

AGNES

Agnes. Rich, old, antique. It is a name that remembers the boat trip from Austria to New York, alone. Strongly flying a flag of independence, goodbye to bland, old countries and being lost behind a dishrag every day. The name shines with strength and determination across the cold and salty Atlantic Ocean. The smell of poppy-seed kolaches stick to the letters, the Czech Matulla tagging along behind, an afterthought. Agnes rolls off the tongue like pink roller skates from the '50s, stopping quick on the "g" to serve the old man his coffee on a Saturday morning. Agnes is maternal, warm, holding a fresh-faced baby in its arms. Flowered skirts and high waisted jeans running errands on Tuesday morning, Wednesday washing and ironing with the new and spectacular electronic iron. Agnes, an old rocking chair, ready for the garage sale. A vase of flowers, smelling of dust and rose-hip.

The "sss" stays on your tongue, sizzling bacon, tasting of fresh pork and hard work. The beginning reminds me of ag, as in agricultural. The Midwestern Ag store, rows of corn standing at attention to the General Highway 44. Or maybe the way someone from Texas would say egg, drawling in the thick molasses of the letter a.

I've never totally associated myself with Agnes. Never been Aggie, or Ness. In third grade I felt like I must lock it up with a shiny key. In the room with the closet filled with the castes of arms and legs, we exchanged our secret "a" names. Adley and Agnes, stinking of old grandparents and sticky sounds, we swore we'd never tell. And then we ran downstairs, names and heritage blowing like wind past our ears, to laugh and play hide-and-seek in the crabapple trees. Now I let Agnes fly high on the flagpole, heritage and determination becoming a piece of me. I am not just Emily, lost among the blond and brown heads tied with glittery pink bows.

An airplane will take me to Iceland, then to Austria. 82 -year- old footsteps retraced, but comfortable inside plush plastic chairs and hop-on hop-off trams. Not the cold and wet wood of a ship during 3 months of hopeful travel, not the lonely nights taunted by failure and jests by sailors. Maybe that trip gave her a piece of her identity, let her find her place. She became new, took Segar and tried to strip herself of the Czech and German like an old apron. Maybe as I sit thousands of feet up in the air over a cold and endless Atlantic, I will find something that can't be described by ancestry.com or immigration records. Something that will reveal some truth, some thought that will bind my feet to a place other than the Colorado clay.

Emily

Class of 2014 (Now at Seattle Pacific University)