Mr. Wilkoff
Stand in the Place where you live.

Alright, so I borrowed the title of this exercise from an R.E.M. song, but I think it is quite appropriate. The place where you live is very important to who you are and the way you view the world. It can motivate you to do certain activities (mountains=skiing) or give you a certain mood (overcast all the time=depression) or even make you question conventional wisdom (totally homogenous=rebellion). I grew up in a small town that was mostly filled with well off white folks, many of whom were elitist and some of whom were racist and homophobic. A friend of mine would write poems about this "wicked little town", describing it in a less than flattering light. He had an opinion. He was making a stand about where he lived. This is what I would like you to attempt today. I would like you to think about the place where you live and describe it just the way you see it, with all of its flaws and beauty rolled up into one piece of writing. Show its contours and crevices. Where are the hiding spots and the best places to go for a milkshake? What are the inside jokes that you hold with your town? And most importantly, what is the relationship you have to your town? Love? Hate? Love-Hate? Co-Dependent? Would you have a major breakdown if you ever left? In other words, stand in the place where you live.

My example:

Underneath and inside. These were the places that I wanted to be. Beyond the too-expensive-shops, the groomed-for-visitors park, the don't-spit-on-me-sidewalks were spots that I saw. I knew. My friends knew. People like us that came before knew. We knew that these places were what matters. It was a small circle of knowing. And it was perfect. We knew that if you crept around the falls, were careful not to fall in, and arched your back while you slid inches closer to the underbelly of The Popcorn Shop, you would find a graffitied hideout big enough for twenty people to sit and enjoy the sound of the water and the thoughts of jumping. We knew that if you went into the alleyway between the overpriced sweater store and the little theater sign, you would see a fire escape. We knew that you wanted to escape, you had to go up not down. Up to a rooftop to play music loud and spit on pedestrians, not on sidewalks. These places were ours. Everyone else didn't know about them. And we pitied them because of it.