Places in the Heart: Adults Remembering their Favorite Childhood Places

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Front porches, grandma’s house, and the woods. These are all places of adventure and learning for kids. Some of these places linger in our memories decades after we last spent time in the place. Why? Drawing upon research in cognitive science, geography, and communication studies, Roger Aden searches for answers to that question by examining the stories of adults who still fondly remember a special place from their childhood. Those stories, he believes, will reveal the characteristics of places in our hearts and the functions they serve for us beyond pleasant recollection. This talk will outline the theoretical foundations for his research and offer examples of how stories might tell us much about the places we refuse to let go.

Roger Aden is Professor in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University. His research integrates rhetorical and qualitative methods of research to examine the meanings of places as they are symbolically constructed and interpreted. Most recently, he has explored the contested meanings of a historical site in Upon the Ruins of Liberty: Slavery, the President’s House, Independence National Historical Park, and Public Memory (Temple University Press, 2015). Previously, he examined how fans of the University of Nebraska’s football team draw upon the state’s history and cultural geography to enact a state identity in Huskerville: A Story of Nebraska Football, Fans, and the Power of Place (McFarland, 2008), and how fans of popular culture narratives engaged in metaphorical journeys to the places suggested by those tales in Popular Stories and Promised Lands: Fan Cultures and Symbolic Pilgrimages (University of Alabama Press, 1999).