

When I first began thinking of what might come from gathering dozens of rural millennials from all over the country together in one room, it came from a very personal need. I needed to see, to know, to talk with, to shake hands with, other young people like me who felt that “rural” was not just a population or location distinction but a term deeply connected to their identity and sense of self. I needed to know that I wasn’t alone. And beyond that, I was pretty hopeful that if we could just get to know each other a little bit, that amazing partnerships and opportunities would bloom and flourish.

When it came time to plan the first symposium in Port Townsend, WA, I and my team, sent out hundreds of emails looking for rural millennials to recruit as participants. When Malloreë reached out and excitedly said she may have an interested couple from a tiny town called Nauvoo, Alabama I was immediately ecstatic. It was exactly what I’d been hoping for: a meeting of the minds from very different, and yet very similar, places.

Andrew and Whitney did not disappoint. Their willingness to be vulnerable and to share personal successes and failures in front of a room of strangers was beautiful. Their thoughtfulness and kindness in comments and responses to others set an inspirational tone to the entire two days that I’m not sure would have been achieved without their presence. Their thick, lovable Southern accents definitely didn’t hurt any either. So when Whitney and Andrew said they’d be interested in hosting the next symposium in their community of Nauvoo, it felt like all of the pieces of our puzzle had fallen into place and that what I’d been hoping to achieve was becoming real. Continuing our message in Alabama and the rural South seemed true to our mission and true to what we want to achieve.

I am born and bred a Pacific Northwest girl. I melt in temperatures over 79 degrees and if I go more than a week away from an ocean, I get anxious. While I know that Nauvoo is different in many ways from my community of Chinook, Washington, we have many of the same struggles and opportunities; a community and society built on the boom and bust, a culture deeply tied to its surrounding environment and its natural resources, a people longing for the good ol’ days but with the desire to move independently and strongly into the 21st century, and a generation that wants to pass the torch but who doesn’t always have the tools to do that gracefully. I know that by connecting and imbedding myself into the struggles and opportunities of Nauvoo, I will not only come to understand that community better, but my community at the same time. That is where the power of this model and this work comes from.

Madeline Moore