 1977	i am born	aug. 1994	wade and mommy marry louis and my friends build fence for animals mommy gets animals - goats, llamas, donkeys, geese	may 1999	i graduate from rit, mommy and daddy come to graduation allsun graduates high school	dec. 2004	i travel home to visit family for the holidays, I see how weak she is, she looks older
1979	mommy, daddy and i move to syracuse from liverpool, ny (we were living with my mother's parents)			july 1999	move to san francisco with toph to begin mfa program at cca allsun moves to potsdam, ny for college	jan. 2005	aj drops out of high school
1980	mommy drops out of college	june 1995	graduate cato high school	dec 1999	first visit home	july 2006	toph leaves me after 10 years of being together (he calls me while I am visiting my mother for her birthday to tell me) i move into a friends' house for a month
jan. 1981	allsun born	aug. 1995	move to new paltz, ny last minute to try college			february 2000	i stop talking to daddy
aug. 1982	klare born	dec. 1995	grandma diagnosed with lung cancer change my major to art	march 2000	well is fixed in cato (on my birthday!)	sept 2006	i move out into my own place in oakland
1984	move to nicer neighborhood still in syracuse, on wellesley road	1996	grandma has one and a half lungs removed and stops smoking	july 2000	another trip home	nov. 2006	i travel home to visit for thanksgiving, lee and i start dating
1986	move to fancy four bedroom house in upper class neighborhood on carlton road	feb. 1996	grandpa dies of parkinson's disease	aug 2000	ariel visits me here	spring 2007	mommy and aj move to assisted living in auburn, ny, klare graduates with her BFA
oct. 1986	ariel born in korea	apr. 1996 good friday	ariel fire accident in woods louis breaks up with me i take time off from college to help mommy take care of ariel cato fundraiser for ariel	may 2001	graduate mfa program and begin full time job at sf non-profit photographing girls in juvenile hall		aug. 2007
nov. 1987	ariel adopted (later calls himself aj, short for ariel st. jude)	aug. 1996	ariel in hospital in boston go back to college in new paltz ariel goes back to school in cato	sept. 2001	i begin to teach a photography course at cca	dec. 2007	allsun graduates with MSW, matt (her boy friend) hits her while the whole family is visiting her, she leaves him
feb. 1988	daddy leaves			oct. 2001	mommy gets septicemia again, brought to er	june 2002	klare graduates high school
mar. 1988	daddy moves back in and leaves again the day after my birthday	june 1997	move to rochester to transfer to rit i start taking pictures of ariel that summer	aug. 2002	toph and i both lose our full time jobs, both go on unemployment, I continue to teach at cca and start teaching at a community college	june 2010	klare's son scott is born
aug. 1988	mommy and daddy divorce	aug. 1997	i meet toph online while visiting my father in california	may 2003	lightwork residency in syracuse jessica and klare separate, jessica moves out klare and jeremey start dating	june 2011	lee and i are married
1989	me, my sisters and brother stop contact with our father car repossessed, house foreclosed, food stamps move to jamesville to a rental house (my favorite place we lived) mommy's parents buy us a new van	oct. 1997	mommy forced to use a walker mommy diagnosed with multiple sclerosis but doctors didn't tell her	nov. 2003	don jose, the llama repeatedly escapes mommy's yard so police intervene grandma is diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, given only a few months to live	may 2012	klare's daughter pepper is born, our father dies
1990	testify in court against father gaining custody	dec. 1997	mommy has surgery on her back	feb. 2004	during a visit to cato altercation with farmer over don jose	june 2012	our son rudy is born
1992	mommy ordained as minister of church of universal light evicted from our house in jamesville (landlord claims my mother's a witch) grandpa dignosed with parkinson's disease and moved into nursing home	dec. 1997 to may 1998	i have to commute between rochester (school and work) and syracuse (family) until mommy returns from hospital			may 2004	photograph mommy with gun klare recieves associates degree
1992 - 1993	we are homeless (live with various friends, family, car, etc)	july 1998	toph moves from baltimore to rochester to live with me in my first apartment	june 2004	mommy relapses, visits emergency room 7 times, i hurry home to help aj who is living alone at mommy's house	july 2004	klare moves back into mommy's house mommy moves from hospital to nursing home
may 1993	move into doublewide trailer in cato, ny (grandpa and grandma gave us farm land to put house on)	aug. 1998	wade leaves mommy	july 2004	klare moves back into mommy's house mommy moves from hospital to nursing home		
aug. 1993	finally get running water and electricity in new doublewide trailer	sep. 1998	mommy learns of multiple sclerosis diagnosis jessica moves in with klare and family				

My father left in the night on February 6, 1987—it was winter and we had just adopted my brother, AJ from Korea two months earlier. My father was the sole breadwinner and my mother has been on disability since before I was born. The divorce left my mother with little monthly income (only her disability check and a small amount of child support). As a result, we lost our car and home and went on welfare and food stamps. My mother struggled to keep food on our table and I often stayed home to watch Klare, Allsun, and AJ. We rented a small farm near where we grew up for about two years after losing our house. My mother began studying New Age philosophies, taught Native American spirituality classes, and hosted a weekly drum circle, which became a way to surround us with caring people of similar interests. She became friends with some people at the Onondaga Nation and they some times sent us food and hand-me-down clothes. We all joined a New Age church where smy mother was ordained as a minister. After an article was published about my mother (taking the name Raven Singlefeather) and her spiritual practices, our landloard evicted us abruptly telling us he suspected that we were witches. One day a large cop showed up on our doorstep and pushed his way into the house threatening my mother and actually beating her up in front of us. We were really scared so we left the house that month and put all our possessions into storage, having no where to go.





My family's belongings were scattered between the storage locker we rented and various friends' storage during the 9 months we were homeless. We moved into a doublewide trailer and lived in it for 6 months before there was electricity or running water. When they delivered the doublewide on the land my grandpa gave us we watched as they literally dropped it on the foundation .











What happened to
me was a tragedle
accident. What happend
was me & my best
friend chris just
finished are tree
fort. That frie day
before Easter I
just spray painted
it. to make it look
good. Then I called
up my other form
er friend John
to come over to
hang out I thought
I mine as well
since my two older
sisters had all of
they're friends over
when John came
over we started
a bon fire next
to the tree fort
we had water
jugs & everything
just in case &
to put it out.
well I dont
remember much after
that but I do
remember going
in a helicopter
& looking down
on the landscape
& telling my self
it must be a
dram & then we
landed on top of
a hospital &
then I fell
asleep by the
anastaska.



Syracuse Herald American

April 14, 1996 / Page: E1

Burns Injure Victim's Family, As Well Kathleen Lovell Feels The Pain Of Son Ariel, Burned When An Aerosol Can Exploded

Teresa Starr Fugit Staff Writer

Kathleen Lovell knows first-hand about the destruction that fire can leave in its wake.

The 42-year-old single mother faces it every day when she visits her 9-year-old son, Ariel, in an isolation room at University Hospital's pediatric intensive care burn unit. Ariel Lovell, 9, was playing in the woods with two friends on the morning of April 5. They had aerosol cans and a fire, the police report said, and Ariel was spraying a can of paint into the fire when it exploded.

Ariel, the most seriously injured of the three boys, was airlifted to University Hospital.

"They're pleased with how he's doing," Lovell said, "but he is still critical; he's considered stable right now.

"They've decreased the evaluation from 25 to 16 percent (of his body as burned). ... That means that he's not on the brink of death anymore," she said.

Ariel's burns are mostly second and third-degree, she said.

"When he is conscious, I ask if it hurts. ... He shakes his head no, most of the time." Ariel was intubated, with a breathing tube down his throat that prevented him from speaking. The tube came out Wednesday afternoon. Friday his condition was upgraded to fair.

"He tries to get up and leave when he's conscious," she said. "He just doesn't want to be there."

Ariel has burns on his face, hands and arms, Lovell said.

She took two pictures of Ariel to the hospital and left them there, because she didn't want to be the only one who knew what her son looked like before the burns and the swelling that accompanied them.

"I really felt they needed to know what he really looked like," she said.

"We don't want this to happen to anybody else - never. ... Anything we can do, no matter how hard it is," she said. "I'm taking pictures of my son. It's very hard, but he's going to want to know what he looked like."

Maybe later, with Ariel's permission, Lovell said, she will make the photographs available to use as part of the education process of the intervention program. "So that kids can see this is what can happen to them," she said. "It's nasty."

Lovell's three daughters, Jesse, Allsun and Klare, are having a tough time dealing with the accident, she said.

Klare, 13, is the one who put her brother in the shower to put out the fire. "She's having a difficult time," Lovell said.

Allsun, 15, was home at the time. She tries to keep going and doesn't admit that things are troubling her as readily as Klare does, Lovell said. But the morning brings a call from school that Allsun

needs to be picked up and brought home because she is too upset to stay.

Jesse, 19, is away attending SUNY New Paltz.

"She's really having a hard time," Lovell said. "She wants to be here." But it means arranging things with the college so that she doesn't have to withdraw and lose this session's tuition.

Meanwhile, the boy who loves animals, who loves to play with his family's pygmy goats, to play in the woods and build forts, is only beginning to be able to enjoy one of his favorite pastimes - watching movies, especially science fiction.

Most of all, Lovell said, he wants to go home. But doctors have told her he will probably not return to school this year.

Lovell, who is disabled, said she is grateful for the support people have given her and her family since the accident.

"We're very, very lucky," she said. "The caring of strangers has really been amazing. All we really have to focus on is Ariel getting well.

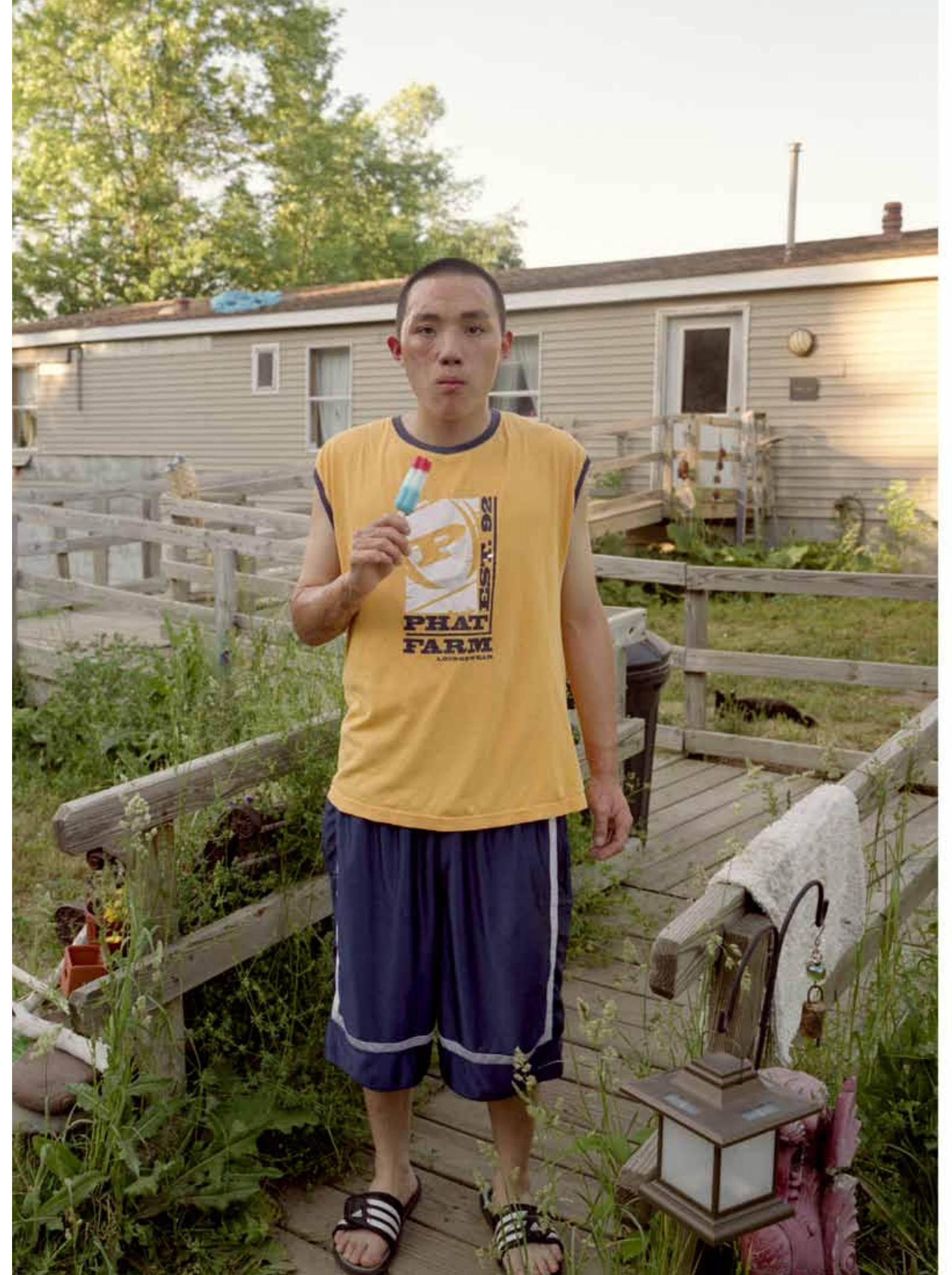


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My favorite goat, Abby got very sick and was shivering. Ariel, Allsun and I wrapped her in a blanket and brought her into the house to warm up. We struggled a lot to get her over the fence and into the house but we managed to get her inside. She is much warmer now but I am afraid she is too sick to live. I slept next to her this afternoon to try and keep her warm. I have been feeding her by hand and watching her carefully to see if she makes any progress. I cried a lot and I'm sure it was not just because Abby is dying. I really missed my family when I was in California and staying with them has been good in many ways but it makes me so sad. I'm afraid that I cannot help them. I miss all of them very much and it seems strange I could miss such a filthy, uncomfortable house with no running water. But I do.

I keep hoping Abby is okay. Ariel will take care of her, I know he will. Allsun will watch over her, too. I just know she will die. At least she will be comfortable and warm inside. I hope sleeping next to her last night helped.

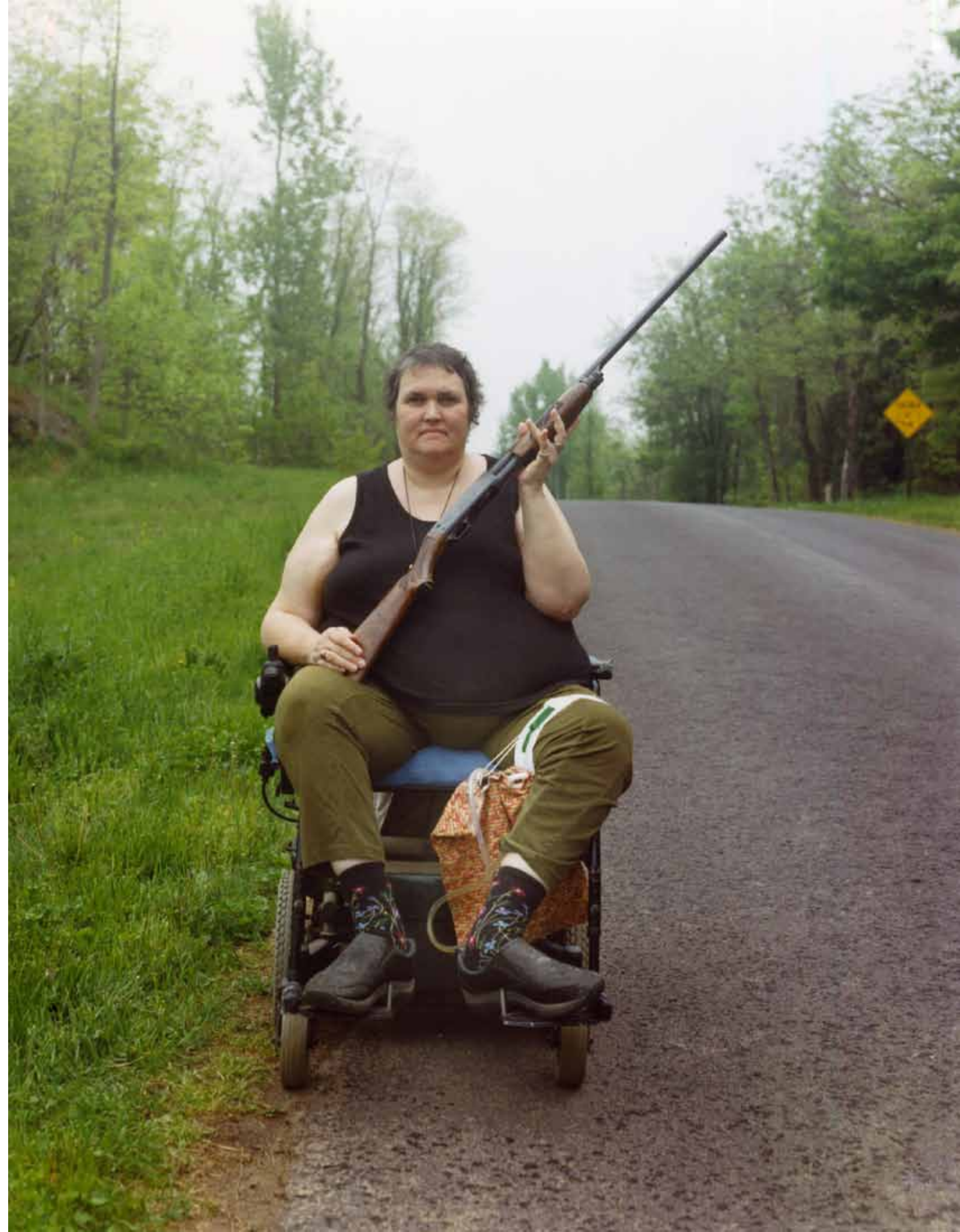
My plane is boarding. Good bye, New York.



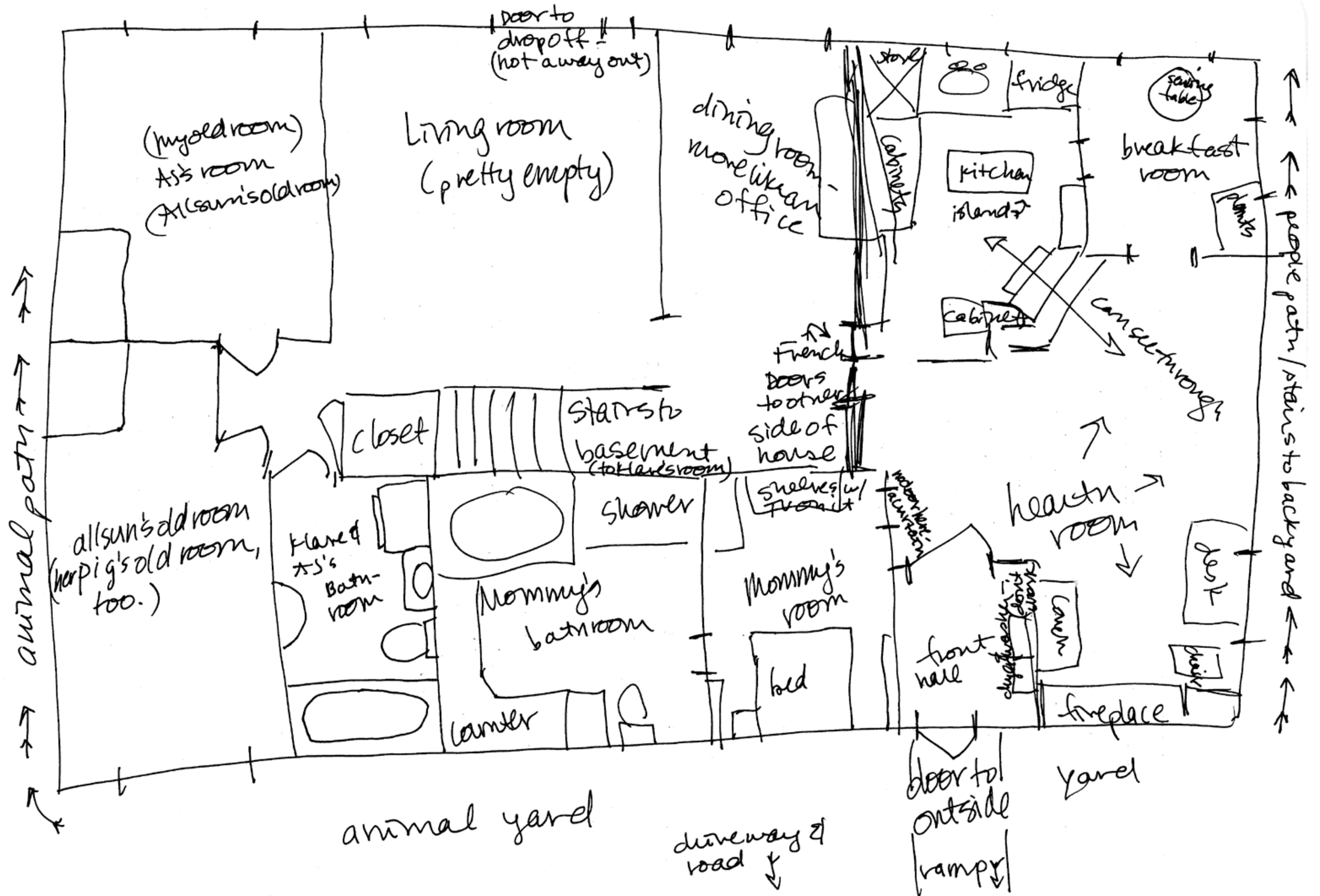




My mother is paralyzed from the waist down as a result of her having Multiple Sclerosis, as far as any of the doctors have been able to tell us from multiple tests. She also suffers from diabetes for which she has to take insulin every day. I took this photograph a few months after cancer finally took my grandmother's life. Mommy looks strong here. On this day, she had gotten my grandfather's rifle out in case the farmer who threatened our family with a shot gun came back. That summer, shortly after this was taken, she relapsed and had to be hospitalized again for six months.



























Roll after roll goes through my camera, and my questions still go unanswered. Without fully realizing it, I used to return home to see them, to hear the screaming, and to smell the sink and refrigerator. I made those trips to make records that I could hold in my memory of the events that so greatly informed who I am now.

I forced myself miles away from my family, and then I wanted to go back. Over and over.

















Phone call I overheard Mommy making:

“I’m calling to make my life better. I’m paraplegic, I have four kids and I’m ready to kill them and/or myself. I have this old van that’s falling apart - the doors are falling off and it’s totally inaccessible so I can’t get anywhere. I need help badly. I can’t go out by myself ever. I sit in my bed room all day by myself - that’s where I am now. The wheelchair I have doesn’t fit through any of the doors in my house and I can’t get in and out on my own. I need help. I just want to make my life better. Can you help me, please?

Ok... thanks.

Yeah, I’m trying.

Ok, bye.”

























I broke Mommy out of the hospital. She had been in there for weeks, she said she felt better and was afraid they would put her in a home again. I flew back, rushed to the hospital, gathered her clothes, got her into her wheel chair and drove away. We really struggled to get into my rental car so we decided to get something bigger. I went in to the airport car rental and explained our situation and they immediately upgraded us - no questions asked. We started to make the transfer to the new car in the airport parking lot when I realized that I was holding most of my mother's dead weight. I finally got her out of the car into the wheel chair but as I tried to pull the chair away she started to slip out! I rushed around to stop her from falling to the ground but I could tell it was already too late. So there I was crouched down beneath her trying not to let her fall on the ground in the middle of the airport parking lot. I was holding all of her weight as the chair continued to slowly slip - even with the brake on. Time slowed down and after several people passed us by, I finally just lost it. I start laughing uncontrollably and then my mother started laughing and we were both laughing so hard I am not sure how I got her into the new car.





The ambulance will drive Mommy 30 miles to the hospital again.

I will get in my rental car and drive there, too.

She will be eating snacks and watching the QVC network when I get there.

They will give her anti-nausea medicine and fluids in an IV again.

I will cry.

The nurses will advise me to be patient because she can not help it. It is her MS.

I will stay in the hospital all day.

I will change my flight again.

In twelve hours she will sign the release papers and we will get her dressed.

We will both struggle with the dead weight of her legs.

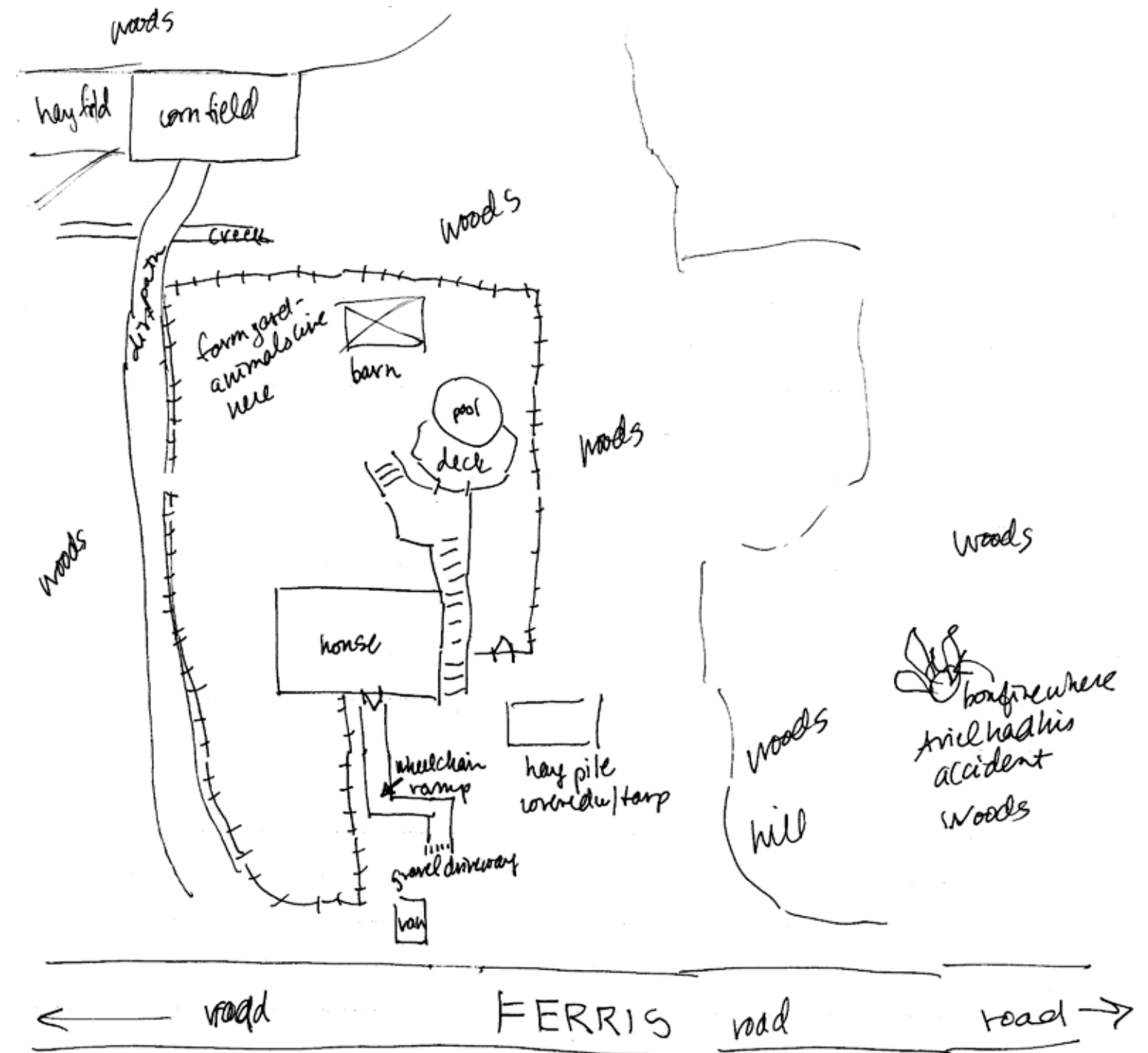
I will hoist her into the chair, then into the car, trying not to sound strained or burdened.

I will cry again.

We will get Taco Bell and see the end of the fire works on our drive home.

I will fly 3,000 miles back to Oakland tomorrow but I will take care of this right now.

home ->	Interstate 57 / 31	=	17.6 miles
home ->	Walmart, Auburn	=	21.4 miles
home ->	Walmart, Clay	=	19.0 miles
home ->	laundry mat, Auburn	=	20.4 miles
home ->	laundry mat, Weedsport	=	11.8 miles
home ->	counseling, Auburn	=	18.2 miles
home ->	Mommy's bank, Baldwinsville	=	13.6 miles
home ->	Grandma's apartment, Liverpool	=	23.0 miles
home ->	post office, Meridian	=	2.8 miles
home ->	food pantry, Cato	=	4.8 miles
home ->	Mott Park basketball court, Cato	=	4.0 miles
home ->	JoAnn Fabrics, Liverpool	=	22.7 miles
home ->	airport, Syracuse	=	31.9 miles
home ->	University Hospital, Syracuse	=	29.5 miles



















It was spring when Mommy first decided to finally sell all of the animals. A local farmer came with a big truck to take the 25 plus goats, donkey, and the llama. AJ helped round them up and herd them into the truck. Everyone got in except for Joe, the llama. They tried really hard—they even tried shooting him with a tranquilizer gun but to no avail. The farmers got tired and finally said they would come back soon to get the remaining llama. Weeks went by and the farmer never came. Mommy never heard from him again so Joe remained in the yard.

It was around that time that Joe first started getting out. We could see him leap very high into the air, clearing the wire fence again and again. He was just too quick and too large to catch. A nearby farmer got really upset at Mommy for being so negligent and allowing Joe to roam the neighborhood. Joe was apparently caught several times wandering into this farmer's bean field. The farmer finally called the police on my mom and her llama. The police warned us but we explained we could not contain Joe and why he was still living there. The farmer told us that the next time he caught Joe in his bean field he would shoot him because he was causing too much damage. Lately Mommy has been practicing her target shooting with the rifle Grandpa left her.





My dearest Jesse,

Photos are amazing things, aren't they? They can capture a moment in time that can be viewed over and over, evoking emotions that may have been long forgotten...

Your letter and photos touched me deeply. They also helped remind me of some truths...

Do not forget there are many times that I am laughing or being silly, enjoying the crystal blue sky, or the billions of stars, or the scent of sage and cedar and the sense of connected-ness I still manage to stumble across on occasion...I may not make the easiest choices but no choice is wrong if I learn from it.

How did I raise you? I think more and more I didn't raise any of you... perhaps I gave you tools to work with. How you use any meager tools you were given is the beauty of you.

You are not responsible for everything- just you. Your brother and sisters are making their choices and have their own tools...

I'm proud of you.

I love you,
Mommy

