

WHAT IS YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF DIRT?

Duration: 6:55 min

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We are outdoors at ground level for the crunch and scuff of footfall on a path of dirt or gravel. A Traveler ejects a wad of spittle before speaking over the ambient sound of birds chirping and ominous, droning melody. The Traveler's voice is contemplatively direct with a brooding urgency that is restrained, allowing room for our answers to formulate.

TRAVELER

What is your first memory of dirt?

Remember

Its smell,

feel,

color,

taste.

Did it crumble in your hands?

Could you roll it? Press your thumb against it?

Did your mom tell you not to walk on it barefoot?

The voice of Mama interjects with all the exasperated authority of a mother bewildered by a child's decision to run through dirt with bare feet.

MAMA

"¡Mira, Muchaco! No camine descalzo que te meten gusanos por eso pies! Y no te ensucie!"

The Traveler quickly redirects us to their questioning.

TRAVELER

What is your first memory of dirt?

There is a contemplative pause with continued ambient sound - instrumental and natural with birds and bugs. Soon, from right to left, a line is being etched into the surface by a stick scraping and subsequently drawing on the ground. The Traveler's questioning returns with an even more inquisitive and directive tone as the stick continues to scrape and draw.

TRAVELER

Was that dirt divided? Marked? Mapped?
Was it contained? Carved up?

Go back into your memory and dig.
Think back.

It is abstract, the division of dirt, but also very real.

The stick strikes the ground and hits a solid surface one, two, three, four times as we approach gurgling water, and then continues to scrape and draw in the ground. The pace of The Traveler's voice quickens and becomes more pointed - the restraint of the urgency hints at becoming unbound a bit.

TRAVELER

Was there a sign? A road? A hedge? A fence? A river?
A wall of cinder blocks? A mailbox?

The scraping is more unnerving until the stick hits a pile of rocks or bricks, knocking them over.

TRAVELER

Could you cross that road?

Pass the sign? Skip over the wire? Jump across?
Were there rules—spoken or unspoken?

The Traveler's words come to life alongside the gallop of hooves as we are running past barking dogs to climb a fence, jump across, swim a river, open a gate, all in time to the words.

TRAVELER

Could you climb the chain link fence? Open the gate?
Swim the River?

Do you remember your desire?

The droning melody is met with a continuous and growing rush of running water and then a sighing, climactic exhale of The Traveler.

TRAVELER

oh.

The Traveler begins to question again - there is almost an incriminatory tone as if we can feel a squint in the eye. A question beneath the questioning, "if your answer is no, then why not?."

TRAVELER

What did you want with that dirt?

A shovel is plunged into dirt and begins to dig, scooping up and dropping dirt, as The Traveler continues.

TRAVELER

To put it in your mouth? (*The Traveler whispers* - Mud pie) To bury treasure? To write your name? To keep score? Home base?

A bat is swung, connects to the ball and it flies - Palestinian children cheer on their teammate and talk to each other in Arabic. The runner exhales and stomps and grinds a slide into the plate. The droning continues as does The Traveler. In the background, respective soundscapes of The Traveler's words - running water, scraping stick, gate, fence, airplane engine, stomping feet, flicks of stone and dirt. The Traveler's pace picks up, maybe through patience waning, and the questions fly like the baseball.

TRAVELER

What access? What boundary? Which checkpoint?
Which border? What bridge? What toll? Which lot?
Which gate? What guard? Which documents? Which flight? Which truck? What raft? Which rifle? What River? Which tent? What claim? What Treaty? ¿Qué idioma? What trust? What deed? Which purchase? What lease? For whom? By whom? To whom? With whom? What access? What boundary? Which checkpoint? Which border? What bridge? What toll? Which lot? Which gate? What guard? Which documents? Which flight? Which truck? What raft?

As The Traveler's pace and volume both ramp up, the speaking is joined by an Echo.

TRAVELER

¿A quién? ¿Con quién? ¿Qué acceso? What boundary? ¿Qué puesto de control? ¿Qué frontera? What bridge? Qué peaje? ¿Qué lote? Which gate? ¿Qué guardia? ¿Cuál documentos? ¿Cuál vuelo? Which

truck? What raft? Which rifle? ¿Cual río? Which tent? What claim? ¿Qué tratado? ¿Qué puerta? ¿Qué guardia? ¿Cuál documentos? ¿Cuál vuelo? ¿Qué camión? ¿Qué balsa? ¿Qué rifle? ¿Cual río? ¿Qué carpa? ¿Qué reclamo? ¿Qué tratado? ¿Qué idioma? ¿Qué fideicomiso? ¿Qué título? ¿Qué compra? ¿Qué arrendamiento? ¿Para quién? ¿Por quién? ¿A quién? ¿Con quién?

There is a crescendo of dirt and gates and fences and a slight rush of the familiar water until The Traveler and The Echo conclude.

TRAVELER AND ECHO
Oh.

There is a final scraping of dirt. The stillness of the moment is punctuated only by the sounds of the birds and evening insects. There is exhaustion now behind the voice of The Traveler as they continue to question.

TRAVELER
What is your first memory of dirt?
Did you mix it with your spit? (*The Keeper whispers - patria - an ejected spittle*) Tears? Blood? Sweat? Like a bond.

As The Traveler speaks, there is quick inhaling and exhaling. Again, The Traveler's words become the soundscape around us - chants of demonstrators protesting, glass breaking, thrown stone, water rushes, a jangling link of fence.

TRAVELER
May your memory be a stone hurled...
over water. over the fence. Breaking glass. Crossing distance.
A stone hurled is a stand. It insists.
Insist.

A distance crossed, moved, climbed, gate swung open, water disturbed from a dive into the river.

TRAVELER
Cross. Move. Climb. Open the gate. Swim.

The background is distantly filled with the nocturnal stirring of frogs, the Puerto Rican coquí, and bugs. The Traveler concludes gently but directly, intently.

TRAVELER
Open your palms.
If you have things in your hands, put them down or away in your pocket or a bag. If you can...

Really, open your palms
Face them out.
Let your palms be seen.

Your open palm is a sign to others.

Look around you.
Does anyone else here have their palms open?
(*The Traveler whispers - They are with us.*)

If there are no open palms now, *there will be in the future.*

Open your palms. Open them.

Imagine a stone in your open palm. Close your hand
around the stone. Hurl it.

Free free free free

The Traveler concludes the directives, played out with hopeful
force - free in the key of will be, must be.

We are left again and finally with the birds and bugs and buzz of
the surrounding evening.

