

Gloria Gaither*Gaither Family Resources and Gaither Music Company**Michigan*

I have lived in Indiana since I came to Anderson University as a kid of the sixties, and then during my senior year, married my Hoosier sweetheart and was adopted by this new place; but I am still a girl with Michigan in my bones. It was the lapping of the lakes and rivers of Michigan that sang to me as a child. It was the smell of cedars and pines that I inhaled with every childhood breath. It was the rolling farms, the virgin woods, the village churches, the community schoolhouses, the roadside picnic tables and parks of Michigan that molded my memories and stimulated my imagination. And though I would come to claim Indiana as my home, still it was Michigan that defined me. It is more than a place to me; it is a genesis from which I could grow to embrace the globe.

Michigan isn't just a state;
It's a state of mind.
The fragrance of pine and the nutty smell of birches,
Their bark peeling into sheer ruffled sheets of grey paper.
Michigan is a liquid place of creeks and rivers,
Lakes and streams and springs bursting out
In the most unlikely places.
It's sand – between your toes,
In your tennis shoes, on the linoleum.
It's piles of sand in the yard,
Under the swing, along the road.
It's dunes of sand, beaches of sand,
Get-lost-winding-trails of sand.
Michigan is fried potatoes and onions
Cooked on a Coleman stove along the highway.
It's Vernor's Coolers at Dairy Queen,
Fudge from Murdick's and pasties
From a roadside stand on the Keewenaw Peninsula.
Michigan is something fragile –
Fragile as an Indian Peace Pipe,
A pink Ladyslipper or the delicate
Color of Northern Lights in the silent sky.
Michigan is tough –
Tough as the steel on a Detroit assembly line,

Tough as the year-round residents
On Beaver Island,
Tough as the survivors of the Missouri Dust Bowl
Or the lean years in the Kentucky mountains,
Who lost it all and built it back
With worn-out tools at Ford or Post or Kellogg.
Michigan is the music over the lake at Interlochen.
It is art on the gallery sidewalks of Petoskey.
It's a Dutch dance in wooden shoes
Among the fields of tulips.
It's a Frankenmuth Christmas that lasts
All year long, and the mist
Rolling in while your head is turned
To hide the bridge.
It's black dirt, golden wheat,
And ten shades of purple lilacs.
Michigan is an attitude.
It's helping a neighbor without being asked,
Fishing 'til the catfish bite,
And waiting 'til the cows come home,
If you have to, to see a kid "turn out."
And once she does, Michigan is a big mitten
To warm her hands
And welcome her home.

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