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**HABITS OF THE HEARTLAND: CHANGING WORK-FAMILY CULTURES  
IN THE NORTHERN PLAINS**

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Note: Names of places and people are altered in this paper to protect their privacy

## Preface

This lengthy and very descriptive essay forms part of a much larger work I am currently writing about the West River community and farming culture in the northern plains. Anthropological works resist easy summary and they look to many readers like an aimless drive along little used section lines. There are no apologies to be made here. Life often looks the same way and anthropologists are students of life lived in its narrative richness. Nevertheless, the material presented here bears a good deal of organization along themes that emerged as important in the course of the research. The earliest sections provide necessary background. The later begin to describe the elements of a distinct cultural outlook to work and family. Throughout, the words of the people themselves get a lot of play. It's about time some of these people were given a chance to talk.

In lieu of an abstract, I open this paper with a poem by the North Dakota poet, Thomas McGrath. Born on a farm in the eastern part of the state in 1916, he attended the University of North Dakota, Louisiana State University, and Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar. His radicalism was rooted in his Dakota past. Blacklisted during the McCarthy Era, it took the native courage of people in his home state to bring him back to teach at North Dakota State University. He ended that career of instructing young men and women from the northern plains at Moorhead State University across the river from Fargo. Tom suggested long ago when I was one of his students that I take some courses in anthropology to learn as much as I could in a classroom about how other people lived. I owe much of what I do today to him.

### The End of the Line

The Iron Horse is rusting,  
In the statue-fenced plazas of the nameless towns,  
Who once crossed the wild prairies, cursing,  
(Voices of feathers and smoke)  
In his carbon rages, on his whirling shoes.

The mourning dove inherits his ancient voice;  
But who will awaken the heroic sleeper out of his history—  
That iron road to Noplace where he lately arrived  
In a gunfire of oratory near where the soldiers lie?

Alas! Joe Hill, the millionaires have thrown your torch backward  
into this future!  
Where now the locomotive is burning among the patriots.  
Fourth of July. Hot...  
Daddy, what's at the end of the line?  
Baby, I tell you, the big train don't go there no more.

--Thomas McGrath  
**Passages Toward the Dark**