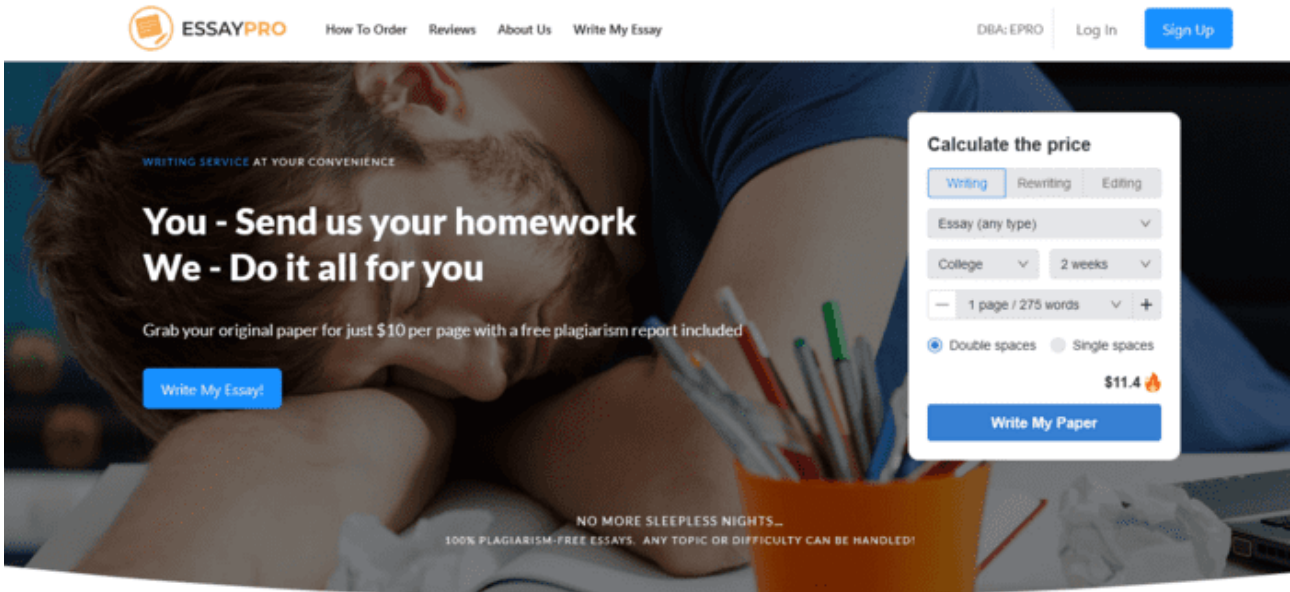


Lost in the Sky at Grandpa's Cabin



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Lost in the Sky at Grandpa's Cabin

My grandfather carries on entire conversations while he salts his food. He salts indiscriminately: His corn, his pasta, his fish, even his fruit. He never samples his food before reaching for the shaker: He knows it has yet to be salted to his liking.

The one thing my grandfather doesn't salt is his beer. If there's one taste my grandfather likes more than salt, it's the wheaty, fizzy flavor of Labatt's Blue. It comes in cans at fifty cents a pop. There is a full-sized [refrigerator](#) rigged up in the basement of my grandparents' summer cottage to accommodate my grandfather's beer. He buys it in [boxes](#) of thirty. They never last long.

My grandmother will spring for the occasional beer, but her drink of choice is wine. She fills up her first glass at noon, and from then until bedtime, she sees to it that it never stays empty for long. During our week-long annual family reunion in Benzie county on the shores of Lake Michigan, she takes advantage of the extra company to share the responsibility.

"I could sure use some more wine," she says, her subtle Southern accent drawing out the

"i." She says it without looking up, her eyes intent on the enormous half-finished rug-hooking draped across her lap. My uncle has learned to pick up the hint: it is often he who dutifully carries the glass to the kitchen for a refill. My grandmother watches him from her chair to make sure that he fills the glass to her liking. "Not so much ice," she will inevitably [snap](#). "Lord, I don't need so much ice."

"You don't need so much wine," my uncle mutters under his breath.

My grandpa buys white wine for my grandma in jugs that cost \$12.99 each. "At least it doesn't come in boxes," my other uncle, Barclay, likes to...

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...ce during sunset. My mother rests her head on my grandma's shoulder, my uncle puts his arm around my sister, I clutch my cousin's hand. We are all lost in the sky, in its bigness and our smallness, in the simultaneous senses of timelessness and of time slipping away. As the last sliver of sun ducks under the horizon, we count down together: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...

And it's gone. And for a few more seconds, the silence lingers. Then my cousin notices my fingers intertwined around his. "AAAAAAAH!" he shouts, untangling his hand and wiping it across the front of his shirt. "AAAAAAH!! COOTIES!!!"

My uncle examines his arm against my sister's shoulder. "My tan is darker than yours," he gloats. My grandma pats my mother on the head. Dessert is almost ready, she tells her. But first, she says, frowning down at her glass, she could really use a touch more wine.

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