

By Lindsey Funk

## **Dear Kirby, West Virginia,**

Who would I be without you?

Like most who live here, I could never imagine leaving you. I mean, what's the need to? You've known me all my life. You're the only home I've ever known; why would I choose a new one? You hold all my best memories and my worst ones too. Though many things have changed over the years, you've always stayed the same. You're the place where everyone who's born there stays. Everyone knows everyone. We're all one big family tree.

Who would I be without you?

You're the place where many generations can be found just a few miles apart, houses scattered across a blanket of fields. Here, reservations aren't needed to just "stop on by." Seeing family isn't something that's just done on the holidays, but rather most every single day. You're the place where a day of fun means going to Granddad and Grammy's house, laughing, eating, and swinging on the porch. You built the foundation of my family, Kirby, West Virginia. I literally couldn't be here without you.

Who would I be without you?

You're the place where I didn't have to try to make friends; it seems that I was just born with them instead. After all, their parents went to school with my parents, just like their grandparents went to school with mine. In you, it's rare to meet someone new, but if I do, it's seems I've known them for years. Here, it's not difficult to find people who care. You're where hand-written cards are still in style and dinner will appear at the door because of a sick family member, or even "just because I care."

Who would I be without you?

You're the place where the two-lane road turns into one, where lots of deer dart out and lots of familiar hands go up. Here, there are more fields than houses and driving isn't done in a rush, but rather just to see the view. A man will deny receiving money for a cell tower to be put on his land, simply because he'd rather see the woods instead. It's not hard to find your way around here, there is only one main road. Although, it is easy to get lost in exploring where the trails go. You always look the same, Kirby, West Virginia. You don't often get anything new. Neither do the people here, and when they do, it's really big news. The daily talk includes, "Hey did you see who got a new truck?" because there are no

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secrets here, word spreads fast. It's definitely not about looks here, for the most callused hands tell the greatest stories.

The work done on the farm is more important than the clothes that you own.

Who would I be without you?

You're the place where Jesus comes first, and the church is considered a second home. You're where others will always pray for you and give all of their own. You're where the Bible is taught, and its rules are followed. The love of God is passed down from generations. The elders here are strong, but tired, years of work starting to show in the way they move. Getting up from the church pew now takes more effort than it used to. Respect here is golden, and hard work is a classic. If you want it, you'll work for it and remain humble too. Manners are a given, but not taken for granted. Kindness here is contagious. Everyone always seems to be happy.

Who would I be without you?

You're where cell service is non-existent, but the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains make up for it. You're where going to the mall takes at least an hour, but the most picture-perfect sunset is out the front door. Fun activities are active ones: hunting, fishing and hiking too. You don't have the popular chains, but the small diners are better. Food here is

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always served at the table, everyone together sharing about their days. Going out to eat is considered a night on the town and any trip away is just a short vacation.

Who would I be without you?

You're my safe place, Kirby, West Virginia. In you, I feel secure. You gave me yourself as a model and were my first art to capture. You're the place that no one seems to know about, but the people who live here couldn't know you more. You're unlike the rest, a hidden gold treasure. You don't require much risk; you provide a comfortable place to live.

Who would I be without you?

Even though I'm learning more about the world, you'll always be my home. I won't be embarrassed or speak bad of you when they ask "Hey, where are you from?" I've realized that, although leaving isn't easy, it also isn't wrong because the world is big. There's lots to learn and even more work to be done. It's not that you aren't good enough. You actually paved the way. So, thank you, Kirby, West Virginia.

You've taught me who to be without you.