

Revival came in little bits and pieces, broken by sighs. I shivered. We had climbed from cool, clear weather, to snow. I stood up and stretched, then walked a dozen yards to the peak of the mountain while the others put up the tent. Before me was a snow-capped panorama that didn't stop until I had turned a complete, 360 degree circle. We were at the top of the world, standing on a pinnacle.

This alpine view hides in my mind, cradled in mists and clouds and the haunting blue light from an overcast sky. This alpine view hides in my mind, cradled in mists and clouds and the haunting blue light from an overcast sky. Rusted tin cans were evidence that others had been there, too. But the scene doesn't play to everyone, only those who climb the hill.

It took a great deal of exertion to get to these places. I went there not knowing what I was going to see. Now these treasures go with me, around every bend and up over every hill in my life. I can't show them to anyone. I can't leave them for anyone. They are just there in my mind for me to enjoy, and maybe to pick up as threads to weave into the story of my own spinning.

Clabbered milk...

Do you remember clabbered milk? Likely not. Sometimes the world turns so fast, things of the past just disappear off the face of the earth. For instance, dinosaurs. No one has seen any of those for years.

Mostly, it's only those who have made their way bravely into geriatrics who carry the memory of creatively soured milk with them.

They also remember transportation before cars, spelling bees, treadle sewing machines, box suppers, and the horse- drawn plow. They cranked telephones and the first Ford engines. They stared at the radio in the middle of the living room, and at the first miniature black and white TV screens set in massive cabinetry.

They made their own butter until oleomargarine came packaged in white blocks at the grocers. Pretty soon, all they had to do was squeeze the button on a plastic casing to work yellow color through the blob.

I can still hear my Dad's voice lamenting, "It's a shame they don't teach penmanship in school anymore." My own generation, my kids, and their kids, grew up without having to draw spiraling circles across a whole lined page. But all the octogenarians remember.

In our neighborhood, Newton milks his own goats. I try to keep his fresh goat milk at the front of his refrigerator and feed the older milk to the cats. "Oh, honey," he says, "don't worry about me. I grew up on soured milk." He has an iron gut. At his age, he hurts in his muscles and bones, but he can eat anything he wants. He spends a lot of time in the kitchen fixing his favorites.

All those cultured milk processes were ways to preserve old milk. People made cottage cheese, butter, cheese, yoghurt, clabber, and fermented milk products. They used the whey left over from the cheese curds, and drank the buttermilk left after the lump of butter was formed, which they remember was just before the churner's arm fell off.

All this because they lacked one crucial modern convenience. Refrigerators!

There were seven children and two parents in Newton's family. He says it was nothing for them to drink two gallons of milk at one meal. Surplus milk made milk toast for breakfast, cornstarch pudding,

bread pudding, and baked custard. The rest was cultured and preserved.

Folks flavored their clabber or buttermilk with sorghum syrup or honey, and Newton laughs remembering that one brother seasoned his with pepper!

Pearl is a spry teeny-bopper in her 80s. She loves the taste of clabbered milk, and the memories it brings along with it. She says she still has the churn she grew up with, and other items, like their butter bowl.

B.J., in his 90s, was failing fast after a third surgery. But there is no frailty in the man. He threw away his medicines, went out to sit under a tree and make himself well. He dosed himself with fresh air, healing exercises, and goat milk - the magic medicines of healing, he says. These days, he walks with canes, but he walks, and visits, dines out, and travels.

I tried some clabbered milk. Sure don't care much for it. So far, I haven't found anyone under the age of 70 who remembers or appreciates it.

There's much more than flavor laced among the molecules of clabbered milk. One sniff of the beverage carries with it the treasures of youth and family for those who lived with no refrigerators.

Someday there won't be anyone who remembers push-pulls, switchboards, or clabbered milk, but I don't want that to happen without tribute to the durable folks who grew up on sour milk, and learned to love it.

Stringing words...

Fifty lights. There are 50 bulbs on each strand of lights that trim our Christmas tree. Fifty lights strung together that must work together or they don't work at all.

I'm deep in thought here, transfixed by the soft glow of colors against green branches, hypnotized by twinkling tinsel. The same 50 lights create a new picture each year. The trees we decorate from year to year never look exactly the same.

Like letters. Twenty-six letters, strung together, create all the sounds of our language, all the words we utter, all the stories we read. Only 26 letters, arranged in hundreds of way to make up the thousands of words we use in millions of sentences.

A local author and workshop leader often asks listeners to fold a piece of paper in half, and keep folding it. One small rectangle on the page represents all the people in the world who can read and write in any language. She uses it to impress upon us that if we have the gift of writing, we can't

keep it to ourselves, but must feel a duty to pass it on.

Writing the *Great American Novel* is not the only way to share. A poem, a letter, a note of comfort or congratulations - all of these are ways to pass around the gift of words. I always appreciate the historian in a family, the one who preserves memories the rest of us forget. Some dig into genealogy, and some have found enough interest among their relatives to publish a family newsletter.

Writers from our area have written devotions for inspirational websites, crafted greeting card messages, entered writing contests, compiled cookbooks, and written every kind of magazine article. Several have written educational curriculum and Sunday School lessons. Texans are consummate recorders of history from every aspect. A few have made a major commitment to correspondence that uplifts shut-ins and those with specific health issues.

The Christmas holiday once again passes before us. Hiding behind a thinning veil is another new year.

Twenty-six letters. It's got me thinking. Before it's time to string lights again next year, I resolve to string letters and words across pages and pages in dozens of new ways. I'm ready to tumble through the doorway of another new year with a handful of pens and a tablet.

And may all who love to write find a way to bless others with the gift that has blessed them.

Granny's sepia profile...

Mom always said I looked a lot like Granny Bishop.

I'd look in the mirror at my little girl face, and compare it to the grim sepia visage staring out of a very old photograph, and I'd wonder how Mama could say that about me. To me, there seemed no resemblance at all. And what's more, I didn't think I could ever look like that.

Mama explained to me there were no camera smiles in those days, and that Granny Bishop actually had a pretty smile and bright, loving eyes. She said you couldn't even wiggle while the photographer stuck his head under a black hood and pulled a chain to expose a glass plate. She described the bulky cameras with their accordion pleats from those days before celluloid film.

Make no mistake. Granny Bishop was a good person. She loved me a lot. Mom said she liked to carry me around in her arms and hug me and tell

Grandpa Bishop how cute I was. My memories are fleeting, little gauzy bits of remembrance.

I vaguely remember their house in Seattle, most of it tucked in my heart and not in my mind. It had a warm, brown feeling, with lace curtains letting in a dappled light. There were dim lamps whose only brightness was in their ceramic character. I remembered, not really seeing, but sensing, a brown velvet couch, an oak upright piano, and brown frames around family photographs stepping up the wall with the staircase. Mama confirmed the veracity of my memory, reminding me that the couch and piano I grew up with were from her house.

A place I loved to sit was at the bottom of the dark, rich stained mahogany stair rail with its imposing carved newel. It was a focal point of the entry way, but to me it was a grand play area.

In the photo, Granny Bishop had gray hair swept away from her face and piled on top of her head. My memories said she wore chunky-heeled shiny black shoes laced around puffy ankles, and her coat was huge and thick and dark brown. I'm certain she was never aware that the lapel always bumped me in the nose when she bent over to gather me up.

That was so many years ago. I was looking at those pictures again recently. Thinking how I didn't get to know her for very long, that I was so young, and there is so little I remember of her. I was tilting

the photo this way and that, looking at her face from different angles, picturing the flat Kodak image fleshed out into three dimensions.

As I studied her features and compared them to mine, I noticed something. Maybe Mom was right! Now that my high cheekbones have sunk and my jawline has turned to jowls, I think...hmmm...yes, I just might look quite a bit like Granny Bishop.

Acknowledgements:

Most of these stories were first published by the Tabor family newspapers of Callahan County, Texas. Among the first readers was one who told me she read the whole newspaper each week, saving "County Roads" for dessert. The best of teachers showed up at every turn: critters, neighbors, veterinarians, other goat owners, and librarians. Along the path to publication were my many lovely sisters who encouraged me over the years, and the priceless fellowship of Abilene Writers Guild who offered suggestions at the start. I offer the biggest bouquet of love and devotion to my sisterhood at Silver Boomer Books. A dream is best shared, and they have walked every step of it with me.

My goat kids and grandkids made the living of the adventure worth writing about, and whenever I stopped to wonder "how'd I get here?" the answer was "MyKeeper." Of all the adventures of my life, I'd hate to have missed this.

About the Author

Ginny Greene likely arrived on Planet Earth with a blue pencil clutched in her fist. Past president of Abilene Writers Guild, her writing life includes years of newspaper lifestyle features, a newspaper column, and a handful of newsletters, including seven years editing the Guild's newsletter. For fun, Ginny writes poems and works crossword puzzles. She edits everything, even street signage, especially yard sale signs, even in her sleep. She's happiest seeing her love of words spilled over to her children and grandchildren, including daughter, Karen, also a Silver Boomer Books editor. While still loving her Northwest hometown, Ginny is at home with Larry near Abilene, Texas, and her grown family. Ginny's book *Song of County Roads* is scheduled for publication in 2009.