

## NICK BROWN

*Resting Place On The 5*, 2012  
Oil on Panel, 60 x36 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## THOMAS FARBER

# Writing from a Distance

A Bostonian  
Who Went West

**N**ow age seventy, and after many books of fiction and nonfiction, writing autobiographically I again think of myself not as Tom but as “the writer.” This character, the writer in me, thinks that perhaps there are two kinds of people: those who say there are two kinds of people and those who do not. As, for this moment, one of the former, the writer ventures that there are those who stay home and those who leave.

Of those who stay, his mother was one. She lived in Boston nearly all of her seventy-four years. Though remaining within several miles from her childhood home, she made a radical break with her past. Never saw her mother again after marrying at eighteen, never corresponded with her again in any way. And, for good measure, cut off all contact with her mother’s extended family, most of them living nearby.

The writer’s older sister, firstborn dealing with their formidable mother in an era of rapid social change, made the normal difficult decisions about how to live and love right there in Boston. Often in the very face of parental disapproval. A strong woman, his sister, able to molt where there was so much pressure to be the person others expected—demanded—you be.

The writer left Boston for freedom from it, to be able to look back from the vantage of worlds yet unknown to him as the person he’d become. Himself but anew. Various selves, actually: reinvented, disowned, reaffirmed, repudiated. Jus’ plain left behind. As that who he’d become, he’d send letters home. Books, it turned out, written in the vernacular he’d been born into. But of course, in the leaving, one loses things. Like, perhaps, something as simple as the vector and music of a place name. The brain and tree of the suburban town of Braintree, or what was mystic in the unremarked-on, much-crossed Mystic River Bridge.

Think of the phrase “twice removed,” as in cousins of different generations. Boston, California, Hawaii, New York City, Paris among the homes, frequent destinations, places the writer stayed, departed from, returned to. So many times twice, thrice, self-removed.

The writer could make the case there was something in Boston driving him away, something that was its fault. He has a friend who left, has never looked back. Had no question that Boston was a place you had to get out of. Shitty weather, high taxes, the cost of housing and heat-