

of them so they'll keep laying. But a Banty hen can barely be prodded off her nest when she decides it's time to set a clutch of eggs. She'll take only tidbits of sustenance, then scuttle back to the nest. Whether she herself is cold or not, the damp body heat beneath her is the exact environment needed for the viability of her eggs.

The shrieking north wind sent a chill down my spine. Blustery blasts pierced the gaps of the Banty's corner nest, ruffling her feathers. The only cackle was the wind laughing at her misery.

In great sympathy, I went round back of the chicken house and patched the holes for her. Spreading flat a large cardboard box for insulation, I quietly tacked it to the back wall and around the corner. It was sufficient to cut off the brutal attack. The wind huffed its disgust and went off to play nasty somewhere else.

My efforts pleased me, and I left the little hen to happily set her eggs till a warmer day when baby chicks would be mature enough to peck their way into the sunlight.

Next morning, though, I found she had abandoned that nest. Several feet along the back wall was a new dent in the hay. She had scratched out another nest, more to her liking, and in it was one fresh egg. Nothing could entice her to return to the abandoned clutch of eggs.

Blowing meanly across the new nest was a cold shaft of wind. It's tone changed when I came around the corner. I just know it was scolding me.

Many lessons like this have taught me how much learning and serving are cloaked in the words "have dominion." What do I know? I was just trying to help. And what would a creature of absolutely no brain have to teach me?

I didn't know that little Banty hen and the North Wind were in cahoots together. Tough as it may have been for her, she knew a cold draft of moving air is better for her maternity room than a warm but stagnant corner nest.

Life on the fly...

A fly, they say, lives
a day, only one day
Cramming all hopes and
dreams and pain and joy
into time divided
by merely minutes.
How is the value
of a life measured
this way? One buzz, one
eat, one crawl upon
the wall, a frantic
clasp to procreate...
then off to sleep, a
long eternal sleep,
by exasperated
swat or ripe old age.
Did he reach his dreams?
See his grandchildren?
All the richness of
seventy years distilled

to the zany flutter
of diaphanous wings
The fly truly lives
a life on the fly.

Poem Comes Calling

So much to do
today
but what can
I do
when a poem leaps
at me
grabs my hand
and pours
words, wonderful velvety words,
slippery-slidey magic words,
and tickly, lyric words
raining
through the sieve
of my mind.
No passing up this visit.
Welcome, Poem!

Wind driven...

It's like a living thing this morning, the wind. Cold came with it, bullying the heat. In a few short hours the wind subdued temperatures in the mid-90s to a chilly 48 degrees, and left summer whimpering, "Uncle."

So many winds live here in West Texas. They each have distinctive characteristics. A wind that brings cold into battle with hot dry desert winds, and triumphs, should have a name.

Wind names elsewhere are mistral, monsoon and typhoon, sirocco and Santa Ana. Even simoom. There are gales and hurricanes, and breezes like gusty and zephyr. Somewhere in the world is a wind with the beautiful, deceptive name, Mariah.

But that's not enough to classify all the West Texas winds. The North Pole populations list something like 31 names for snow, because they have a lot of snow. Their snows are defined by season, size, texture, moisture. From what I've seen, there

are enough winds in West Texas for at least 31 descriptions.

A rare wind came by the other day. It passes by at least once a summer close to a spot I'm standing.

This wind wears a skin - a strong, tightly knit wind skin to keep it from dissipating into the generic winds. It has a nucleus, a tail, a body that propels it on airborne feet.

This wind needs a name. The name should tell how it barges across the land, a rude interloper, a wind devoid of manners. It is a loud, brash show-off, unmindful of its path, intimidating livestock and shoving trees sideways.

The name must tell of its voice, for a bellowing howl runs with it. It's a voice that sounds like a motor wound up to top speed. It gets your attention.

This wind comes on fast and barrels across our property, racing some unseen timekeeper. One summer, this strange wind charged through a stillness. Other years, it has challenged a wider, bigger wind. Its compact size lets it dodge and ram and punch its way past, the whole time yelling at the top of its raspy bass.

I heard it coming the other day. Its voice swelled to a rage. I stood mesmerized, watching its invisible passing as if it were a train going by. It leaped our boundary trees, cascaded into the field,

rushed headlong across the pasture, leaned up hard against the fenceline. At the break in the roadside trees, it made a wild escape through the driveway. It roared across the road and faded into the neighboring field.

This wind has such a presence. In a way, it is like the water in a stream plummeting down a mountainside, crashing over cliffs, and surging over rocks. A wind like this should have a name.

This Wind

Who's up there
hurling the wind
above the trees
volley after volley
whistling past - Listen!
another heave-ho,
sounds beastly heavy,
takes a strong arm
to lob it aloft,
Olympics athlete
heaving granite
balls of air.

Block and Tackle...

This is not a football story. Nor is it a story about pulleys and lifting equipment. The block I'm talking about is writer's block. I've got it bad. This could be a very short story. I can't think of a thing to say. And further, I'm nearly convinced at this point that I never will again.

Words are what I love. I love how 26 little letters can be arranged to make thousands of words. The words can be used over and over to put the thoughts from my head onto paper. Paper that can be read by others.

The process of writing whisks me off to another world - somewhere away - so deep, so high, so far away I lose myself in it. Everything is shut out. All the kids' noises, TV blare, the buzz of the clothes dryer, the ding of the microwave that tries to remind me it has heated that same cup of water three times so far today. If I remember to start dinner, it still might end up burned or unfinished.

I've missed appointments and left kids waiting to be picked up.

Sometimes I get hung up on an awkward phrase or paragraph. It's frustrating. I fidget in my chair, casting about in a mental void for the right words or the right way to use them. When I'm worn to the nub and all seems hopeless, I have to tell myself very firmly - There ARE enough words in this language to say what you mean!

I get my second wind, charge forward, tackle the problem paragraph and wrestle it to the floor. I'm left sweating, exhausted, and shaky. It takes a lot out of me, but it is a glorious and victorious feeling when that certain "something" says "That'll work."

But this week there is no story in my head. I'm blocked. Maybe it's the season change, or the pressures of a busy fall schedule, or the weather. Too much gray sky takes the wind out of my sails. Worries multiply like virus and squeeze out creative thoughts.

There are a lot of reasons for writer's block, but reasons don't really matter. All that matters is that I somehow manage to untangle the knots that hold me in this paralysis.

Avoidance is the first thing I always try. It never works, but I still try. I make a phone call, or

fold clothes, crucial tasks like that. I walk out to the mailbox, amble alongside the goats, pick up a book, wash dishes, stare out the window, pick lint off my shirt.

Finally, I have to sit down and put words on paper. Any words. Words call up more words. It makes me understand what W. H. Auden meant when he said, "How do I know what I think, until I see what I say?" I dread those days when I feel like a robin tugging on a worm that does not want to come loose of the earth.

Hey! I just checked the word count for the fifty zillionth time. The computer says it has dutifully preserved 537 of my words. That's enough for a dry spell. I can quit now. I'll be back next story, hopefully blessed with a heap of words.

Wind Travels...

The chameleon wind is on a whirlwind tour.

She might have made it across the countryside unnoticed, except for the dirt road that lay like a ribbon across her path. The sand she snatched from the ditch sketched her swirling profile in the air as she spun to the edge. The dust devil is an impish child of Mother Wind, but she was allowed to indulge her whimsy, twirling an eggbeater path across the field.

She lets loose her breezes to eddy and twist in an upward spiral. The handful of dirt sifts through her fingers, but she juggles it upward again before it can fall back to the earth.

In her swishy dust devil costume, she danced across the field and into a yard. Inches before crashing against the white house next door, she laughed and whirled, cutting a sharp turn to the left. It was then she dropped the sand, and the visible wind disappeared.

The wind child traveled on in secret until she couldn't bear the suspense. Exploding with giggles, she popped into the top of a tree and whipped it frothy. The leaves were still laughing when she touched the branches of the next tree, skipping from one to the next along the row. The sprite ruffled the composure of the stately sentinels that stood windbreak duty along the property line. She thought they took their job much too seriously, and she loved coaxing them to laughter. A merry "tee-hee, tee-hee" followed her frolic to the last treetop.

For a while, again, her wind song was a faint whisper, giving no clue to her next direction. Then, she flashed her gauzy skirts and flung herself at the tree to the east. She shouted in its ear, then ran away, laughing.

It was time to go, but there was one more tree to the north the wind child couldn't resist. She could never resist a willow. Flopping across its canopy, she tickled it mercilessly, and left it pale and green and gasping for air. It seemed the willow hollered, "Come back, come back, that was fun!"

But Mother Wind grabbed her hand and together they moved on.

Music of Seasons

Consider the seasons — of love
and health and life and
celebration



Holiday heels...

"Oh, I wonder how you serve it? Where would you even find it?" I asked the questions after catching the tail end of a Today Show bit with a Southern cook.

"What are you talking about?" MyKeeper asked. "Find what?"

"Whale meat. They said something about eating whale."

MyKeeper cracked up. He laughed and laughed, trying to tell me they were talking about eating WELL.

That's just a sample of how tricky it has been for me to adapt to all things Texas.

Our first days here were filled with utility hook-ups, fast food meals, and getting the girls registered for school. The drawl was pleasant in our ears, but sometimes I just didn't get it.

At school, class requirements and electives were discussed. The required courses were listed on

Punkin's schedule. Everything fit so far. There were no conflicts of time for Math, Science, History, and Language.

The counselor told us Spache was one of the electives. It was available 2nd period, and 6th, but if she chose that elective her math class would have to be moved around. I'd never even heard of a Spache class, so I finally asked, just to clear up my confusion.

"Oh, you know," the advisor said, "Spache. Theater Arts. Drama class."

"Oh. Speech." I felt really silly.

The hardest words in the Texas lexicon are oil and soil. Add boil to that list, too. For the longest time I thought the guy was speaking fondly of his ol' well. And I was likewise puzzled for days when a rancher held up a fistful of dirt and said something was missing from the soul.

The kids tried to coach me on Y'all. They made me practice over and over, and told me I needed to put more energy into the 'ALL' part of it.

By now, we've been in Texas several years. I'm so used to the accent I hardly hear it anymore. I can still be tripped up, though, as I found out the other day. A caller was giving me a name and address over the phone. "It's at Holiday Heels. YourKeeper will know where it is."

"Holiday Heels?" I repeated. I wrote down the number and gave the message to MyKeeper.

"What in the world is this?" he asked.

"Holiday Heels. They said you'd know where it is."

He choked with laughter again. "You mean Holiday Hills!!! It's a church!"

It could have been a shoe store, or a good place to go for a pedicure, or Santa's boot maker. I still picture the congregation kicking it up for the Lord, though. To me it will always be Holiday Heels, a very enthusiastic church.

Pitching woo...

It's about time to rake up all the wasted hay and droppings from the goat pen again. Not an enjoyable chore. I have to talk myself into it.

A couple of days ago, I knew I was nearly ready to get out there. I found myself considering the more pleasurable aspects. When I spend that much time in the goat pen, the herd starts treating me like one of them. They follow me around and rub against me. They look at me with an acceptance that speaks of deep friendship, sometimes cemented by pulling my hair while I'm bent to the task.

Next, I pictured the younger goats walking between my feet and jumping up on me. The bigger ones walk ON my feet, and wedge themselves between me and whatever I'm trying to do. They think they're helping. They have to get their nose into everything. Their nose, and then their whole body.

That thought erased all thoughts of mucking out the pen for another few days.

Days later, an urge came upon me again. I gathered a rake and a wheelbarrow. Then, thank goodness, something happened, and I had to put it off till the next opportunity. Maybe the dog dish was empty, or the kitchen trash can was full. I don't remember the cause of that postponement.

A brilliant thought came to me one cool, cloudy morning. What I really need is chickens. Enough chickens to do the job for me. But then I'd have to clean out the chicken house, too. Ugh! By the end of the day, I'd given up on that idea, and the next day was way too hot for such labor.

Yesterday, I looked for the pitchfork. I found it, but it was a fork with no pitch. The handle was lying broken and useless not far from the rusted fork.

I mentioned to MyKeeper that we needed a new handle for our pitchfork. He said it would be no more expensive to buy a whole new pitchfork than to buy a handle for a broken one.

I explained I've had these urgings to get the job done. I want to get the leavings spread onto the garden before tilling. Of course, if we don't get rain, there will likely be no garden this year, but if we get soaked I want to be ready with seeds. Even if there's no gardening this year, the goat pen still needs its periodic cleanup.

"Hey, that's great!" he said "I've been wondering what to get you for Valentine's Day. That's just perfect!"

This is the same guy who has such tender thoughts about engagements. We were discussing a friend's search for a ring for his fiancé. The ring chosen was a hardship to the budget, and MyKeeper said, "Why do people buy engagement rings anyway? Diamonds are so expensive." I replied that it was a symbol of belonging to each other. He said, "So's a brand on the haunches. Cheaper, too."

MyKeeper was pleased with himself over the Valentine gift idea. "And everybody says I'm not a romantic," he bragged. "Don't you think that's pretty thoughtful of me?"

"Oh, you're all right!" I said, giving him a pal slap on the back.

What a guy. At least I'll be able to get the goat pen cleaned out before Spring.