

Growing up with Richard Linklater

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

August 6, 2014

If I'm honest, there were three things that led me to [Austin Seminary](#). I don't mean the (clear your throat and make your voice an octave lower) CALL, per say. Or even the academic verve of the place. Rather, I'm thinking about what made me fall in love with the quirky coffee shops with rusty lawn furniture. What drew me to the vibrant Mexican folk art, determined wildflowers, and laid-back milieu. I'm talking about all of the other things that let you know that a seminary is the right fit.

The first was my pastor, Rev. Tom Schmid, who handed me the Admissions Director's name while telling me beautiful, nostalgic stories of the city.

Then, when we visited, we met with [Dr. Jack Stotts](#). Jack asked my husband what he did, and when Brian explained that he worked at Sam's, Jack slung his long, lanky legs over the side arm of his chair and told us a bit about the Walton family. For Jack, there was no apparent disconnect between talking with someone who worked at a cash office at Sam's and being friends with the owners. He could navigate both worlds, with equal ease and respect.

Third, there was Richard Linklater, the film director who signifies a sort of litmus test. I can tell a lot about a person when I ask them what he or she thinks about Linklater. There's no judgment held for those who don't particularly enjoy the rambling sprawl of his films. I just mentally place them into a different category in my mind.

(Scratch that. I met some of the Methodist ladies from Bernie's home church a couple of years ago. And I do have to wonder about anyone who doesn't appreciate a man who actually has [Bernie living in his garage apartment](#).)

[Slacker](#), which followed characters throughout Austin, was like a siren song, wooing us to the weird. After spending four years at a fundamentalist Bible college in Chicago, feeling so tightly wound that I could hardly breathe, I needed a place where

I could unravel. I wanted something that would completely, utterly contrast where I had been. *Slacker*, with its celebration of precious, odd, and ordinary people, promised me that Austin would be that place. And it was.

A week ago, to mark the end of summer, our family relived a bit of our past. We went to New York to visit my husband's best friend from high school, a man who quickly moved into all of our lives so fixedly that my daughter and I can't imagine being without him any more than my husband can. Then, we went to the [IFC to watch *Boyhood*](#).

Most of Linklater's movies reflect real-time. His camera is not afraid to take the [two quiet minutes to walk up a winding staircase while anticipation builds between a couple](#). But *Boyhood* takes twelve years and condenses it into one sitting. With some sort of mystical time-bending power, Linklater does not lose the slow pace that characterizes most of his movies. We still have a chance to savor ordinary moments. There's no Hollywood makeup, smearing artificial age onto the skin. There's no switch-up of actors. There is the aging process—that alluring rearrangement of the face and body. The effect is astonishing.

Of course, Austin is featured, but other neighboring cities are there as well. I smiled as the camera moved through the towns that I've heard of so often, as my seminary classmates have dispersed throughout the state. And then there was the stunning, vast landscape of West Texas, which always illicit a soul full of awe.

As I looked at the row of friends in the movie theater, I could not help but appreciate this process of growing old. I've moved six times in the past two decades. With all that upheaval and my work, I am constantly meeting new people, making new friends.

But watching *Boyhood* reminded me of the beauty of being with people for decades, of watching them change and growing older together. We have seen one another unwind. We still hold on to a mass of expectations and hopes—some are dashed and the others remain with a more patient anticipation. Our faces and bodies have rearranged. Our professional lives are a bit steadier. Our passions have suffused into something that usually resembles contentment. Our art has taken on an everyday discipline, rather than the ambitious longing for some underground fame. And there is stunning beauty in all of this settling.

So I'm thankful for Richard Linklater, for allowing me to grow up with these images. In an odd way, he made my call to seminary louder and clearer. And now, through *Boyhood*, Linklater has allowed me appreciate that vast span of time as well as those ordinary moments that make up our lives.