

COME SEPTEMBER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

At 13, I met my best friend while taking lessons at an equestrian club in northeast Ohio. I write about him in my memoir, and his name is Mark. I was from a wealthy family in the upscale suburb of Shaker Heights, and Mark was from a working-class family in Appalachia that had recently moved to Ohio. Mark's father was the property manager at the club, where his family continued to enjoy the lifestyle familiar to them from rural Ohio.

When we turned 16, Mark's father changed jobs, and his family moved to a middle-class suburb in northeast Ohio. Mark did not fit in with the city kids, and he began using recreational drugs and alcohol in an attempt to bond with the 'cooler' schoolmates. However, after graduating from high school, things deteriorated quickly, and he started abusing the substances.

Mark joined the Army at age 20 to get his life straightened out, but he was soon discharged after several incidents of unruly behavior towards other soldiers. I visited him at the VA hospital in northeast Ohio, where he received a misdiagnosis of bipolar disorder, and he was struggling. His family had moved back to Appalachia while he was in the Army, and once released from the VA hospital, he returned to live with them. That is where the accident happened. He jumped from a moving train while using drugs and the fall left him battered and crippled. He fully recovered from the accident a year later, and I went to see him at his family's home. On an ill-fated night at a local dive bar—after Mark poured whisky and beer on top of his psychotropic and pain medications—I found myself driving Mark to the emergency room at a local rural hospital to have his stomach pumped. I left to go back to college in northeast Ohio the next day. It was the last time I saw him.

I published my memoir in April 2024 and decided to write a novel. I knew the story needed both a hero and a premise. I decided to turn my friend Mark into the hero and base the premise on a central question: How could our lives have unfolded if we had stayed friends? The story is pure fiction, created to tell an exciting tale about friendships, their challenges, and the power of reconciliation and forgiveness. It was our 9-year friendship that inspired it.

THEMES FROM MY LIFE THAT SHOW UP IN MY FICTION

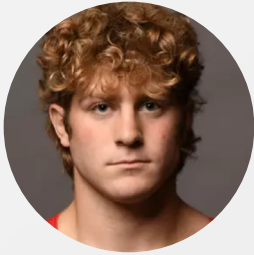
Authors are told to write what they know. I spent a year writing my autobiography (a detailed history of my life and how it unfolded) and another year turning it into a memoir. When I was ready to write my next book—a novel—I knew what themes had run through the story of my life. So, many of them will show up in my works of fiction. These include:

- ***Healing from childhood abuse***
- ***Not fitting in at school, and the long-term effects of bullying***
- ***Struggling to be heard and seen in a world where we don't fit in***
- ***Surviving the loss of parents, siblings, and friends***
- ***Living with addiction***
- ***Recovering from addiction***
- ***Having an alcoholic parent or life partner***
- ***Understanding that we always have choices in the face of our circumstances***
- ***Blaming our circumstances, becoming victims, and relinquishing our power***
- ***The role of therapy in managing trauma and addiction***
- ***Lives of the ultra-wealthy and learning that money doesn't bring happiness***

- ***Being comfortable in multi-cultural settings and learning foreign languages***
 - ***Being there for a good friend, even when things are tough***
 - ***The power of forgiveness***
 - ***Our love for horses and their ability to transform lives***
 - ***The complex relationship between parents and their children***
 - ***Finding a career that brings fulfillment***
 - ***Giving thanks to a higher power and being grateful for our blessings***
-



CHARACTERS



Ryan Jackson



Hank Jackson



Glenda Jackson



Kip Reynolds



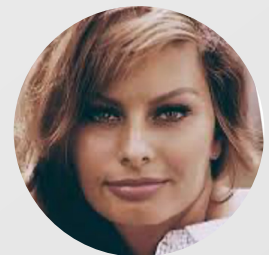
Claudia Kinzler



Adam Kinzler



Conrad Kinzler



Sophia Serrano



Patty Reynolds



Dudley Reynolds



Jenny Winthrop



Talia Alazar



Malik Barzani



Ahmed Karam

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

- *Did Hank show any respectable qualities at the beginning of the book?*
- *What were your initial impressions of Ryan, Kip, and Claudia? Did a friendship between them seem improbable given their diverse backgrounds?*
- *When you met Adam in Dr. Greene's classroom, did you think he had any qualities that would eventually make him likable?*
- *What did you predict would evolve between Kip and Adam? Did you think they would become friends?*
- *What accounts for Ryan and Kip's instant bond when they first met at the stables?*

SEPTEMBER 11TH AS A CATALYST

- *How does 9/11 shape the trajectory of each main character?*
- *Do you think their lives would have turned out similarly without that event?*

RYAN'S JOURNEY

- *How did you respond to Ryan's struggles with abuse, violence, and addiction?*
- *Did you feel empathy for him? Why or why not?*
- *How does Ryan's love for dogs, horses, and music impact the trajectory of his life?*
- *Why do you think Jenny was able to see the good in Ryan and fall in love with him so early in their relationship?*

HANK'S JOURNEY

- *Did your feelings about Hank change throughout the story?*
- *Did you believe Glenda when she told Jenny that Hank loved his children above all else?*
- *Did you empathize with Hank's struggles with anger and alcohol?*

CLASS & PRIVILEGE

- *Kip and Claudia are both from wealthy families. Did their social status play any role in their attraction to each other?*
- *What effect did coming from a wealthy family have on Kip's goals in life?*

KIP'S FRIENDSHIPS

- *How would you define the relationship between Kip and Ryan? What kept them connected despite Ryan's downward spiral and his altercation with Kip at the bar?*
- *Do you think Kip was right to maintain distance at times?*
- *How did Adam's relationship with Kip evolve over the years, and how did they finally accept each other as friends?*

CLAUDIA'S ROLE

- *Claudia is central to both Kip and Ryan's emotional journeys. How did Ryan's realization that he and Claudia would never have a romantic relationship affect his friendship with Kip?*
- *Should either Kip or Claudia have tried to turn their friendship into a romantic relationship earlier in the story? Why did each of them wait?*

GLOBAL VS. LOCAL

- *The book moves between Appalachia, Michigan, Colombia, Asia, and the Middle East. How did this global scope impact your experience of the story?*

JUSTICE AND RETRIBUTION

- *Adam, Kip, Claudia, and Ryan all grapple with the idea of retribution differently. How does each character define it?*
- *Do you believe anyone in the story truly finds closure?*

FINAL SCENE

- *What did you feel during Ryan's musical performance at the end?*
- *How does that moment tie back to the book's central themes?*

TITLE SIGNIFICANCE

- *What does Come September mean to you after finishing the novel?*
- *Why do you think the author structured the story around the month of September over 17 years?*

DEEP DIVE TOPICS

Ryan’s childhood trauma was the source of uncontrollable anger that rendered him unable to have healthy relationships with peers. It also led to his drug addiction. How else does growing up in an abusive home affect children as adults?

Kip is aware that Claudia, Adam, and Ryan come from families who openly show their love towards each other. He knows his family is different, saying “his house is not a home” because it is not filled with love. Is that emptiness a symptom of his family’s extreme wealth, or is it caused by something else? What is the larger message about money not being able to buy happiness?

The storyline is driven by the protagonists’ commitment to seek retribution for the lives that terrorists and their financiers destroy. Drug trafficking links between China, Colombia, Hizbullah, and the United States are explored in depth. The geopolitical forces at play in the underground world of drug trafficking are not based in fiction; the author has presented real-world facts. Were you aware of the links between these groups and the damage they are doing to Western society?

Ryan, Hank, and Dudley each deal with addiction issues throughout the story. The harm that drug and alcohol abuse inflicts on them, their friends, and their families eventually serves as the impetus to seek help. Ryan and Dudley

achieve sobriety by the end of the story. Could they have accomplished this if the kidnapping and shoot-out at the end of Part 3 had not so dramatically impacted their lives? Does an addict always need to face a life-threatening event to seek help?

Ryan and Hank are at odds with one another until the end of the story. Kip and Adam do not start off as friends, and eventually they have a falling out. Glenda is in the difficult position of having to protect Ryan from his father while helping Hank deal with his anger issues and drinking. Patty runs out of patience with Dudley's drinking and suggests it might be time to divorce him. Ryan and Kip have a major falling out and disconnect from each other for 5 years. By the end of the story, all the relationships have healed. What enabled the healing?

SCENE LOCATIONS

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

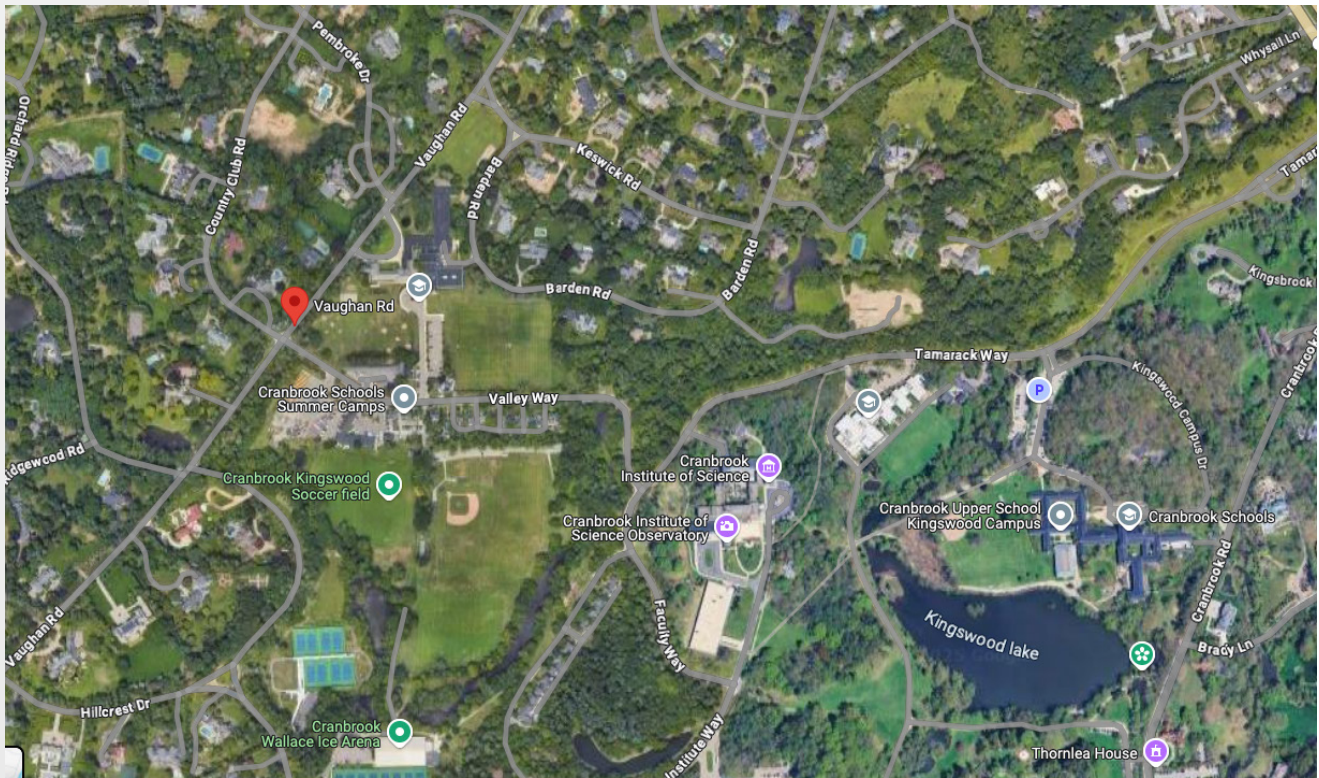
QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICHIGAN

*The Cranbrook School
Vaughan Road –the Reynolds' home*

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

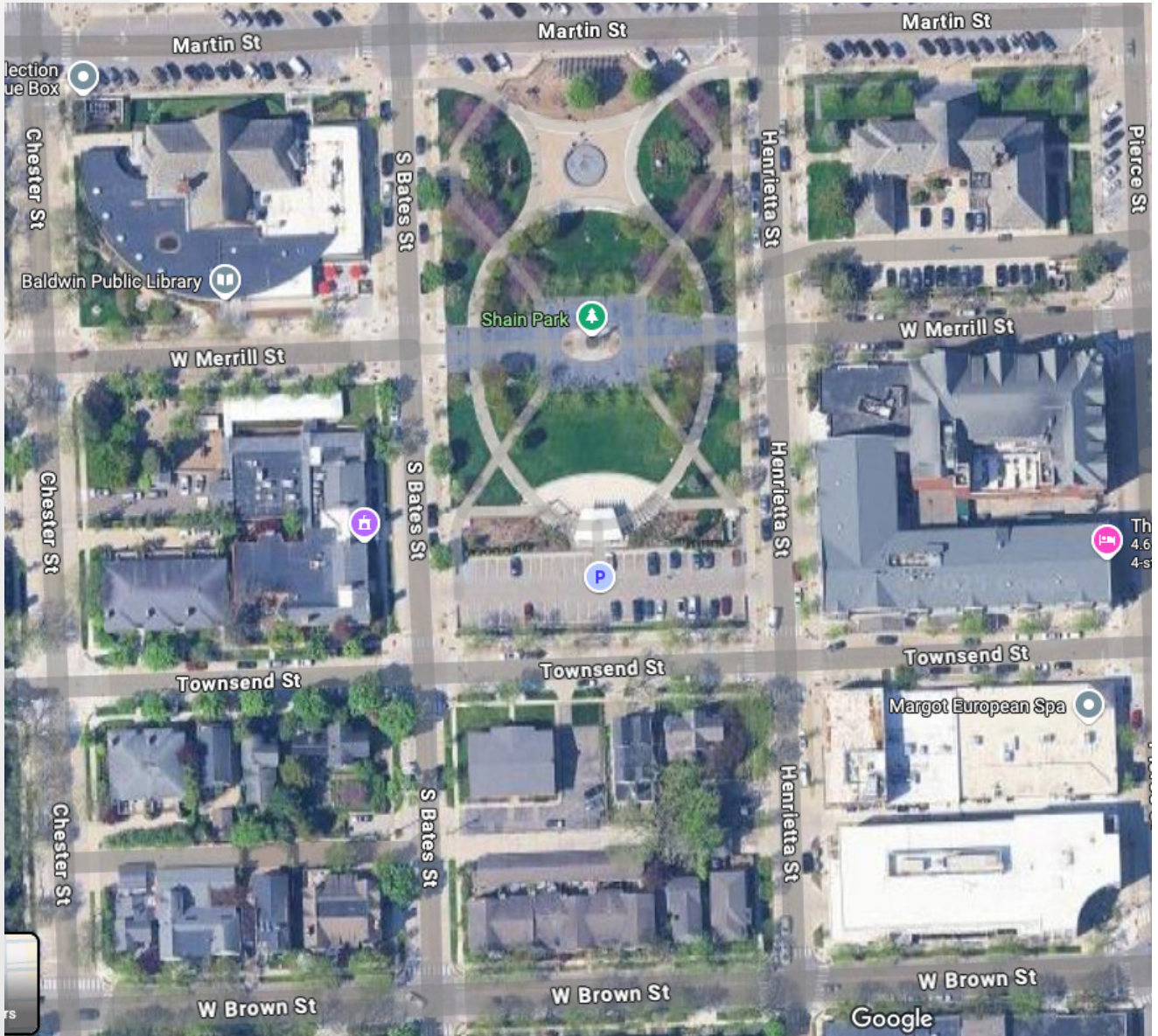
QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



BIRMINGHAM, MICHIGAN
Brown Street and Shain Park

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

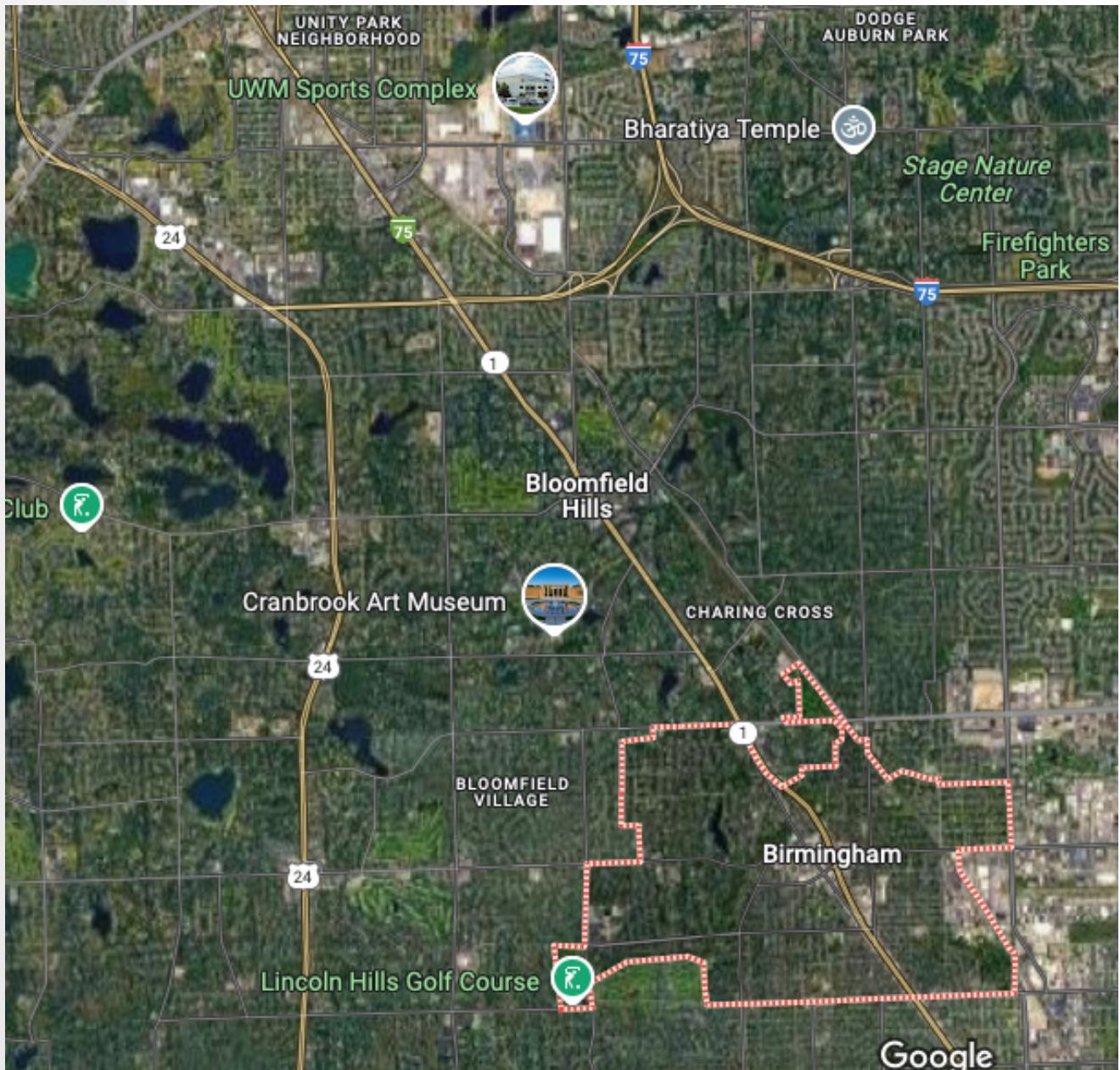
QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



PONTIAC, BLOOMFIELD HILLS, AND BIRMINGHAM, MICHIGAN

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

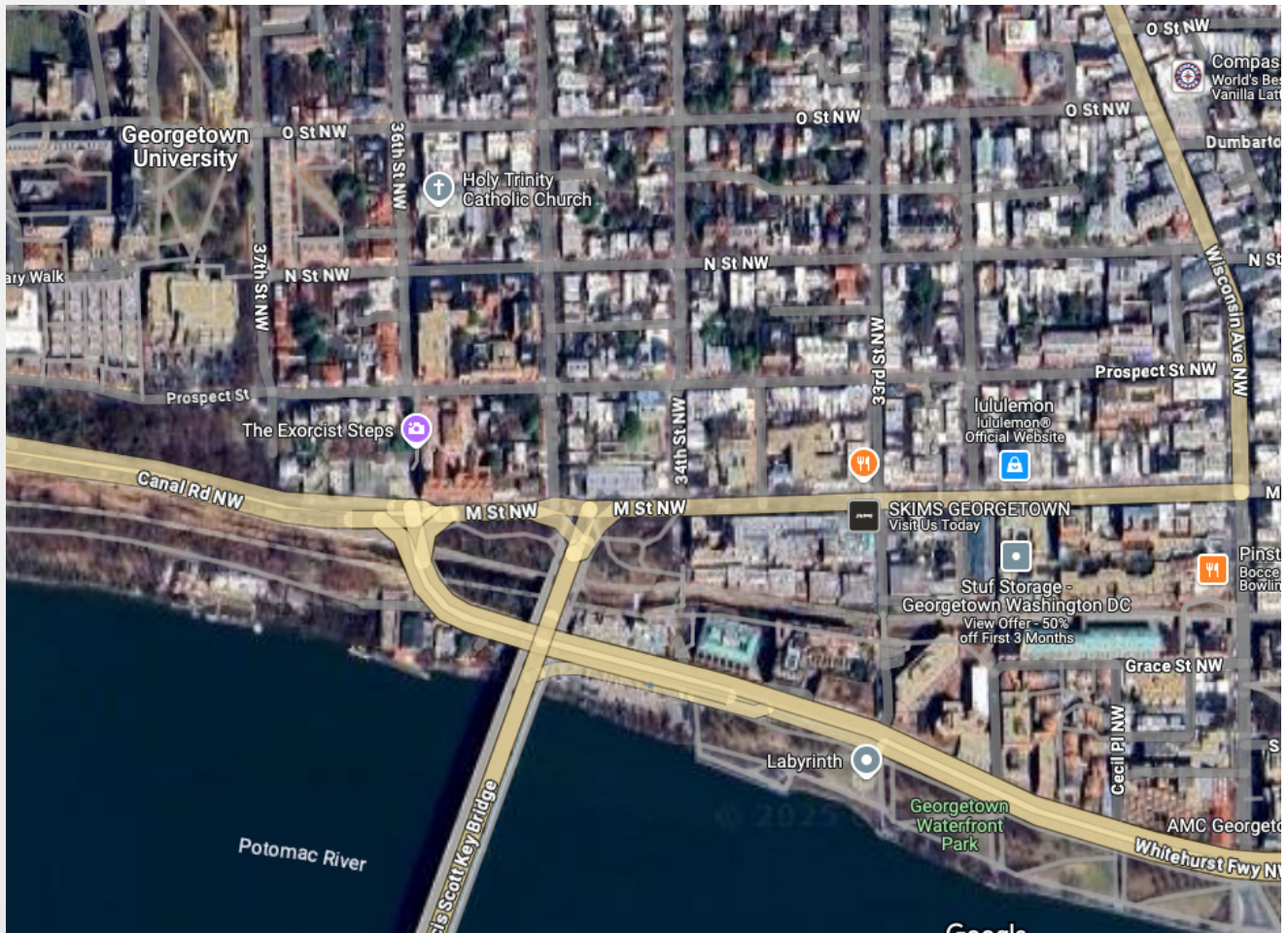
QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



GEORGETOWN, WASHINGTON DC
Georgetown University, Waterfront Park, 33rd Street

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



HONG KONG

Victoria Peak, The University of Hong Kong, the Mid-Levels

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

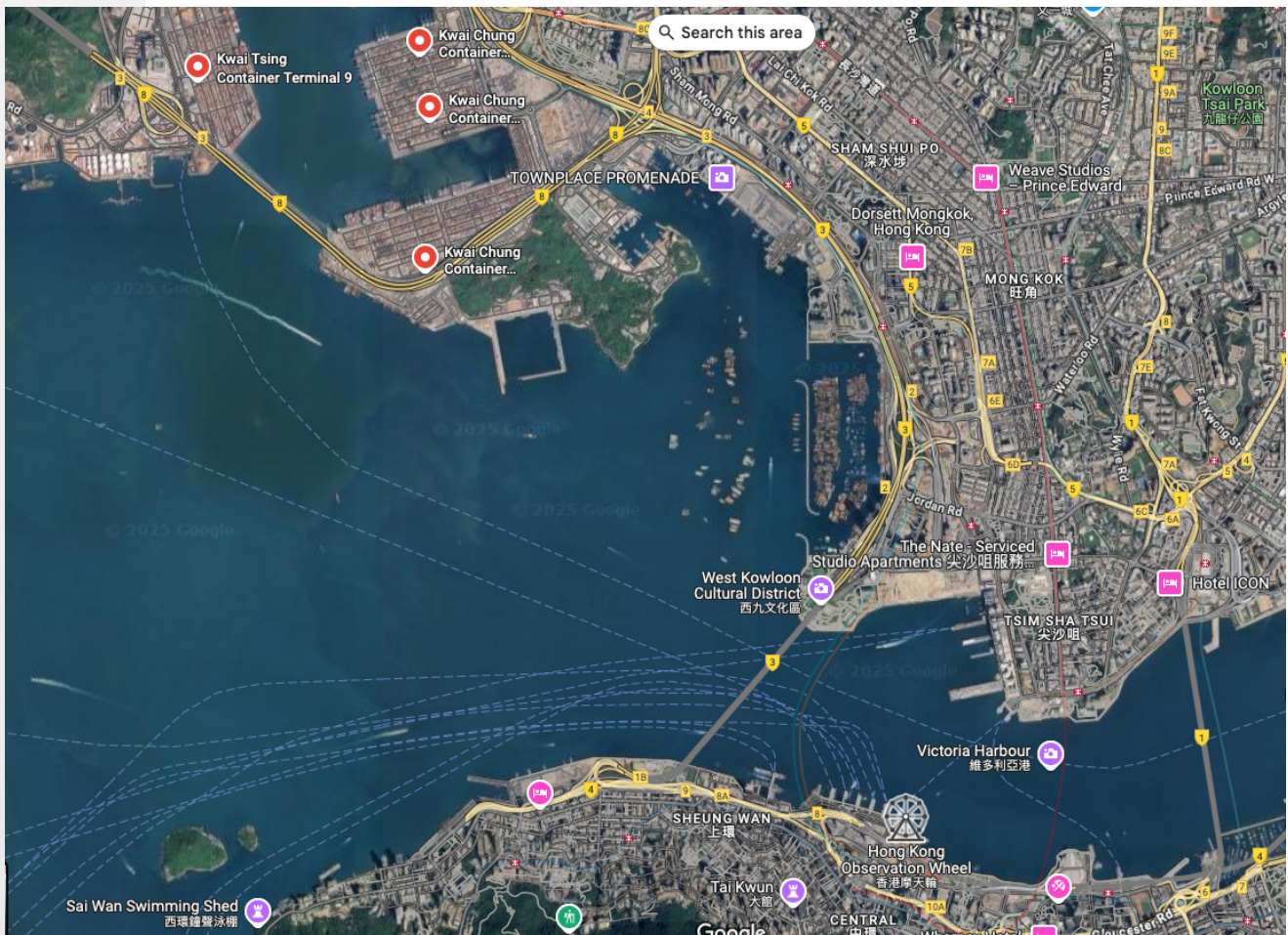
QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



KOWLOON

The Kwai Chung Container facility

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

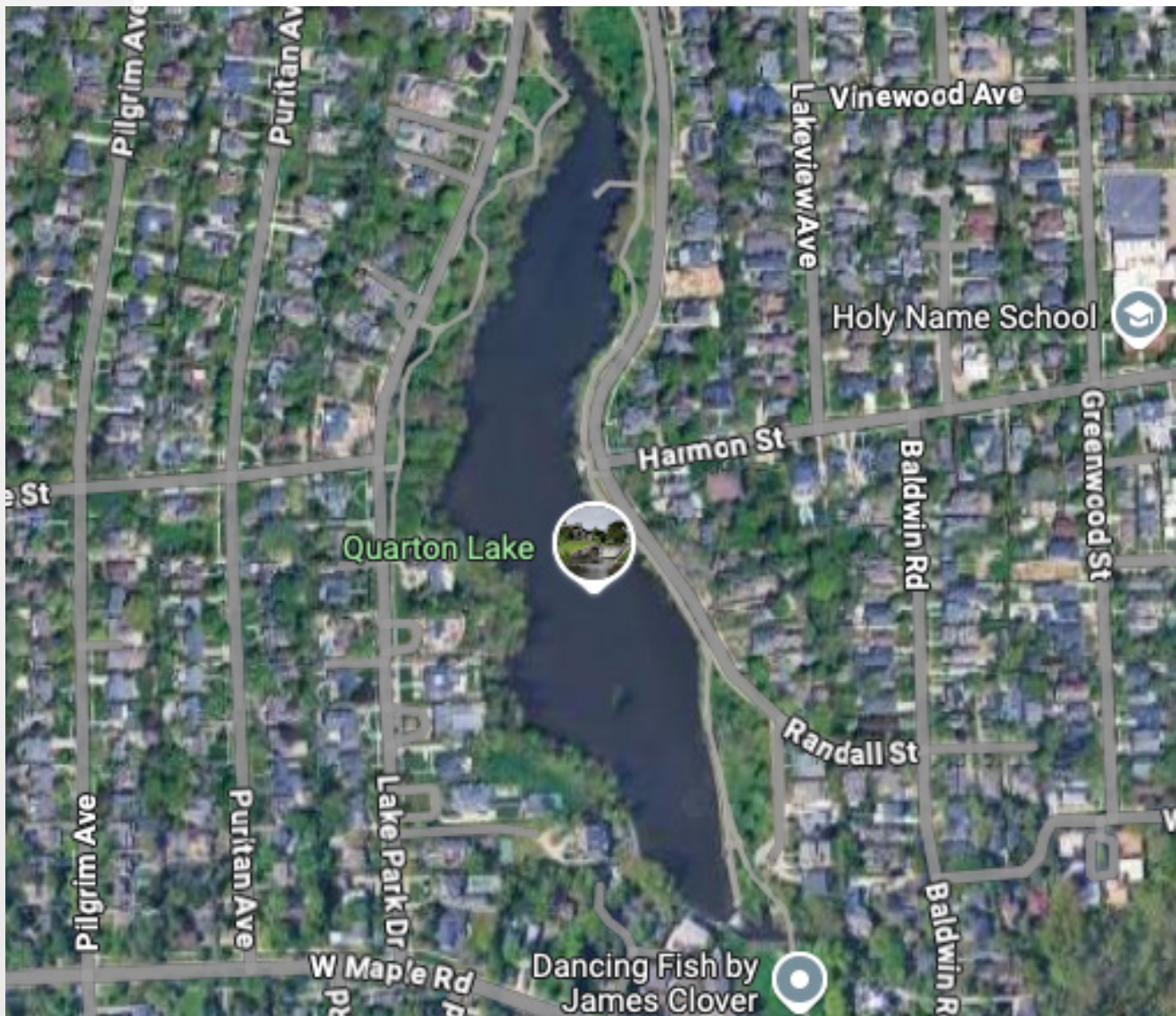
QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



BIRMINGHAM, MICHIGAN
Quarton Lake and Lakeview Ave.—the Kinzlers' home

CRANBROOK

B'HAM, B-HILLS,
PONTIAC

HONG KONG

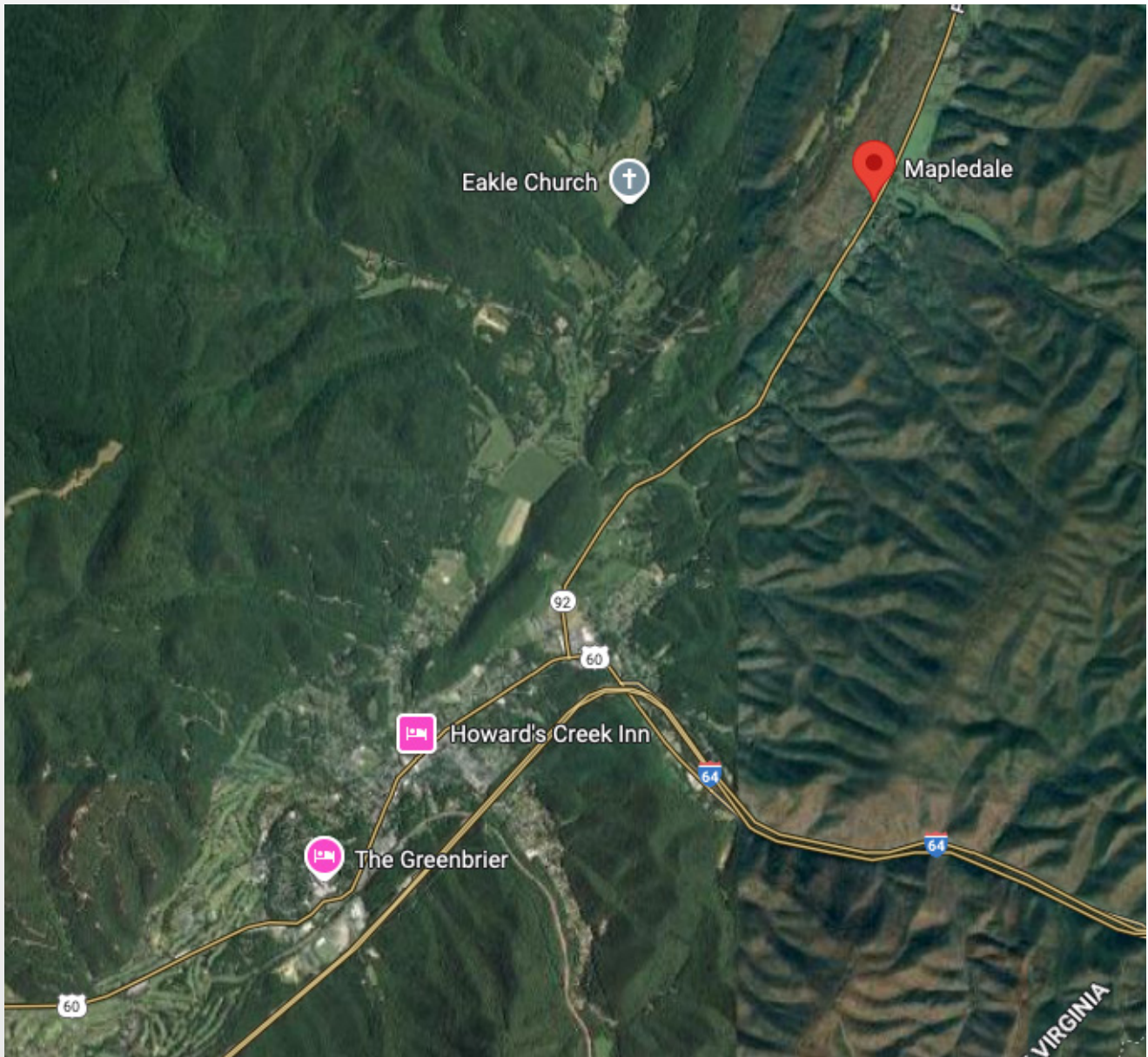
QUARTON LAKE

BIRMINGHAM

GEORGETOWN

KOWLOON

WEST VIRGINIA



GREENBRIER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

The Greenbrier Resort and Mapledale—the Jacksons' home



BLOOMFIELD OPEN HUNT
Inspiration for the Bloomfield Riding Club



THE CRANBROOK SCHOOL



ENTRANCE TO THE GREENBRIER RESORT



GREENBRIER RESORT

Main building, guest cottages, pool, and golf club



HONG KONG AS SEEN FROM VICTORIA PEAK



HOMES ON THE PEAK



THE KWAI CHUNG CONTAINER FACILITY



CITATION SOVEREIGN CHARTERED BY THE REYNOLDS FAMILY



GULFSTREAM G280—AHMED KARAM'S "SECOND HOME"

