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### **Foreign and Domestic**

From an objective glance, one might look at Chicago and ask what's so great about it. After all, it's the land where summers are unbearably hot, and the winters are even colder. Lake Michigan is simply melted glacier water, making it unpleasantly cool even on the hottest day, and during the winter the only thought of comfort is a warm house, sitting by a fire place, glad that no collar bones were broken slipping on black ice that day.

What about autumn though? Or the spring? The air is warm, the sun is kinder and the Earth is filled with flashy colors, leaves or flowers, depending on the season. Wrong! The spring is wet, and autumn is dark, and in both cases sneeze attacks are flying through the air either as leaf mold or pollen. So again, Chicago: what's so great about it?

Yes, despite the frigid wind, there is still something magical about sledding down slopes of snow or perhaps stuffing a chunk of ice down a friend's shirt as payback. This is emphasized all the more because the fact of returning home, meaning clothes get to dry out, grabbing some hot chocolate to go with those marshmallows all while the sensation of feeling returns to the tip of the nose.

It is these moments of closure, of the satisfaction of tiring one's self out over running through snow, that create the sense of camaraderie in Chicago Winter-wonder Land. The shared misery of slipping on black ice, brushing the latest snowstorm off the car, shoveling the sidewalk and hanging up Christmas lights are what make the sticky humidity from summer (which makes it feel like death is at the door) worth every second.

In the time that I have gone to college (and since have moved to Alabama – away from Chicago) I have been back home twice: once in the Winter and once in the Summer. When I moved away from Chicago, it was a bright sunny Chicago winter morning. It was not particularly cold, nor warm (as it never is in January). Sitting in the back seat, watching the towering office buildings pass by with looming shadows, a realization struck: that this city was here long before I was, and it will continue to function long after I leave.

This is what makes the return home all that much stranger. The first time it was mid-evening, pitch black under a dull and miserable overcast sky. The moment the taxi turned onto my street, I felt a shudder within me, as if my soul had recognized the home it had long been deprived of. 364 Days. It had been 364 days since I had been in Chicago. In that time I had nearly completed half of college, gone through more heart-ache than I thought could have happened to me, and firmly established my roots with the best friend I'd ever had.

It seemed fitting that the friend's house I was staying in was on the same block as the house I grew up and lived in my entire life. There was time for that in the morning, but first it was with much anticipation I greeted my family friends. The excitement was palpable, and dinner that night was quite enjoyable, catching up on college stories, hearing what the old high school was like from my friend's younger sister and so on.

The bizarreness did not end with being a guest in a friend's house however. The next morning, I took a chilly walk down the frozen, salted and slushy sidewalk to the end of the block where my house was situated. Just like they had always been, there were the train tracks across the street, on top of the slight hill, leading to the train station about 1000 feet away. That is not what caught my eye however. Instead, my eye was drawn to the big blue block that now protruded from two sides of the roof of the house: additions that had been made to extend the

upstairs into two additional rooms (aside from the two that already existed). Closer to the ground however, the two bushes at the edge of the front walk had been excavated and the side row of 8-foot-tall bushes had a huge gaping hole, to allow room for the large dumpster that was sitting unceremoniously in half the yard. The ground was muddy and slick with half-frozen slush, providing an unkempt look as the construction workers prepped the house for the spring rush of house sales.

Walking around the house provided ammunition for even more anguish. The backdoor had been filled in, and a sliding glass door had been placed on a different face of the porch. From the glass door, I could see much of the interior had been reshaped – the pantry, kitchen, sunroom and my bedroom had been redrawn into a different, more convenient layout of rooms. I stepped back, stunned for a moment. My bedroom no longer existed. This home was no longer mine. I would never be able to take friends or a partner back here and show them my memories of growing up in that house. Not entirely.