

**As a child**, my father used to take every winter to the "Gilo" forest in Jerusalem" to pick mushrooms; a traditional activity for former USSR citizens in Israel and their "native" children. "Gilo" forest looked to me at those times as a refuge place. Ever green trees that despite their massive height shaded and guarded me. The thick branches, the smell of the rain and the damp ground, all of those made the forest into a place in my neighborhood to which I can escape under my father's guard and forget all those troubles, high school bullies and homework. A place where my father will protect me but so will the trees and stones. A place where huge limestone rocks will use as jumping points but also as a place to hide. A place where at the wave of a hand and at the finding of a mushrooms my father would be proud. A different place, that exists only a few days in each year and for very few years in my life.

A few years later we left "Gilo". We moved to a different neighborhood. And "Gilo" which I never really liked, and the forest which I cherished almost vanished from my memory. To me, that place doesn't exist anymore.

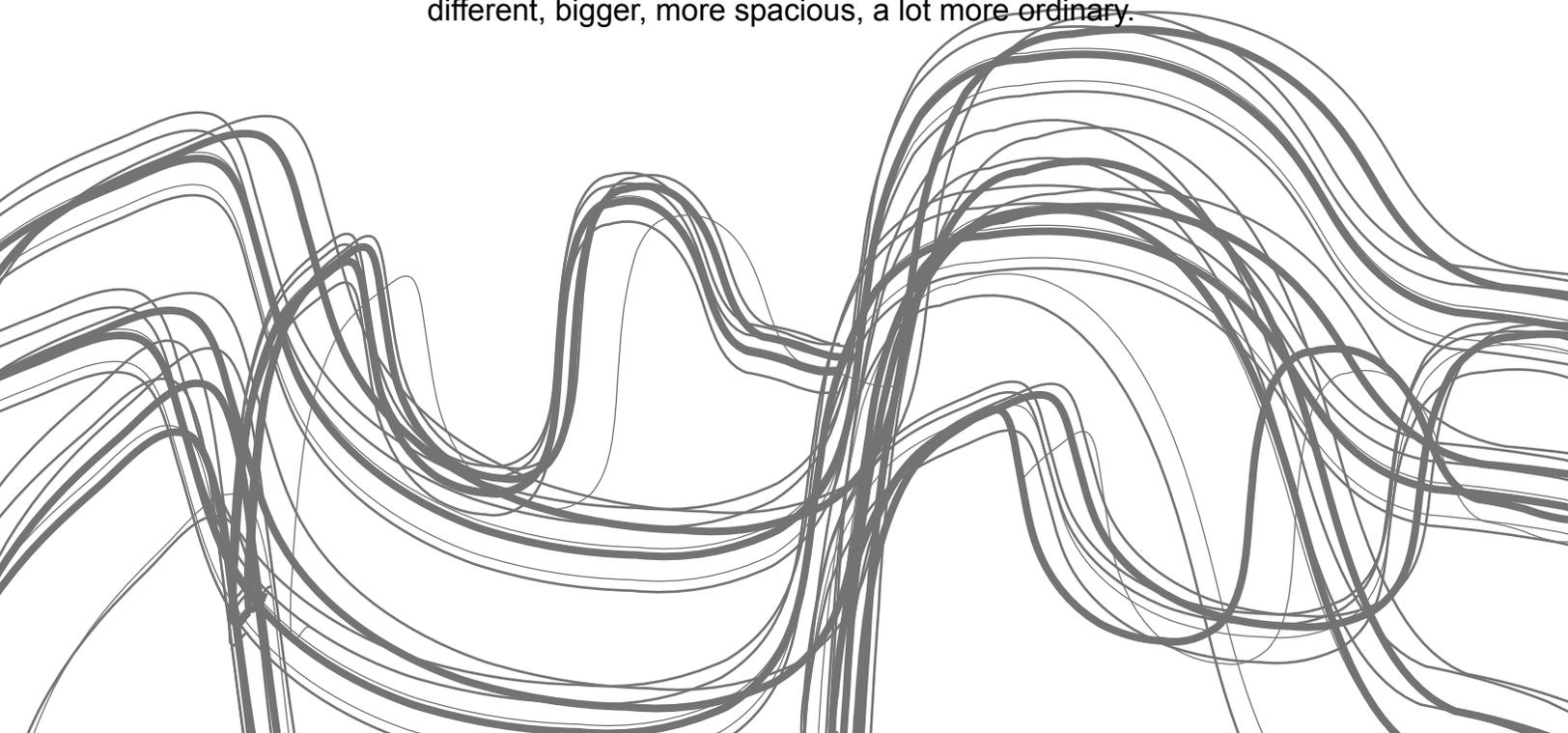
I have visited the forest not long ago. I didn't find any mushrooms. My father protection, I no longer need and some might say that he is over proud of me already. It seems that the forest, that physically hasn't changed at all, became a different place in my eyes.

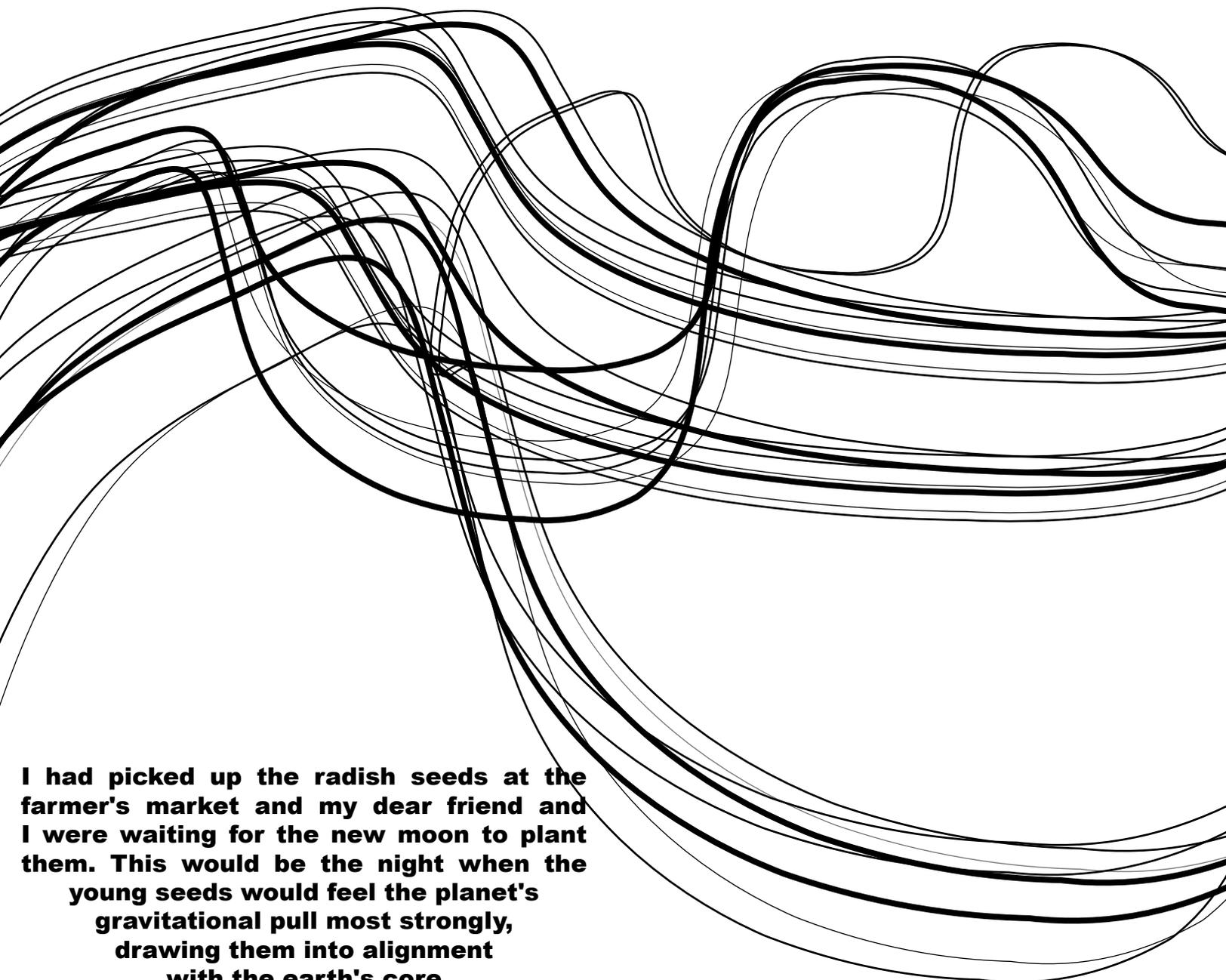
A dull, boring, "regular" forest.

And quite frankly, that is perfectly alright.

**As a child**, that forest was an amazing place to me. A place that enabled almost anything. I, needed a place of shelter and refuge at the time so I tagged and marked it as one. For someone else that place could be a place of meeting and gathering. For a third person, a hated place. It seems that I used the physical attributes of the place and created for myself a perfect space in my cognition, guarded and special, that today although it physically exists, it is no more.

Is it the fact that the ground became further from my feet is what caused it? Are the tree tops closer now? Is the scent of rain gone? Probably those are not the reason, although the place looks different than ever. The trees do not shade anymore. It is as if their branches became thinner and further from each other. Their shade does not protect even from the sun rays. To the ground, that has furthered itself from me only by a few centimeters; I now look as if from a skyscrapers. The mushrooms, I have a feeling I won't find even if I try. The road itself that brought me to the forest is different. If as a child I came to it from distress, from a will to find my own place in it, now I do not have that need and therefore my place in it will not be found. Is it the road that outlines where we are going to? Is the place I come from dictates where I'm going? I do not know, but something in the physical space has changed. My forest has changed. It is different, bigger, more spacious, a lot more ordinary.



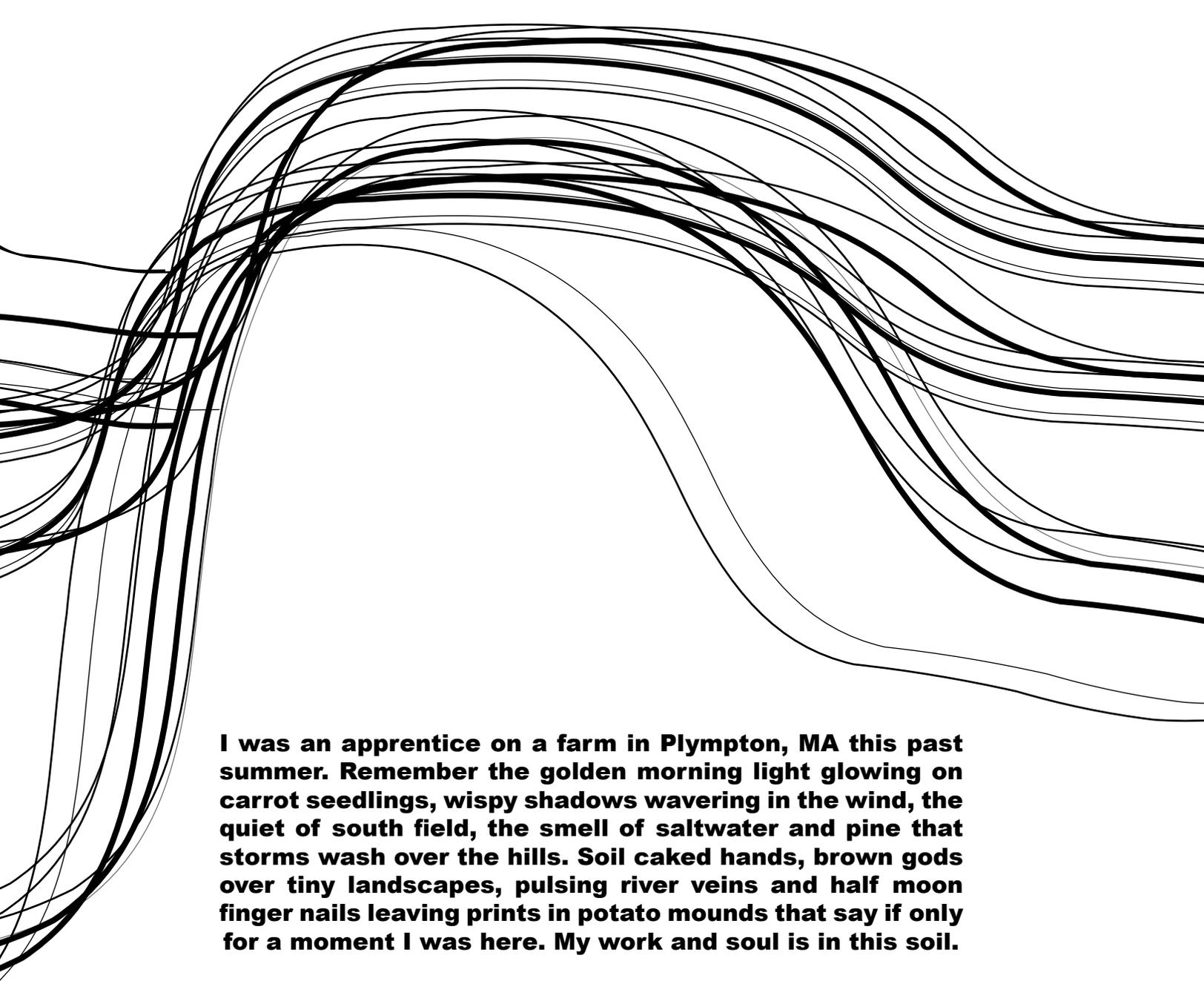


**I had picked up the radish seeds at the farmer's market and my dear friend and I were waiting for the new moon to plant them. This would be the night when the young seeds would feel the planet's gravitational pull most strongly, drawing them into alignment with the earth's core as they encounter moist soil, or so we'd been told.**

**At midnight**

**we gathered barefoot in a small plot on the side of our yard beneath the skeletons of last summer's sunflowers. The dirt was cold and wet between our toes, so naturally we applied it to each other's faces too.**

**Eyes to the sky, we dug the seeds into the ground to complete our moon mud radish ritual.**

An abstract graphic consisting of numerous overlapping, curved black lines of varying thicknesses. The lines flow from the top left towards the right, creating a sense of movement and depth. Some lines are thick and bold, while others are thin and delicate, creating a complex, layered effect.

**I was an apprentice on a farm in Plympton, MA this past summer. Remember the golden morning light glowing on carrot seedlings, wispy shadows wavering in the wind, the quiet of south field, the smell of saltwater and pine that storms wash over the hills. Soil caked hands, brown gods over tiny landscapes, pulsing river veins and half moon finger nails leaving prints in potato mounds that say if only for a moment I was here. My work and soul is in this soil.**

**The merging of dirt and sweat and sunshine on  
browning skin.**

**It is in connection with this land that I feel both big,ben  
over the fragile life this dirt holds, and small, humbled by  
the beauty of ecoystems and elements much  
bigger and wiser and older than myself.**

Like many other kids, I found the mud in my backyard to be just as enthralling as any toy in my house. I'm not saying that it was my favorite, but I did go back again and again to make mud pies, mud mountains, mud castles (complete with a moat), and, my specialty, "witches brew".

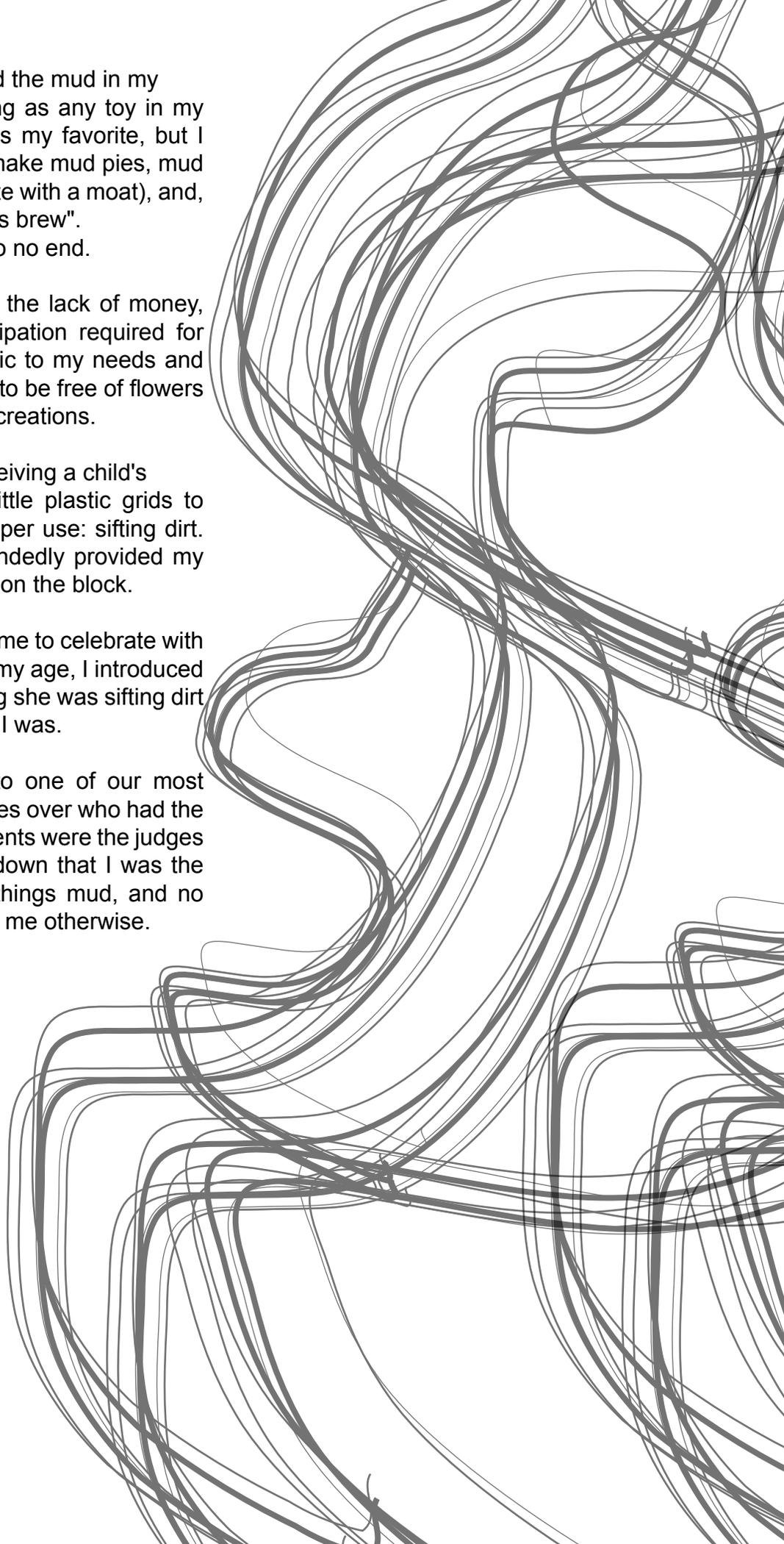
This entertained me to no end.

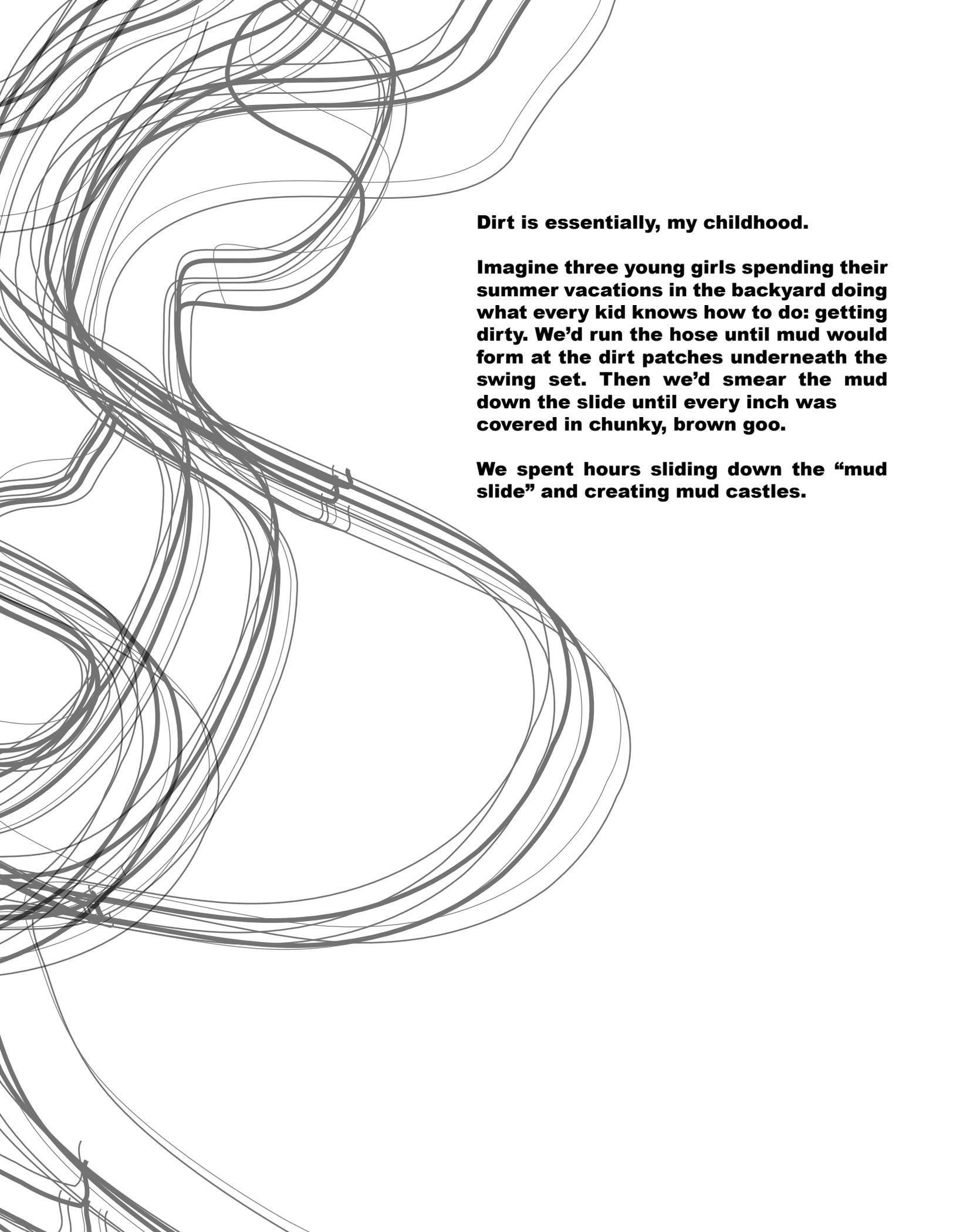
My parents--probably thrilled by the lack of money, maintenance, or parental participation required for these activities--were sympathetic to my needs and even reserved a part of our yard to be free of flowers or foliage for my mud creations.

I specifically remember receiving a child's needlepoint kit with sheets of little plastic grids to sew; I immediately put to its proper use: sifting dirt. I can guarantee that I single-handedly provided my family with the softest dirt on the block.

That 4th of July, family friends came to celebrate with us. As the host of their daughter my age, I introduced her to the activity, and before long she was sifting dirt as passionately as I was.

Unfortunately, it ultimately led to one of our most heated fights. We debated for ages over who had the softest dirt, and although our parents were the judges and ruled it a tie, I knew deep down that I was the winner. I was the expert of all things mud, and no small competition would tell me otherwise.





**Dirt is essentially, my childhood.**

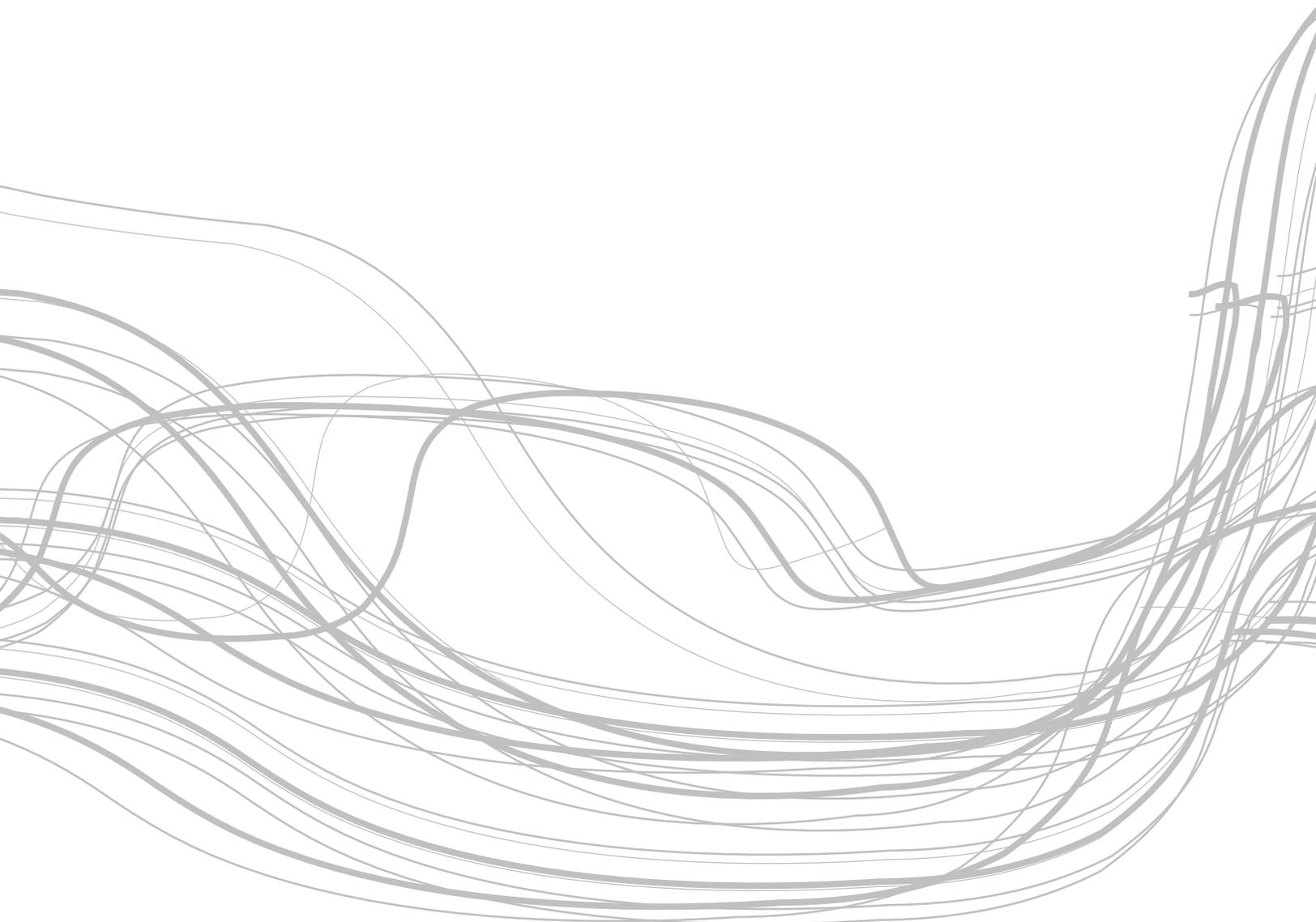
**Imagine three young girls spending their summer vacations in the backyard doing what every kid knows how to do: getting dirty. We'd run the hose until mud would form at the dirt patches underneath the swing set. Then we'd smear the mud down the slide until every inch was covered in chunky, brown goo.**

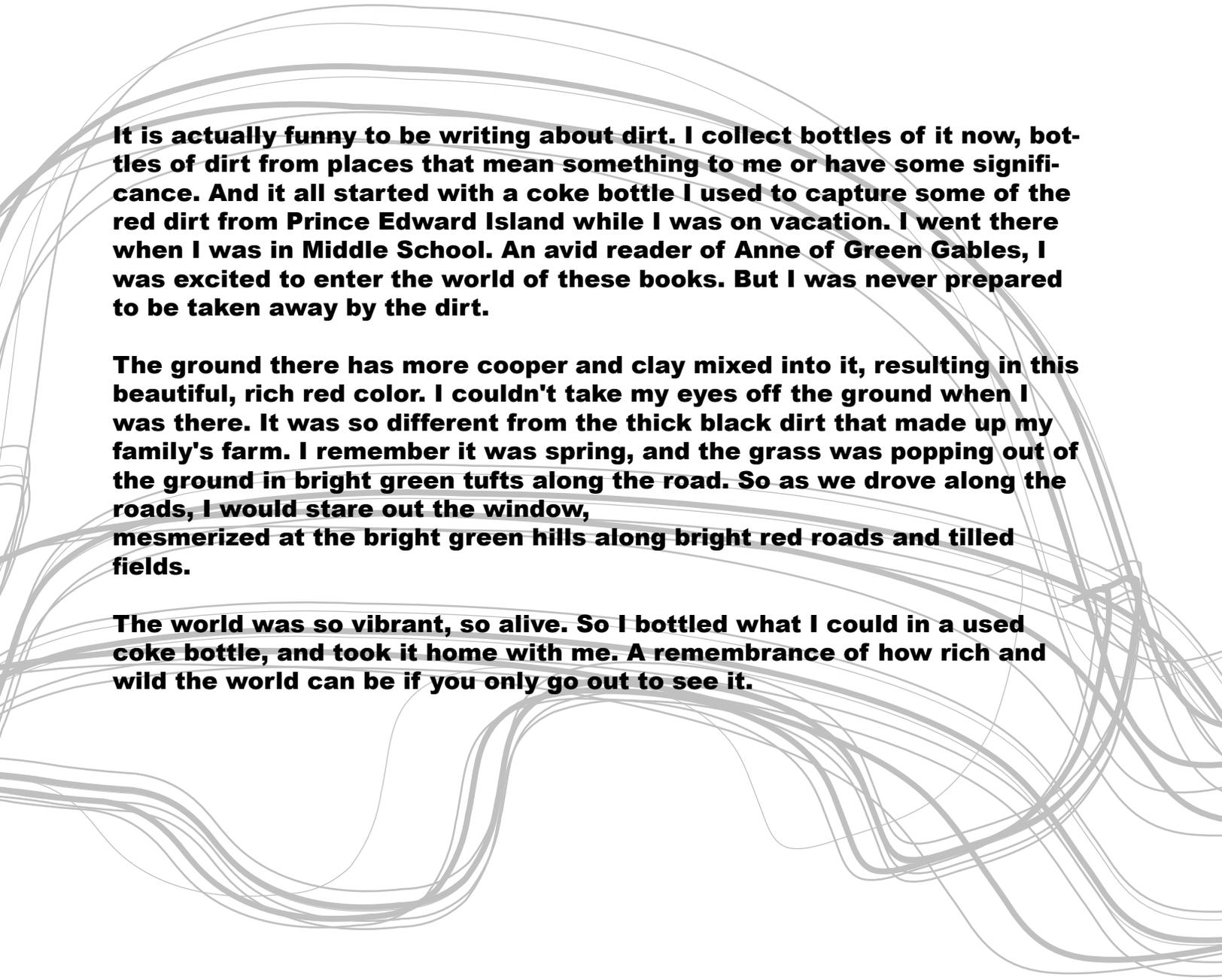
**We spent hours sliding down the "mud slide" and creating mud castles.**

**Growing up and before my marriage to Dear Paul, I lived in South Boston and had no connection to the soil as there was no soil surrounding my home. I did, however had connection to the sand at Southie beach.**

**When we married, we lived in Dorchester which had a sizable garden surrounding the family home. Paul and I continued his family tradition of planting wonderful and interesting plants in the fall. We got inspiration from the beautiful gardens of Portugal that was seen on a visit there.**

**It inspired us to vary height, breadth, color, texture and shape of plants and leaves. Comparable to planning an art work. These plants formed the basis of my art an expressionistic, organic, lyrical abstractionism that takes form in my intaglio mono prints, oils, watercolors, collages/works on paper.**

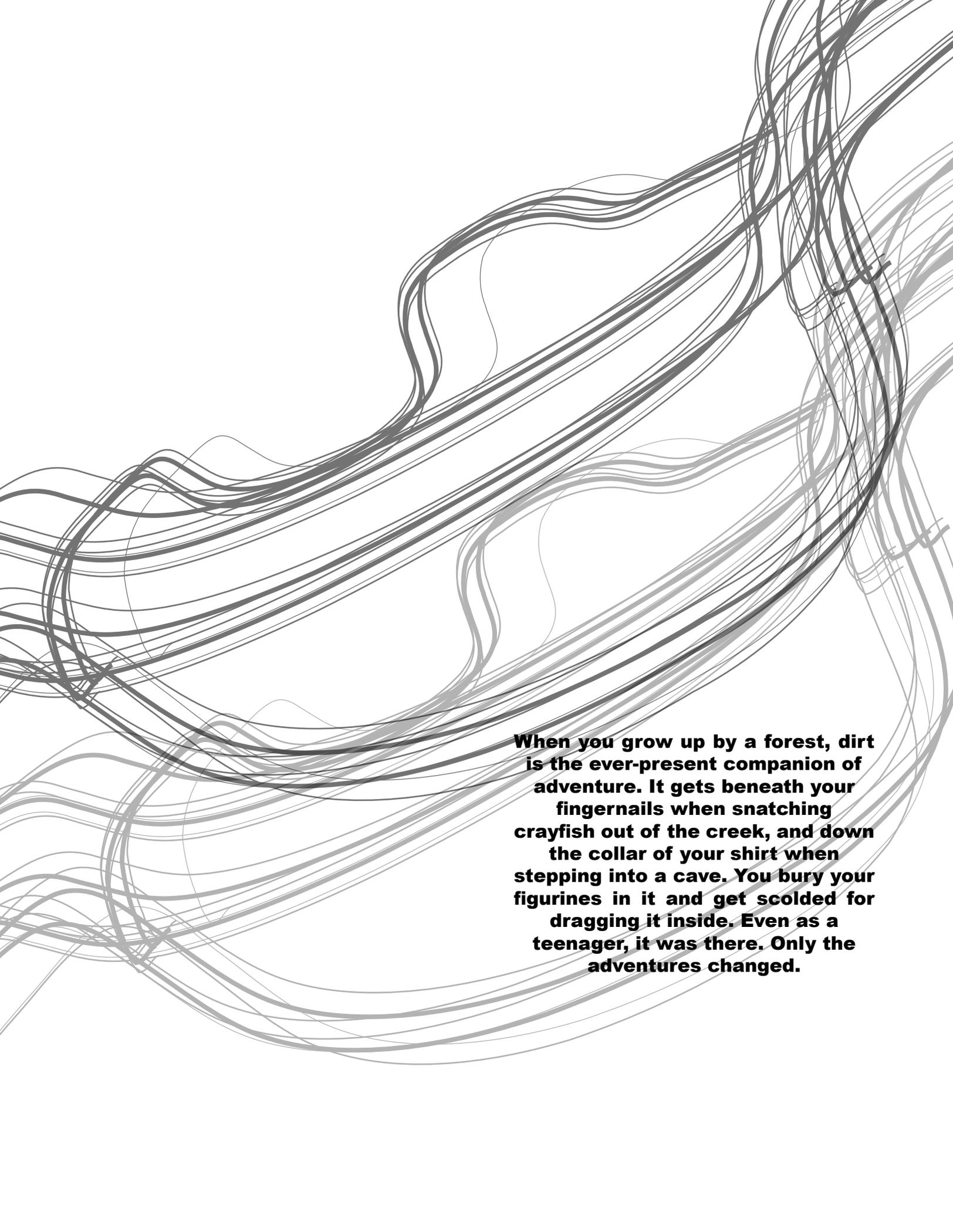




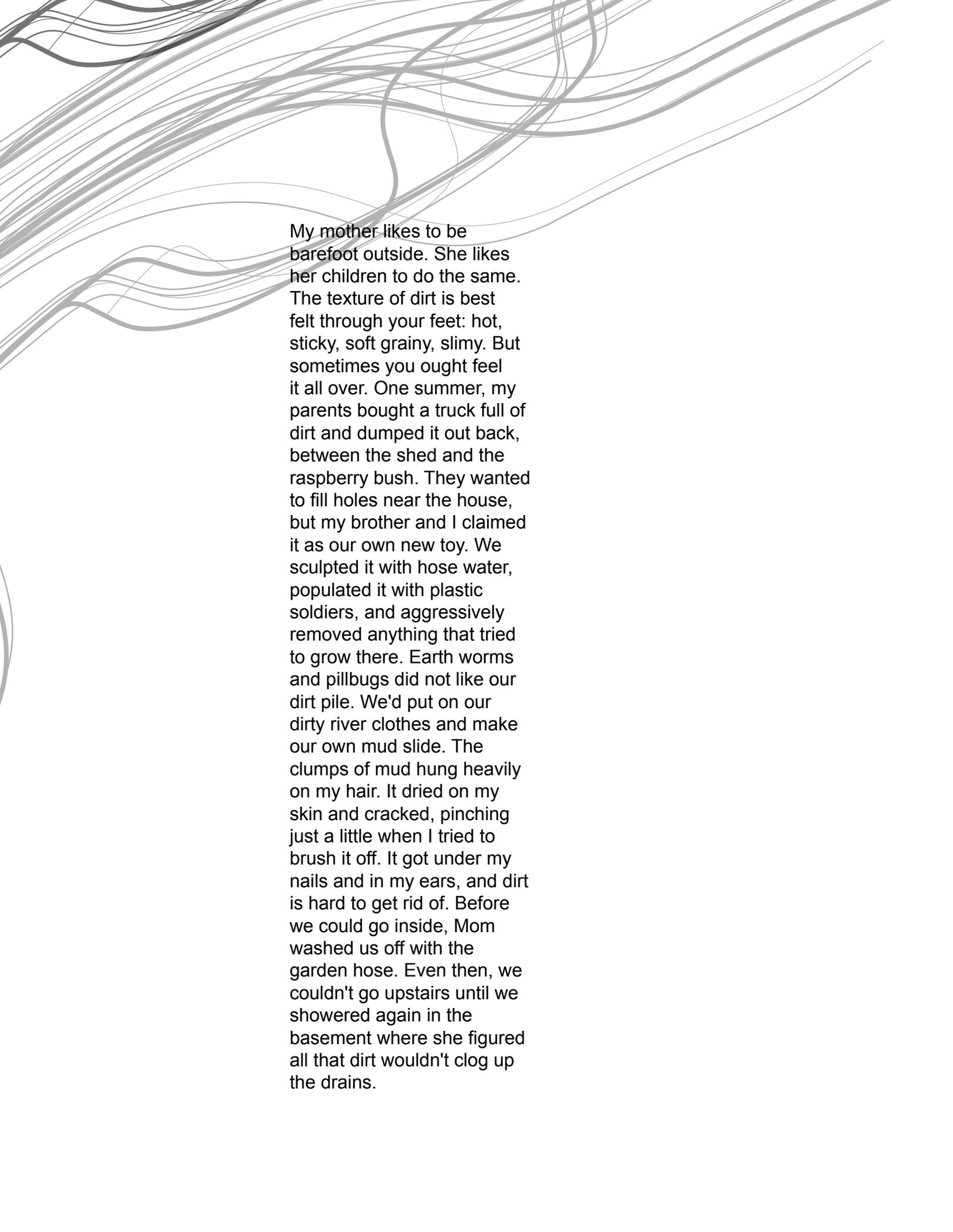
**It is actually funny to be writing about dirt. I collect bottles of it now, bottles of dirt from places that mean something to me or have some significance. And it all started with a coke bottle I used to capture some of the red dirt from Prince Edward Island while I was on vacation. I went there when I was in Middle School. An avid reader of Anne of Green Gables, I was excited to enter the world of these books. But I was never prepared to be taken away by the dirt.**

**The ground there has more cooper and clay mixed into it, resulting in this beautiful, rich red color. I couldn't take my eyes off the ground when I was there. It was so different from the thick black dirt that made up my family's farm. I remember it was spring, and the grass was popping out of the ground in bright green tufts along the road. So as we drove along the roads, I would stare out the window, mesmerized at the bright green hills along bright red roads and tilled fields.**

**The world was so vibrant, so alive. So I bottled what I could in a used coke bottle, and took it home with me. A remembrance of how rich and wild the world can be if you only go out to see it.**

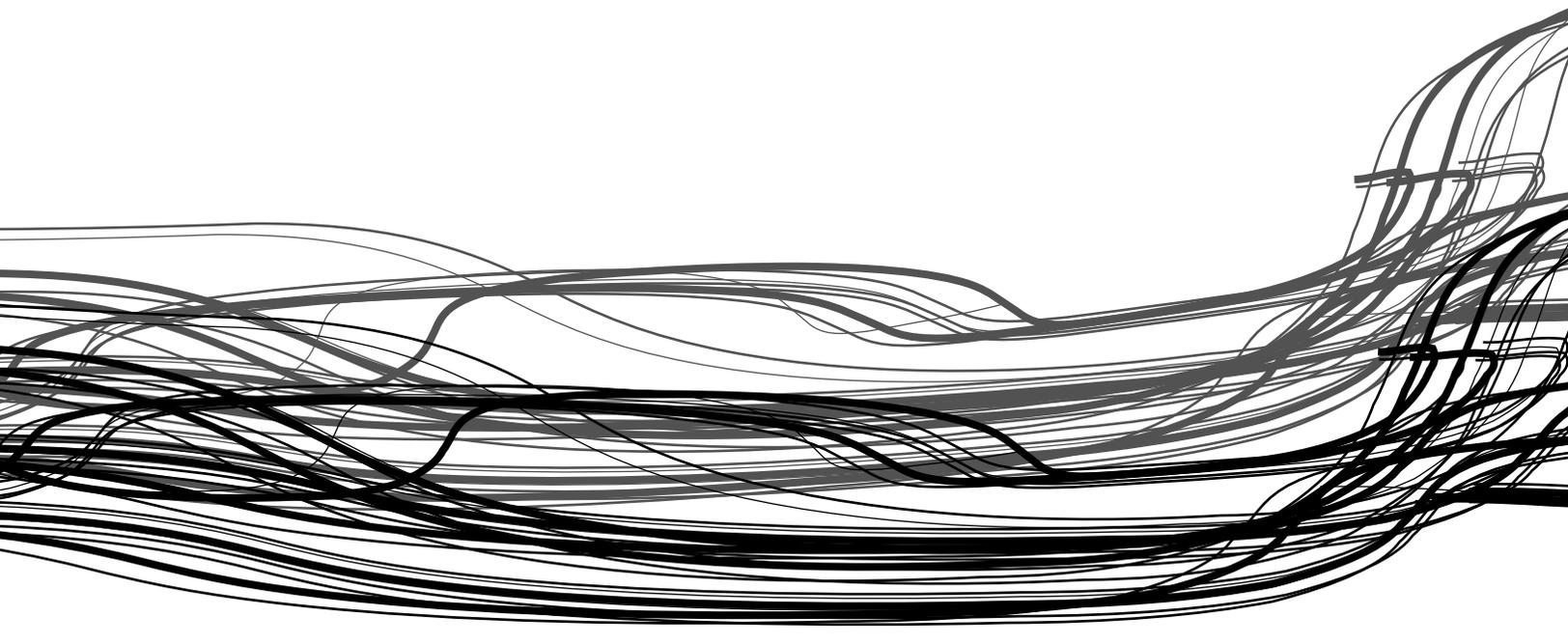
The background of the page is a complex, abstract pattern of numerous overlapping, flowing grey lines. These lines vary in thickness and opacity, creating a sense of movement and depth. They generally trend from the upper right towards the lower left, with some lines curving and looping back. The overall effect is reminiscent of smoke, water currents, or perhaps tangled threads.

**When you grow up by a forest, dirt is the ever-present companion of adventure. It gets beneath your fingernails when snatching crayfish out of the creek, and down the collar of your shirt when stepping into a cave. You bury your figurines in it and get scolded for dragging it inside. Even as a teenager, it was there. Only the adventures changed.**

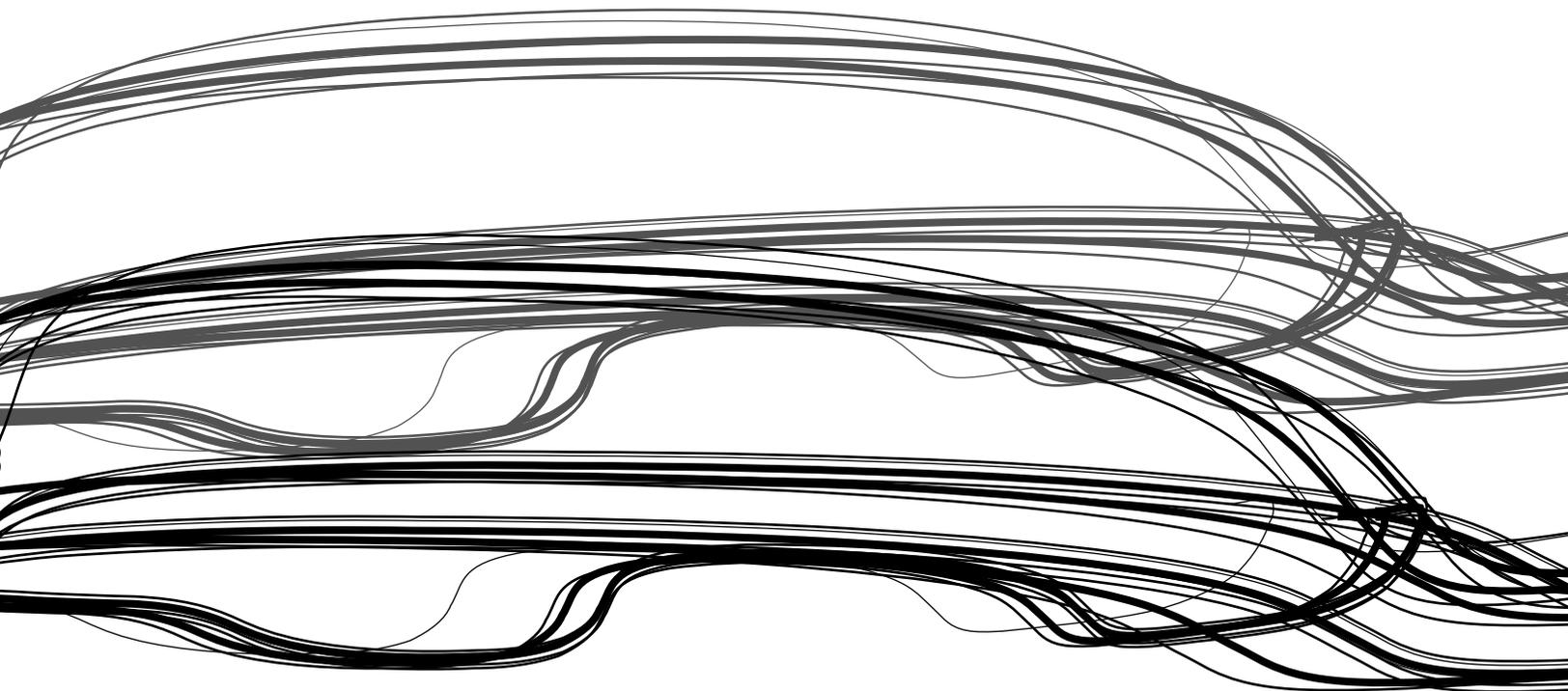


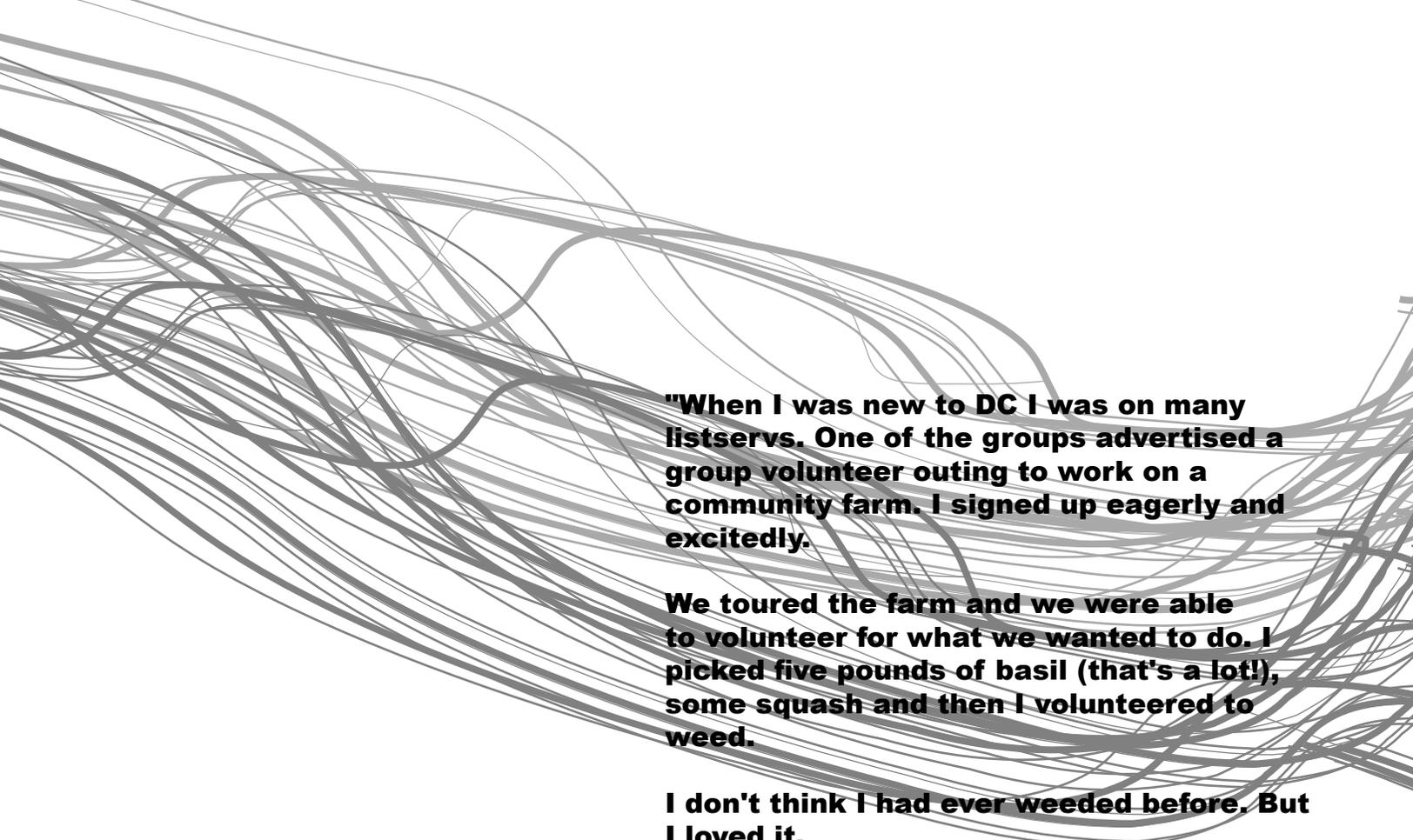
My mother likes to be barefoot outside. She likes her children to do the same. The texture of dirt is best felt through your feet: hot, sticky, soft grainy, slimy. But sometimes you ought feel it all over. One summer, my parents bought a truck full of dirt and dumped it out back, between the shed and the raspberry bush. They wanted to fill holes near the house, but my brother and I claimed it as our own new toy. We sculpted it with hose water, populated it with plastic soldiers, and aggressively removed anything that tried to grow there. Earth worms and pillbugs did not like our dirt pile. We'd put on our dirty river clothes and make our own mud slide. The clumps of mud hung heavily on my hair. It dried on my skin and cracked, pinching just a little when I tried to brush it off. It got under my nails and in my ears, and dirt is hard to get rid of. Before we could go inside, Mom washed us off with the garden hose. Even then, we couldn't go upstairs until we showered again in the basement where she figured all that dirt wouldn't clog up the drains.

when i was very young (or when i am old  
enough to pretend i was very young) i would  
walk back and forth behind my living room  
window. i wouldnt play in my mother's  
garden or my father's garden or in my  
garden. i wouldnt dig through the earth for  
roots. i wouldnt look underneath ferns  
for mushrooms. i wouldnt pick herbs  
and raspberries for recipes i would  
never make for absent minded eating.  
i would pace and pace and pace, wearing a  
hole in the green carpet, working the packed  
earth into ever crack of my peeling skin.



My mother-in-law and I don't talk often, but we are most alike when our hands are in the earth. We both appreciate the life it gives. One day she pulled up some thyme from her backyard with a little root hanging. I planted it in a pot in my kitchen and from that day forward, I decided to grow more. I never knew how good and cool the earth could feel until I kneaded it with my own hands to nurture the life of my plants and fresh herbs.





**"When I was new to DC I was on many listservs. One of the groups advertised a group volunteer outing to work on a community farm. I signed up eagerly and excitedly.**

**We toured the farm and we were able to volunteer for what we wanted to do. I picked five pounds of basil (that's a lot!), some squash and then I volunteered to weed.**

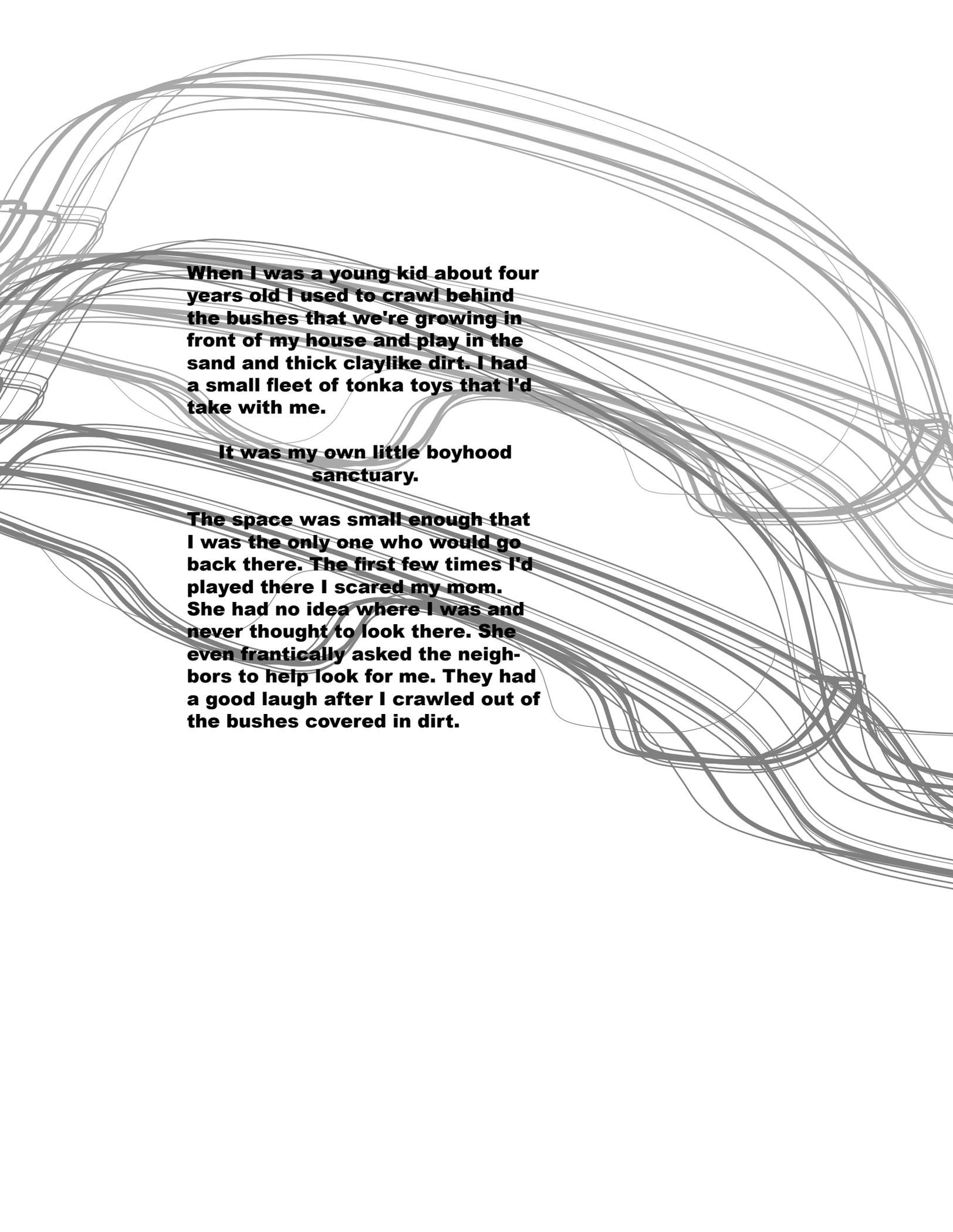
**I don't think I had ever weeded before. But I loved it.**

**I'm kind of a perfectionist. And the garden was badly overgrown. In the same way I like cleaning more than merely organizing, weeding is the process of removing what doesn't belong, and what may be harmful, from the goodness that ought to thrive.**

**I happily made my way down the rows meticulously pulling all the wanton green bits out of the earth. And it hit me, when was the last time I had even touched the earth? When I had I last eaten something that had picked off a vine? It was an incredible experience.**

**Although, admittedly. I didn't go back.**

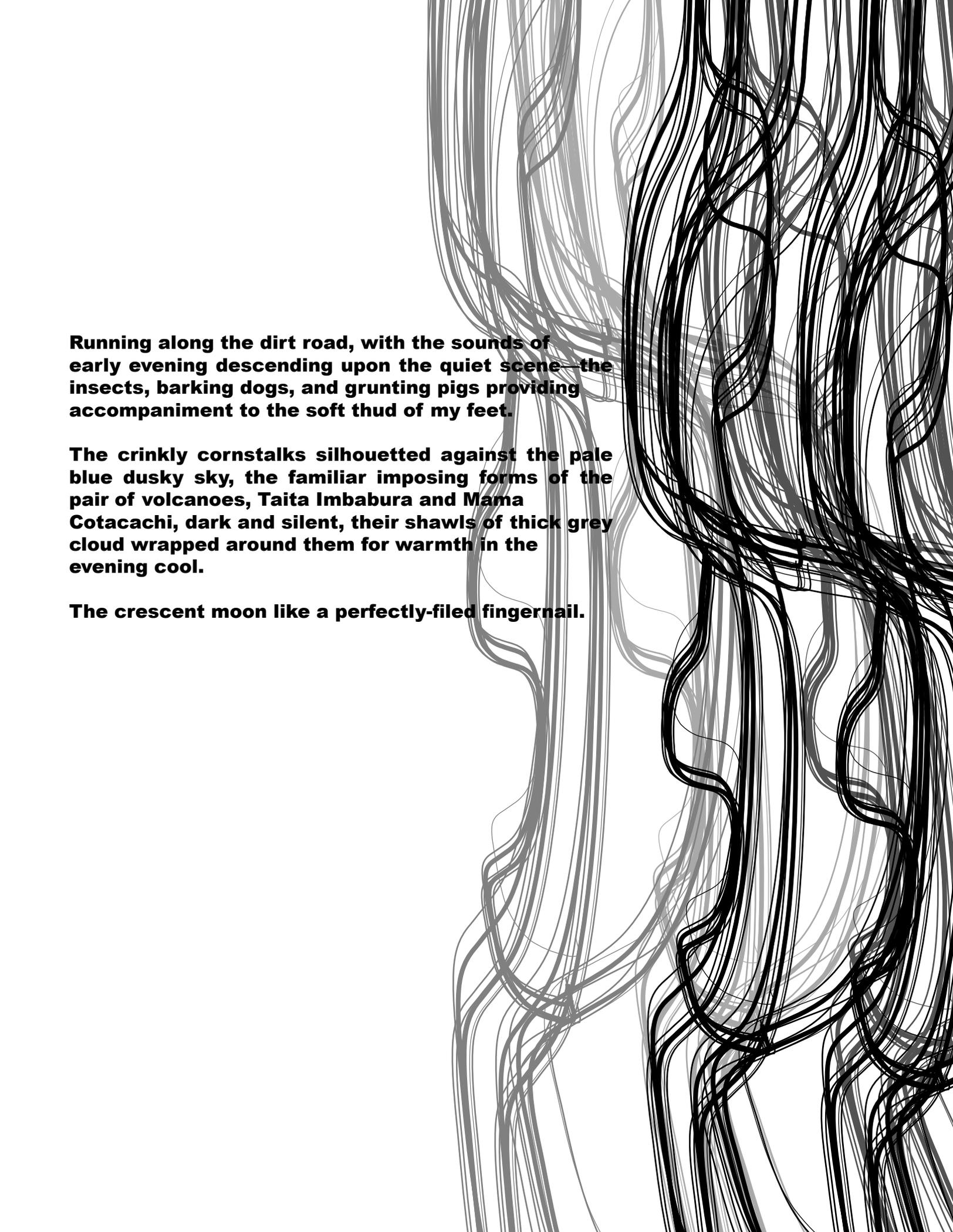
**But it's not too late for me to make my own garden."**



**When I was a young kid about four years old I used to crawl behind the bushes that we're growing in front of my house and play in the sand and thick claylike dirt. I had a small fleet of tonka toys that I'd take with me.**

**It was my own little boyhood sanctuary.**

**The space was small enough that I was the only one who would go back there. The first few times I'd played there I scared my mom. She had no idea where I was and never thought to look there. She even frantically asked the neighbors to help look for me. They had a good laugh after I crawled out of the bushes covered in dirt.**



**Running along the dirt road, with the sounds of early evening descending upon the quiet scene—the insects, barking dogs, and grunting pigs providing accompaniment to the soft thud of my feet.**

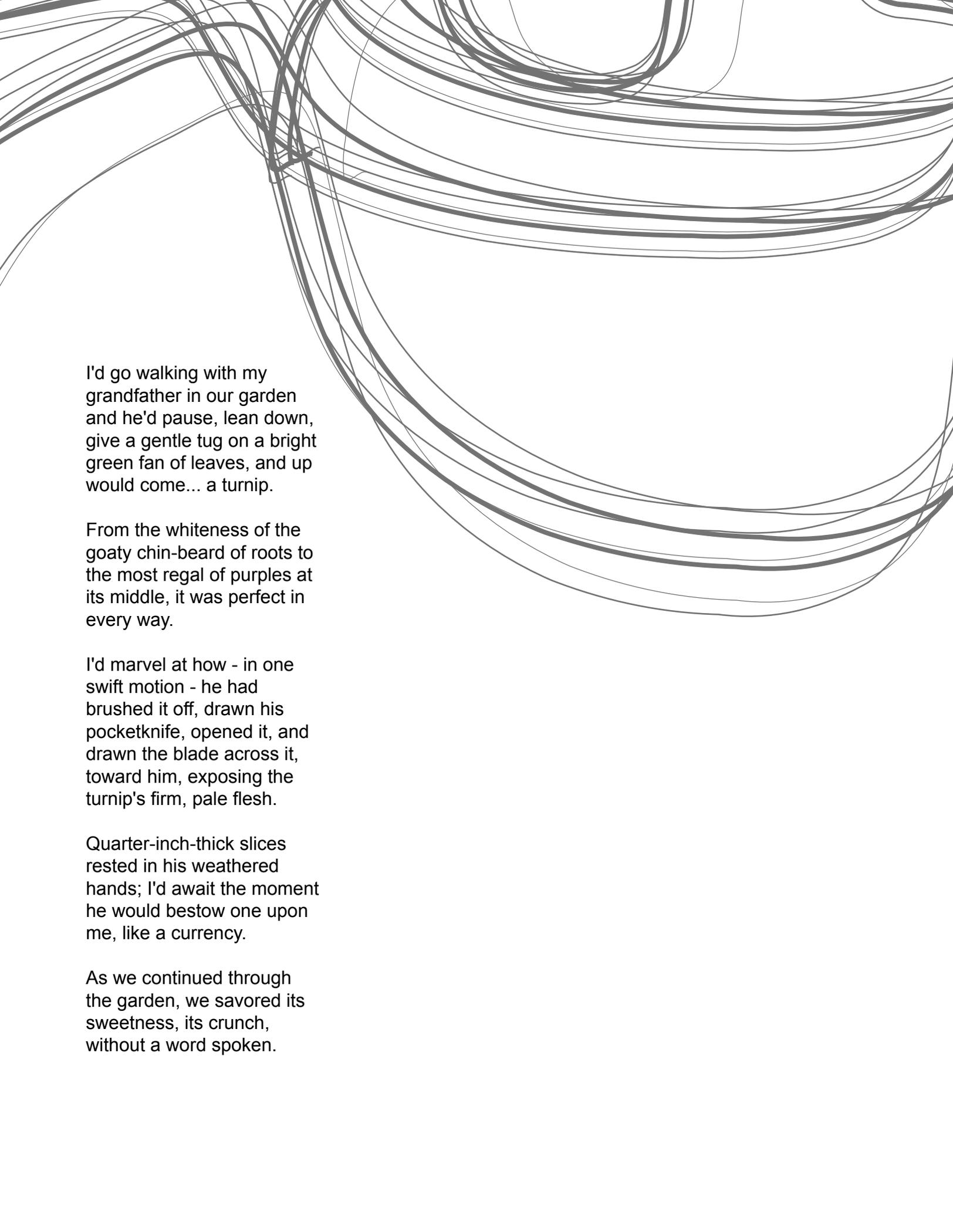
**The crinkly cornstalks silhouetted against the pale blue dusky sky, the familiar imposing forms of the pair of volcanoes, Taita Imbabura and Mama Cotacachi, dark and silent, their shawls of thick grey cloud wrapped around them for warmth in the evening cool.**

**The crescent moon like a perfectly-filed fingernail.**



**I watched the big kids in grade school walk by on their way home from school. I was snug in my little house under the boughs of the trees. A tiny clothesline for my doll clothes was stretched between two of the branches.**

**The dirt floor was soft and dry and smelled like leaves.**



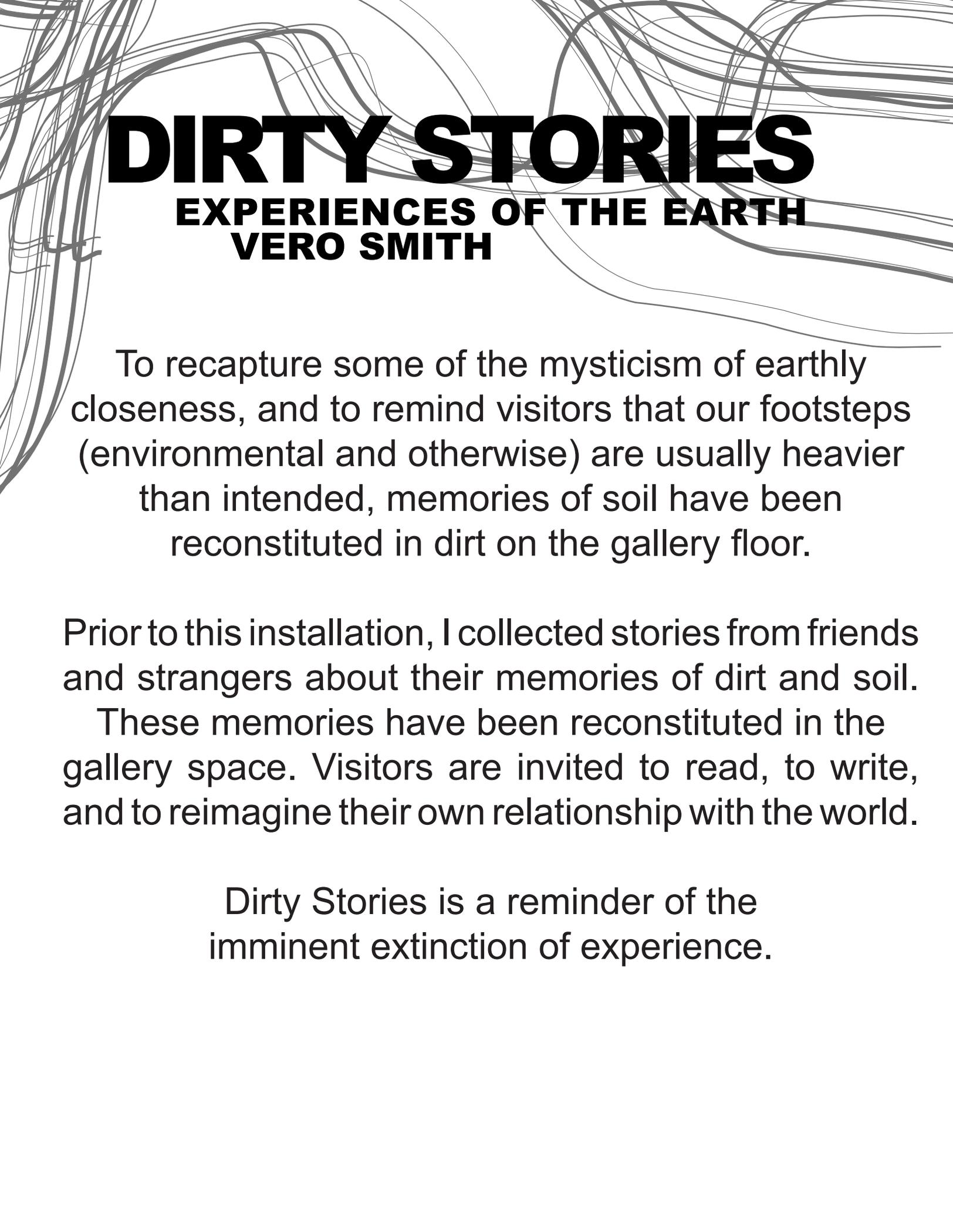
I'd go walking with my  
grandfather in our garden  
and he'd pause, lean down,  
give a gentle tug on a bright  
green fan of leaves, and up  
would come... a turnip.

From the whiteness of the  
goaty chin-beard of roots to  
the most regal of purples at  
its middle, it was perfect in  
every way.

I'd marvel at how - in one  
swift motion - he had  
brushed it off, drawn his  
pocketknife, opened it, and  
drawn the blade across it,  
toward him, exposing the  
turnip's firm, pale flesh.

Quarter-inch-thick slices  
rested in his weathered  
hands; I'd await the moment  
he would bestow one upon  
me, like a currency.

As we continued through  
the garden, we savored its  
sweetness, its crunch,  
without a word spoken.



# **DIRTY STORIES**

## **EXPERIENCES OF THE EARTH**

### **VERO SMITH**

To recapture some of the mysticism of earthly closeness, and to remind visitors that our footsteps (environmental and otherwise) are usually heavier than intended, memories of soil have been reconstituted in dirt on the gallery floor.

Prior to this installation, I collected stories from friends and strangers about their memories of dirt and soil.

These memories have been reconstituted in the gallery space. Visitors are invited to read, to write, and to reimagine their own relationship with the world.

Dirty Stories is a reminder of the imminent extinction of experience.