

# Racing in Place: Collages, Fragments, Postcards, Ruins

Michael Martone

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Is it truth or fiction? Memoir or essay? Narrative or associative? To a writer like Michael Martone, questions like these are high praise. Martone's studied disregard of form and his unruffled embrace of the prospect that nothing--no story, no life--is ever quite finished have yielded some of today's most splendidly unconventional writing. Add to that an utter weakness for pop Americana and what Louise Erdrich has called a "deep affection for the ordinary," and you have one of the few writers who could pull off something like *Racing in Place*. Up the steps of the Washington Monument, down the home stretch at the Indy Speedway, and across the parking lot of the Moon Winx Lodge in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Martone chases, and is chased by, memories--and memories of memories. He writes about his grandfather's job as a meter reader, those seventies-era hotels with atrium lobbies and open glass elevators, and the legendary temper of basketball coach Bob Knight.

Martone, as Peter Turchi has said, looks "under stones the rest of us leave unturned." So, what is he really up to when he dwells on the make of Malcolm X's eyeglasses or the runner-up names for Snow White's seven dwarfs? In "My Mother Invents a Tradition," Martone tells how his mom, as the dean of girls at a brand-new high school in Fort Wayne, Indiana, "constructed a nostalgic past out of nothing." Sitting at their dining room table, she came up with everything from the school colors (orange and brown) to the yearbook title (Bear Tracks). Look, and then look again, Martone is saying. "You never know."



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