

Some selections in Freckles to Wrinkles have been published previously.

"Afternoon at Grandfather's House" – *Artella* web site * "Guard Duty" – *Chicken Soup for the Horse Lover's Soul* * "The Gate" – *Streetlight* * "Nearing Menopause, I Run into Elvis at Shoprite" – *Karamu* (Word Press), *Grow Old Along with Me* (Papier-Mache Press) * "The Fifties" – *Rattle, Radiance* (Word Press) * "Creamed Spinach" – *Echolocation* * "Ballet Class" – *Coffee Break Poetry* www.cafepress.com * "Spring Fever" – *Imprint: Enlightening, thought-provoking and uplifting poetry* * "Expect Joy, Expect Blessings" – www.boomerwomenspeak.com, July 2007; excerpts in Linda's book, *The Hip Grandma's Handbook* * "Gumming of Age" – another version published by *flashquake* * "Killing a Frog" – December 2003/January 2004 inaugural issue of *Plum Ruby Review* and August 2007 issue of *Contemporary American Voices* * "Wild Sugar" – *Acorn* * *Universities West Press Anthology* * "Red Tide" – June-August, 2007 edition of small literary journal *Skyline Magazine* * "Tip Boxes" – *Coe Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Fall 2006 * "Carol Lee Turns 60..." – *Erato*, February 25, 2005 * "Meet Frankenstein" – poetrymagazine.com and *Greatest Hits by James Penga* (Pudding House) * "Four on a Fold" – *Brother*, Action Press, 1996, and *Boomer Girls: Poems by Women from the Baby Boom Generation* (University of Iowa Press) * An earlier version of "Education" – *When I Was a Child: A Poetic Collection of Childhood Impressions* (PoetWorks Press, 2003) * "Bridging a Woman's Life" *Houston Poetry Fest Anthology 2005*. * "Bloodlines" – *Capper's Magazine*, October 2000 * "Connie Sue's Concerns" – (*North of New Orleans*, Summer 2004) * "Expect Blessings; Expect Joy" (Boomer Women Speak web site) * "Graying in my Life" – *The Lost American: From Exile to Freedom*

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Dedication

*This volume is dedicated
to every freckled day
of our past
and every wrinkle
in our time.*

Ginny Greene

Becky Haigler

Kerin Riley-Bishop

Barbara B. Rollins

The Silver Boomer Books

Silver Boomers
a collection of prose and poetry
by and about Baby Boomers
March, 2008

Freckles to Wrinkles
June, 2008

This Path
Fall, 2008

Others by Silver Boomer Books Press:

Song of County Roads
by Ginny Greene (Fall, 2008)

Slender Steps to Sanity
by O. A. Stepper (Winter, 2008-2009)

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*From Freckles**Barbara B. Rollins*

children.” Doris Day ~§~ “Age does not bring you wisdom, age brings

Soundtrack

Barbara B. Rollins

Mary had a little lamb
my name is Sam, Sam I am
hippity hop, hippity hop
here I come, ready or not

push 'em back, push 'em back
yackity yack, don't talk back
he loves me yes, he loves me not
he said he'd call, but he forgot

a hundred bottles of beer on the wall
yes, Mom, I know, I meant to call
grades are out, I got a C
next week we're playing Tennessee

here comes the bride
hand in hand and side by side
hush little baby, don't you cry
mommy's got to go now, kiss me 'bye

wash your hands and comb that hair
the hundredth time, we're almost there
don't jerk the wheel – slow – whoa
have you settled yet on where to go

you wrinkles.” Estelle Getty ~§~ “Wrinkles will only go where the

this house just echoes it's so quiet
I'm playing bridge next Thursday night
don't forget the passports, Dear
I told you that! You just don't hear

grow old with me, the best is yet
Dad's laugh and hugs we won't forget
I shall wear purple, red hats, too
yes, Sweetie, Grams kiss your booboo

the thing that flies, yes, a plane
where did I put my walking cane
I didn't hear a thing she said
I don't hear much outside my head

I thought I'd teach the world to sing
but now I mess up everything
when words and names I know won't come
then in my head the whole earth hums

Riding Into Time

Lisa Timpf

He was brown, with a black mane and tail and white socks. If he had a name, I don't remember it.

I saw him whenever I accompanied my parents to the grocery store in town. Depositing a dime into the coin slot would bring him to life, this mechanical horse, and for a few handfuls of seconds, the lucky child for whom that ride had been purchased would sit on the saddle, feet firmly planted in the western-style stirrups, eyes closed to block out the store and the shoppers, the better to visualize the open range or some similar fantasy setting.

As a youngster, I didn't have a plentiful supply of coins of any description. And so my opportunity to taste the magic of the mechanical horse was at the whim of my father.

I knew better than to ask. My dad usually refused selfish requests. Non-verbal communication, however, was fair game. And so, I would slow down just a bit and give the horse a lingering look as we walked past – for the horse was strategically positioned in such a way that every outgoing shopper had no choice but to walk by him.

And sometimes Dad would ask, "Would you like a ride?" and I would scramble up on the horse's back, quick, before he could change his mind, and sit there, gripping the reins tightly, waiting for the horse to lunge to life.

And other times, the majority of times, we just walked past.

wrinkles on thy cheeks." Thomas Browne ~§~ "When you finally go

Now, I don't mean to sound as if my dad was cheap, or mean, for he was not. Though I was oblivious to it at the time, I realize now that by the time the bills were paid, my father didn't have a whole lot more disposable cash than I did. A few seconds' worth of riding on a mechanical horse provided no benefit beyond a soon-vanished pleasure, and would have seemed an immense extravagance, a waste of hard-earned money. And so I have some appreciation, now, of the inner struggle he must have experienced as he looked at my face, and the horse, as we headed out of the store with a cartload of carefully selected groceries.

My father died a few years back, and the mechanical horse and his cousins are long gone from the grocery stores in our parts. Yet I can clearly remember those few treasured rides – made the more pleasurable by the times we walked past. For my father may have known this as well: a thing is sometimes made more precious not because we do it all the time, but because we do not.

Four on a Fold

Paula Sergi

Some summer nights in the early sixties
in the middle of the country,
no ocean for thousands of miles
in either direction,
the air was everywhere heavy
like grandma's mothballed wool quilt,

back to your old hometown, you find it wasn't the old home you missed

navy as night
covering our faces, holding us down.
We should've been tired from play —
four square, seven steps around the house,
hopscotch drawn from the sharp side of a stone
on squares of concrete that marked
the edge of our front lawn.
Those nights we could stay up till nine,
but even after sunset no air moved.
We'd try to sleep
in the ten by twelve family room,
windows on three sides,
as if the screens themselves
would make a breeze.
Four on a fold-down couch
in short polyester pajamas
that stuck to our backs
waiting for sleep,
for a breeze, for a father
who never came back to say good-bye.
I worried maybe we'd all suffocate
before dawn, but we all grew up
one way or another
before we realized
how little air we'd had.

but your childhood" Sam Ewing ~§~ "A face without freckles is like a

Charley Plays a Tune

Michael Lee Johnson

Crippled with arthritis
in a dark rented room
Charley plays
melancholic melodie
on a dust-filled
harmonica he
found abandoned
on a playground of sand
years ago by a handful of children
playing on monkey bars.
He now goes to the bathroom on occasion,
peeing takes forever; he feeds the cat,
Melody, when he buys fish at the local market
and the skeleton bones of the fish show through.
He lies on his back riddled with pain,
pine cones fill his pillows and mattress;
praying to Jesus and rubbing his rosary beads
Charley blows tunes out his
celestial instrument
notes float through the open window
touch the nose of summer clouds.
Charley overtakes himself with grief
and is ecstatically alone.
Charley plays a solo tune.

sky without stars.” Natasha Bedingfield & Tobias Gad ~§~ “When

Unbreakable

Juleigh Howard-Hobson

It is 1969. I am six. I am in my grandmother's kitchen. My grandmother loves beautiful things. She has them everywhere, but especially here, in her favorite room in her house.

Her pots have colors on the outside. She has a pink one, a green one, a great big orange one. One pot is white, bright white, with a line of red on the rim of it and on the handle, too. Her mixing bowls make a rainbow when you line them up.

She has fancy dishes up in the cupboard but her everyday dishes are more wonderful. They are Melmac – real Melmac – and she has green, yellow, red, blue, pink, and fleck grey. Some are the color of the inside of a cantaloupe. When you put the different colored ones all on top of each other, cup, bowl, sandwich dish, supper dish, they look like candy towers.

She says when she dies she will leave all of them to me in her will.

My mother says good, I don't want them that's for sure.

I smile.

I sip strawberry milk from a lime green cup that I put on a butter yellow saucer. My tuna-fish sandwich, cut in four squares, is on a plate that is the same color of the sky. These are my favorites.

Carefully I replace the cup to the saucer when I am done. Carefully I pile them up, cup and saucer, like Necco wafers, on the blue dish. Carefully I carry them to the sink.

Even though they are my grandmother's Melmac dishes,
now they are mine, too.

My grandmother smiles as we wash them, together.

Ballet in the Piney Woods

Glenda Beall

Little girl sunsuits littered the wiregrass.
Summer warmed small bronze bodies
that danced on the stage of a fallen oak,
to songbirds' music from the mayhaw.

They felt, at five, the kiss of butterflies
upon their eyes, breathed honeysuckle air.
Like sylphs set free they twirled, arms open,
gathering the breeze against their bareness.

Chastised for their boldness by older girls
who barged into their glade,
the innocents saw themselves
and were ashamed.

"Wear a smile and have friends; wear a scowl and have wrinkles."

Ramblings of a Long Since Ex-Paper Boy

Larry Lefkowitz

Some decades have passed since I was a paper boy. Or a boy who delivered papers, as a “paper boy” seemed to put me in the same class as paper airplanes and paper boats. Of the latter two categories, paper airplanes would have been closer to the mark. For I would throw the papers from my bicycle in the hoped-for direction of the front door in hoped-for emulation of a plane coming in for a landing. Unfortunately, my mastery of aerodynamics was not good. The paper usually planed off or veered off or flew off in other directions, landing on – or even in – hedges, gardens, various other sites which would have made nice places to read them. But my customers, for some reason, preferred to receive their papers on their front door stoops.

Perhaps they would have been mollified if the papers arriving at various points on their frontal property had remained crisply folded. If I was a poor thrower, I was a worse folder. The papers often flew open in mid-flight, which made a pretty sight to me but a disturbing one to my customers. They apparently preferred to open the paper themselves instead of having it already opened for them. Or perhaps they rued having to reconstruct the paper so that each page followed the previous in numbered order. It would have been far easier to read

whatever page ended up first, but try to teach an old reader new tricks....

If memory serves me right, the favored paper fold in those days was not the simple folding in of the sides to make a cylinder, but a more complicated folding into a square. I did not excel at this fold. It was a fold designed for controlled flight. In my case, the paper flew more in the manner of a kite than a missile.

Still, my customers stayed with me. Pity on their part, or personality on my part, or maybe something I touched within them, manifesting the less than perfect in life, struck a chord.

Surely, in the not far future, electronic delivery to a screen will make the paper boy obsolete. The sight and sound of a paper flying through the air and landing with a pleasant whack will disappear from American life. The feel of a newspaper, the odor of a newspaper, will go also. Progress, they will call it. If I'm still around, I won't.

I Find

TJ Coles

I find that I, as time goes by,
Sometimes forget the what and the why.
I sit by myself doing whatever I do.
Reading a book or polishing a shoe.

When suddenly something jumps in my mind.
I must go, I must run, I must seek and then find.

to look like everyone else." Jane Fonda ~S~ "The childhood shows the

I rise from my place and proceed with due haste,
Certain of my duty and sure of my pace.

I arrive when I get there all ready to go.
But whatever I came for, I no longer know.
The impulse is there, there was something I sought.
But now, it seems I can't remember just what.

There is something I need. I'm sure of it now.
It'll come back to me, someday or somehow.
I wait and I pace like a cat in a cage.
The answer won't come, the mind won't engage.

I finally give up and go back to my shoe.
Who knows what I thought I wanted to do.
It's only when the chair finally hits my behind
That I remember once more what I wanted to find.

I jump up again and go back where I looked
Only to find that once more I've been rooked.
What ever it was that I wanted to find
Must somehow connect with my chair and behind.

It's my memory you see, it comes and it goes.
Sometimes it ebbs and sometimes it flows.
There's no point in throwing a hissy fit.
It only comes back in my chair, when I sit.

I think if just maybe I wrote it all down
It might just stay long enough to be found.
So I'll just go get some paper and pen...
Now tell me, what was I here for again?

The Fifties

Barbara Crooker

We spent those stifling, endless, summer afternoons
on hot front porches, cutting paper dolls from Sears
catalogs, making up our own ideal families
complete with large appliances
and an all-occasion wardrobe with fold-down
paper tabs.

Sometimes we left crayons on the cement
landing, just to watch them melt.

We followed the shade around the house.

Time was a jarful of pennies, too hot
to spend, stretching long and sticky,
a brick of Bonomo's Turkish Taffy.

Tomorrow'd be more of the same,
ending with softball or kickball,
then hide and seek in the mosquitoey dark.

Fireflies, like connect-the-dots or find-the-hidden-
words, rose and glowed, winked on and off,
their cool fires coded signals
of longing and love
that we would one day
learn to speak.

be written upon our brows, let them not be written upon the heart.

Mud Puddle Frolics

Betty Jo Goddard

It was May and school was still in session when the weather turned hot. Graciously, it chose Friday night for a storm. Dark, looming clouds rolled in from the west, thunder boomed, lightning crackled, and wind raged. Rain pelted our roof, filling our rain barrel in no time and dripping through our ceiling into the waiting pots below.

If Windsor's streets had storm gutters, there were none near our house. Water filled ditches and lapped across the road. As soon as we kids got up, we looked through mom's lace curtains and saw water lapping across Virginia Avenue. We bolted down our oatmeal and started in on Mom.

"Mom, can we go out wading?"

Mom raised her eyebrows. "Can? I think you're all able to wade, but you don't have permission to."

"May," we chorused. "May. May we at least go barefoot?"

You'd think, with all this bleating, that going barefoot was the greatest thing in the world, but I didn't really like going barefoot all that much. The rocks hurt my feet, I couldn't run as fast, and I didn't like getting my feet dirty. Despite this, that huge puddle drew me like a bee to honey.

"Can we? May we? May we, please, pretty please?"

Possibly to relieve her ears, Mom caved in. "Oh, all right, then. But you be sure to wash your feet when you come in. I'll put a bucket by the rain barrel."

We kids shucked off our shoes and headed for that mud puddle, slamming the screen door behind us. Muddy water rose up over my ankles and up my legs. Delicious. I pushed my shins against the water, swirling it in waves up to my knees, enjoying cool streams rolling down my calf. A fly landed on my arm, tickling it. I brushed it away with a watery hand as I churned toward Jim.

Just as I came alongside him, Jim stomped. Water splashed over my thighs, wetting the hem of my dress.

“Oh, ho. Too bad for you, Jim.” Bent on retaliation, I clenched my teeth, stuck out my chin, and, with determined vigor, matched Jim stomp for stomp. Then I turned and churned through the water away from my foe. At the end of the puddle, I eyed Jim as he headed toward me, his pant legs rolled up above his knees. Not to be cowed, I waded toward the center of the pool. Jim feinted, then stomped hard, sending a giant spray over my front. I circled to Jim’s left side where the water was deepest and thrust my foot down. A gratifying geyser of muddy water splashed clear up to Jim’s face. Laughing, I waded off with Jim plunging after me.

“All right for you,” Jim said. When he reached me, he jumped high and landed with both feet, dousing me. Water dripped from my chin, from my nose, from my eyebrows. This was war.

Jim and I stomped in earnest. Splashes flew. We lurched backwards, arms reeling from “accidental” shoves. Jim’s rolled up pants legs were drenched; my fresh print dress dripped.

Mary Lena, our little sister, liked the splashing game. Heedless of her sun suit, she stooped down, cupped her hands, and threw water to the skies. Laughing, John mimicked Jim and me. Stamping his chubby legs, he happily splattered. Tom, who barely knew how to walk, toddled toward the water and sat right

down in it. It wasn't long before all of us had a lot more than our feet wet.

Since our clothes were already wet, why couldn't we? Leaving Tom behind, Jim, John, Mary Lena, and I dashed inside and petitioned Mom. "See, we on accident got a little bit wet, so please, can we sit down in the water and get all the way wet? Please, pretty please, can we? May we?"

Mom suffered our shrill pleas while she surveyed our spattered clothes. Assent was the path of least resistance. Exasperated, she said, "Oh, all right. Go ahead."

Banging the screen door, we thundered out and headed for the mud puddles. Now real splashing began. With great arm thrusts, Jim and I splashed each other, showering water in a veritable deluge. Reveling in the sensuous feeling of getting wet all over, I jumped up and landed, splat, on my seat, showering Jim with a giant spray of water and mud. Going barefoot wasn't half bad when we could do this.

After we had our fill of puddle splashing, Mom took her washtub to the back yard and, bucketful after bucketful, filled it with water from the rain barrel. "Now you kids get in there and rinse all the mud off before you come into the house. Every bit of it. Betty Jo, you help the little ones. Get the mud out of their hair, too."

So, as the May sun beat hot on our shoulders and rainwater splashed cool on our arms, we kids enjoyed more frolicking in our backyard washtub pool. Altogether, the morning was wonderful fun, and we were out of Mom's hair for an hour or two. Back in the 1930's, none of us – not even Mom and Dad – had dreamed of television or computer games. But we didn't need that stuff, even if we'd known about it. A good night's rainstorm provided us with a whole Saturday morning of rowdy entertainment.

Bloodlines

Becky Haigler

Three figures stand against a soddy
in the Oklahoma dustbowl, as if awaiting
execution or reprieve. In the foreground
Henry Ford's machine is clearly
the occasion for the picture.

"Uncle Brad's Model A," said a grown-up.
I didn't care for the car. I stared at the woman:
tall and bony, sad eyes in wire-rimmed glasses,
mouth drooping under a long nose,
hair not captured by the shapeless hat.

"Uncle Brad, Aunt Emma and Grandma."
"...the soddy Grandma lived in
when she came to Indian Territory."
"Emma never was a pretty girl."
Comments followed the picture 'round the table.

"It's me!" I claimed what others were too polite to say,
but I knew. Two generations and a side-step ago —
my father's father's sister had my face. No matter
that she was ugly, that we were ugly. Instead,
a sense of belonging, being connected, to Emma's face.

A Cowboy and His Horse

TJ Coles

Horses were very important to me when I was a kid, because of my decision to become a cowboy. It's a well-known fact that any cowboy worthy of the name has to have a horse. This was difficult because we lived in the city most of the time. The only time I had a chance to ride was when we were visiting my Grandmother's ranch. Even then, the only horse I was allowed to ride was Snowfire.

Don't let the name fool you. Snowfire had a white coat, that's where the snow part of her name came from. Her fire however had long since gone out. She was very nearly as wide as she was long. She was so big that when I sat on her I was almost doing the splits. Two small kids riding bareback could sit side by side without fear of falling off. She was mild mannered and gentle – you could put a little kid up on her back and have no fear that she would buck him off no matter what the kid did. She was also so slow you could leave the kid on her for an hour and they would both still be within sight of the house.

Snowfire and I spent many wonderful hours together. I would be riding along staring meaningfully at the horizon on my way to save the ranch from the Indians or rustlers or flood, fire, disaster or whatever. Snowfire would be meandering along nibbling on anything that looked interesting along the way. If things got too boring, I could just stretch out on her back and take a nap.

that I'm older. I like it - despite the wrinkles. It's what I feel inside

Those were good times but, perhaps not as exciting as they might have been. One day I decided it was time for a real adventure. I'd ride over the mountain and down to Piney Creek. There could be rustlers or stampeding cattle along the way; even if there weren't, at least I'd be out of sight of the house.

I would take my BB gun along for protection and maybe shoot a grouse for the supper pot. I had never actually shot a grouse but I was ever hopeful. The trip was a little over two miles. Taking into account Snowfire's best pace, I figured it would take us all day, so I packed a lunch.

Because this was an adventure, I put a saddle and bridle on Snowfire. Once everything was lashed down or otherwise securely tied, I grabbed the reins and swung into the saddle and we lit shuck out of there swinging high and wide. That is to say, by hammering my heels repeatedly into her sides I managed to get Snowfire up to the blistering pace of may be three or four miles per hour and headed more or less in the right direction.

The next hours were pure high adventure hampered only by Snowfire's propensity for sampling every stray outcropping of vegetation that she came across, making our actual progress approximately that of an anemic snail. We finally reached the top of the pass about noon. Because we were making such good time, I decided to eat lunch in the saddle. Snowfire didn't need a break to eat because she had been eating more or less continuously since we started.

We finally made it to Piney Creek about six in the evening and stopped just long enough for Snowfire to drink her fill, then turned around and headed back. Based on our progress up to that point, I figured we'd get back to the house in time for breakfast. But once she realized that we were headed back toward the barn, her whole attitude changed. It was like riding on a new horse.

Her walk was no longer a slow meander from one grassy bunch to the next. At one point she even broke into a trot. Soon we were walking along briskly, Snowfire no doubt picturing a warm stall and perhaps a scoop or two of oats, when there was a rustle of brush at the side of the road ahead of us. Snowfire snorted and clamped on the brakes. She came to a sudden and complete stop. She was an old cutting horse and could stop on a dime. Her rider, however, was not nearly as competent and was certainly not ready to stop.

I was thrown forward over the saddle onto her neck; on the way I happened to catch some of the more delicate portions of my body on the saddle horn. I was in a precarious position. I had both my arms and legs wrapped around Snowfire's neck. She did a very quick twisting and spinning motion, which dislodged me from her neck. She left me sitting in the middle of the road, clutching my injuries and watching her blaze back down the road, stirrups flapping and tail held high. I sat there wondering what in the heck had gotten into that dang horse. Who would have thought that fat horse could move so fast?

I was sitting there in the road thinking bad thoughts about my trusty steed when a movement caught my eye. I turned my head and, standing right there in the road, a little ways away, was a full-grown mountain lion. Well, full-grown might be an exaggeration. On sober reflection, looking back over thirty-some-odd years, I'm quite sure that this was a yearling cat probably no more than three quarters grown, but from the perspective of that ten-year-old sitting on the road, this was one really big kitty.

I was sitting with my knees up, hands cradling my bruised parts, and staring at a mountain lion, who was staring back from a distance, which I am here to tell you, was not nearly far enough away. I had absolutely no faith that my BB gun would be of any use in this situation, but I really wished that I had it in

your wrinkles.” Sonja Henie ~§~ “Our wrinkles are our medals of the

my hands instead of strapped to Snowfire's saddle. Maybe I could use it as a club.

The big cat was watching me closely, mentally picking out the parts of me it wanted to eat first. I started to get to my feet, getting ready to begin running as fast as I could in the direction Snowfire had gone. The cat crouched as if in preparation to spring at me so I sat back and started talking.

"Nice kitty, good kitty, you're such a pretty kitty." I was babbling, I knew it, but I couldn't help myself.

"You're such a good kitty. You wouldn't want to eat me, kitty. I wouldn't taste good. If I ever catch up with that dang horse I'm going to pull all her tail hairs out!"

The mountain lion relaxed a little, his ears came up and he looked puzzled. He hadn't expected to have a conversation with his dinner, who also happened to be a blathering idiot.

I continued to babble. The big cat finally sat up and looked around with an anxious expression. I watched while words continued to pour out of my mouth. Perhaps he was afraid one of his friends might see us together. That made me laugh out loud. When that peal of laughter came out, the lion jumped back several feet and began to cock his head one side to the other. I dissolved into a fit of giggles undoubtedly brought on by stress. I couldn't stop. Finally, I fell over on my side giggling, tears running down my face. Somewhere, my rational mind was thinking, "This is great. A cougar eats me because I'm laughing so hard I can't defend myself."

The cougar finally turned and trotted off into the woods, no doubt thinking that I was a raving lunatic and probably diseased. Moments later, I managed to get hold of myself and took off running down the road in the profound hope the mountain lion wouldn't change his mind. I headed to the main ranch. Snowfire had gone the other way. The heck with her. She left me on my

own to face the cougar, so she could just take her chances. Besides, I seriously needed a change in underwear.

The journey up to the mountain had taken more than half a day. The way back took less than twenty minutes. I burst into the main house and babbled out my story to my grandfather. He dutifully listened, nodded his head, and commented that he hadn't seen a cougar in the neighborhood for more than ten years. But in the morning, we'd take the truck back up and see if we could spot it. I strongly suspected that he was taking my story less than seriously. So, I pointed out that his favorite horse was still up there with the mountain lion.

"Old Snowfire is smarter than any cougar she's likely to meet. Don't worry about her," he said.

But I did worry. Even though she had left me to face the cougar alone, she was still my trusty steed. Well maybe not so trusty. We had many hours together doing mostly whatever she wanted to do, but even so, I didn't want her to end up as lion food. I walked sadly down to the barn. I knew the cougar would get her. She was just too fat and too slow to get away.

There she was in her old stall. The saddle was hanging on the rack and her nose was in the feed trough sucking up oats. No wonder Granddad wasn't worried about her. She had beaten me home with enough time left over for him to unsaddle and feed her. She looked up at me and snorted in recognition, probably surprised that I had managed to get away from the lion.

"Yes, I got away, no thanks to you," I told her.

She snorted again and nuzzled me with her velvety nose. Anyone else might have thought that she was glad to see me or that she was apologizing for leaving me there on my own, but I knew her better than that. She was just hoping I would give her another scoop of oats.

Killing A Frog

James Keane

Killing a frog
is easier than you think,
especially a baby one that can't hop
and doesn't blink,
picking gently among the wetted rocks
not to swim
to drink, perhaps to play
within the confines of a shallow brook,
green
with curiosity but nothing like fear
today.

A stone thrown here,
a stone thrown there
and still the baby one doesn't jump,
doesn't scare, though he does
stare ahead (in growing dread?) until
finally a direct hit shatters his head.

No scaring needed now,
no caring no how, just
staring into emptiness as
the baby one dies,
is dead.

might at least have put them on the soles of her feet." Ninon de

Another hit, and now his baby brain
lies, a pale green wafer, on the stone terrain.

I was there. I wanted to be.
I was not the only one.

But all I did was watch the killing done, though
I may have thrown a tiny little pebble, just one.

But I know I never hit him, I didn't, I swear
(as if anything killed would care).

If anyone older had happened upon us then,
they wouldn't have approved, but they wouldn't
have made a fuss; or maybe, to sound
serious, just a bit of
grown-up noise.

For, after all,
we were only
being boys.

The thing is,
of distance, age and time,
none for long has been my friend, none
has passed over the memory of this crime
to away and gone
to a merciful end. Never

ever for the unwitting stranger
to mercy, to danger,
to courage,
to caring, who couldn't stop
a simple horror, but won't
stop staring

at the baby one
trying no longer to be a frog,
dying
at the unfeeling fingers of
growing children, though
graced with the empty love
of Almighty God, from Whom
all blessings, brooks
and dead frogs flow.

Ballet Class

Margaret Fieldand

We walked down the dark street
to the Horn and Hardart on Broadway
using our quarters to select
slices of pie
arrayed behind glass doors,
wondering whether June was getting too thin
or if we were getting too fat,
clattering down the subway stairs
to wait together for the train home.
And yet
I have lost the image of your face
and the sound of your name.

I can't do magic." Rupert Grint ~\$~ "Age wrinkles the body. Quitting

On the Road

Kathie Sutherland

When I was a child growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, my family spent many summers on the highway, enroute from one military base to another. Stuffed in a car or station wagon, favorite books, crayons and card games tucked into our suitcases, we'd read, sleep and argue our way across the country pausing to picnic, camp out and occasionally stay at a motel. From Edmonton to Montreal; Ontario to New Brunswick and then back over the Canadian Shield to the black dirt of the Manitoba prairie, and finally over the Rockies to Victoria at land's end we were always on the move.

There in the backseat I connected with my country, pleased that I could see what I'd learned from my geography books though the panorama of a side window. We visited museums and pored over route maps and in the quiet I dreamed that I was following in the footsteps of the Jesuit Fathers; paddling a canoe with French voyageurs; searching for buffalo with Native women on the Saskatchewan prairie; riding hard with Mounties as we chased down horse thieves. I even herded cattle with Alberta cowboys and drove a commemorative spike into the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railroad).

Even now when I'm on an airplane, aboard a Greyhound bus or even during a short trip on city transit, I return to this state of suspension and am released from my everyday concerns. When my husband suggested an overnight trip to the town of Rocky

wrinkles the soul." Douglas MacArthur ~§~ "Age imprints more

Mountain House recently, I leapt at the chance to enjoy the Alberta landscape. Settling into a comfortable silence, me in the passenger seat with a notebook on my lap and pen in hand, we headed west on Highway 39.

The canola fields were a sunshine yellow. Clumps of daisies were growing furiously by the roadside and barn swallows danced around old sheds, pleased to be nesting in the sagging roofs and collapsing walls. As the country sped by I caught sight of some cows grazing in thin shade of scrawny poplar trees, sleepy from the heat, oblivious to the tanker trucks and RVs rushing by. I thought about the people who once lived in these old homesteads, of men wiping the sweat from their faces as they picked rocks in the sun, women baking bread and hanging laundry where it was likely to catch a constant prairie wind.

As we traveled further west, I saw a white-tailed deer meandering along the edge of the forest, and later a coyote trotting across the ditch. An osprey circled above a wetland and fuchsia fireweed made an appearance in the long green grass and then orange lily-of-the-valley in the lowlands. As the red willow and cattails gave way to aspen and spruce, I searched the bogs and creeks for a glimpse of a moose.

Just outside Rocky Mountain House, a proliferation of signs announced the weekend's activities: a ball tournament, a horse show and "Bastion Days" at the Heritage Site. We were lucky to find a bed at Fox Ridge Bed & Breakfast. Our hosts gladly shared their knowledge of local attractions.

In the morning, after a restful night and congenial breakfast with a couple visiting from Yorkshire, England, we drove to the Heritage Site to learn about traditional Metis hunting techniques, watch demonstrations of long-barrel rifle handling, and storytelling by knowledgeable volunteers in period costumes. We drank Labrador tea and enjoyed hearing tales of rival fur trading companies told by an actor who tugged his wool

vest down over his belly and hitched up his plaid trousers, while telling us about other Scottish adventurers who ate from fine china hauled overland.

At the site of the original fort, where there is little left except depressions in the earth, I sat quietly listening to the wind and birds, and imagined the bustle of business as it might have been. I could almost hear horses snorting and leather saddles creaking, smell wood smoke and sweaty bodies, catch the sound of shouting as bateau came into view around the bend in the North Saskatchewan River.

Satisfied with a large helping of Canadian history, we left the site and headed for home. Slipping back in time like this seems to put things in perspective for me. Both as a child learning Canadian history and as a woman searching for her own roots in story, the interior of a moving vehicle is an ideal space for resting in the flow of time and space.

My Next Ex-Wife

Quanah Parker

Met my first up in Oklahoma
when I was just sweet sixteen.
I was a barback in a honky tonk
where she kept the dishes clean.
Daddy was a preacher and he came in handy
when we took our vows for life,
And she was, my friends, my first ex-wife.

~§~ *“Please don’t retouch my wrinkles. It took me so long to earn*

My first ex-wife – how cruel can one girl be,
to take a chance, make romance then a perfect fool of me.
My first ex-wife, I loved her heart and soul
she was my one and only love until she had to go.

But she'd moved in with a Bible salesman
when I came home from the war,
So I got hitched to a Wichita Widow,
had legs clear out the door.
Next was a teacher from Texarkana;
all she taught me was strife,
And she was, my friends, my last ex-wife.

Hold your hats and look what's comin'
across that hardwood floor,
Long blond hair, ten years younger
with legs clear out the door.
Pardon me boys, but moments like this
only happen once in a life.
I think I just met, my next ex-wife.

My next ex-wife, oh who will that girl be?
to have a chance to make romance then a perfect fool of me.
My next ex-wife, I'll love her heart and soul
and probably I always will – till one of us must go.

Snow Ride

Denton Loving

The boy dressed to go out and sled for his first time. He was four, and this was the best snow of the winter so far, the first good snow of his young life.

Overnight, the winter storm had dumped half a foot of pure white powder. It looked like a sheet of butter-cream frosting spread on the world around the apartment complex. The parking lots, the sidewalks and yards, and the playground behind the buildings were covered.

His mother dressed him as warmly as an Eskimo child but in brighter colors. He wore a new red coat with a thick collar that buttoned around his neck, mittens and a wool toboggan she pulled down to cover his ears. His blue Spiderman galoshes were a size too big, meant to last for two winters. He was unsteady but getting used to walking in them.

This new world was so untouched and beautiful, he didn't want to disturb it. So he took longer strides in order to step in the existing foot prints. His mother watched from the corner of the building until he drew close to the other children.

It was still early, but already the back of the playground was full of neighborhood kids, also wrapped in boldly-colored winter clothes. They toted plastic sleds and garbage can lids with them, anything to carry their padded bodies down the slope behind the apartment buildings.

whereas a grown-up never wears out his short pants." Karl Kraus ~§~

At the bottom of the hillside ran Plum Creek, a shallow stream where he and his mother sometimes threw bread crumbs to the wild but friendly ducks. His mother had told him Plum Creek was likely frozen over. He couldn't imagine how this could be possible.

Like spiders dancing on a shared tapestry, one sled would skim downward, and somewhere nearby, another would follow. Up the steep hill, a child struggled back through the snow, dragging the sled, already eager for the thrill of the next ride down. Their movements became intricate designs left by ghost children and impossible to trace from beginning to end.

The boy rode down with the other children, ones he knew and trusted, who held his small body close to their own as they were pulled down the bank side. Now, though, he insisted on going alone, his solo sledding journey. An older girl, who sometimes babysat him, put him on a sled by himself, and when he was ready, she gave him a hearty push. Down he went, gliding in the wake of past sled marks, faster and faster down the hill, the air whipping his face.

It was the first time he felt the mystery of how a few seconds can speed by so quickly yet seem timeless, like a memory played in slow motion. He had no name for the sensation, but he wanted it never to end. It was the most freeing experience of the boy's life, and he soaked it in as the sled and his light body floated over the powdery white surface covering the earth. He relished every bounce and bump in the snow.

He reached the little flat place before the creek's bank, but the boy and the sled did not stop. He didn't want it to stop, and perhaps no one had told him how to stop anyway, to push his feet into the snow until they reached the hidden earth and slowed the sled. Plum Creek was in view now, and at this speed, he thought he would just keep going – over the creek bank, far past the other side, maybe never stopping again.

“When you're 50 you start thinking about things you haven't thought

But the sled did stop.

He was wet and cold when he realized he and the sled were in the slow, icy water of Plum Creek. It wasn't frozen over at all.

He stood in the creek and reached for the sled before climbing out. Water filled the extra space in his Spiderman boots. Up the hill, he trudged with the sled dragging behind him.

Cheers rang from the top of the hill. The older children welcomed him back with cries of congratulations and a few jokes. Their round breaths sent up smoke signals in the icy air. The others had mastered the descent, but none could remember such an exciting first flight.

Water still sloshed in his boots by the time he was taken home and dunked in a warm bath. His mother hovered over him. He was likely to catch pneumonia, his mother told him. She wrapped him in blankets and fed him chicken corn soup.

But the boy only worried the snow would melt before he could go out again. The thrill of the ride down hill – that one amazing moment – was worth everything else.

Veranda

Joy Harold Helsing

tired old man
in a wicker chair

tired old dog
on his own worn rug

just passing time

about before." Eugene O'Neill ~§~ "Even a minor event in the life of

The Mirror

Barbara Darnall

Why does my
grandmother's face
look back at me?
I didn't even like
the old woman much:
authoritative,
bitter,
stern.
Oh God,
don't let me
sound like her, too!

Why couldn't I
look more like
my mother's mother?
A gnarled stick,
but independent,
strong,
and kind,
who lived to be
eighty-three,
and then quietly
lost her mind.

a child is an event of that child's world and thus a world event." Gaston

Rituals

Mary Deal

Now that I'm single and dating again after nearly forty years of marriage, I'm finding I have a lot to catch up on.

"Jeffrey's not all there," my friends had warned.

As he and I became friends, I saw strange behaviors but nothing too unusual. At dinner, for instance, he would first eat all his mashed potatoes, then the bread, and then all his vegetables, followed by the meat. He never mixed foods and finished one before tackling another.

"Why not combine tastes?" I asked.

"Guess I can't break old habits," he said.

After seeing him do this time and time again, it began to bother me a little. He would finish one item, then pick up his plate and turn it so the next was in front of him. It seemed as if he ate all the other foods first, in order to sneak up on the meat.

One evening after dinner when he put on his jacket, he stretched his neck like a goose, like the neckline might be too tight. But the collar was open and in no way binding. These were strange behaviors, but not that weird. We all have rituals. I hoped my friends' warnings hadn't made me overly critical, but as time passed, I noticed other severe behaviors.

Every time we approached a crosswalk, he'd ceremoniously whack his fist four times against the black and white plaque that said "Push Button to Cross." Then he'd push the button. After seeing him do this a few times, I must have looked doubtful.

“Hit the sign four times,” he said. “The light will change in ten seconds.”

“That’s absurd,” I said. “It’s just a sign.”

“A repairman told me that when I asked how to make the light change faster.”

He believed the repairman who teased and played into his impatience? Not only was his behavior strange but so, too, was the belief in it.

People in cars at stoplights seemed puzzled when they watched him animatedly bang his fist, and I was embarrassed by their looks.

As weeks passed, I began to realize how deep his neuroses ran as I watched him for the umpteenth time stick a finger into his fly to make sure his zipper was up. Guys always do that. I do that, too, when I wear slacks, but not every few seconds!

That last time I saw him, we happened upon a crosswalk button where the instruction plaque and screws were missing. Clearly nothing was housed behind any plaque to affect the light changing. It was just an instructional sign. Everyone knew that, even the repairman.

The button below the missing plaque was not damaged and still clearly usable. “Quick, hit something, Jeffrey,” I said, teasing. “We have to get across the street.”

He goose-necked again and stared at the empty rectangular frame attached to the solid metal light pole. Finally, dead serious, he fingered his zipper and turned and walked away. “It’s broken,” he said, calling out over his shoulder. “Let’s find another place to cross.”

I pushed the button and the light changed. At that moment, I knew which direction I was headed. I also knew I would not be spending much time in the future with any guy who ate all his mashed potatoes first.

Henhouse Treasures

Becky Haigler

I hold Nanny's hand when we uncover
the feed barrel. Sometimes rats hide there.
We scoop kernels of maize in a lard bucket
which serves to carry feed to the chickens
and eggs to the house.

In the chicken yard, Rhode Island reds
and leghorns, a ragged black rooster, peck
at imagined morsels and stray insects.
We empty our bucket by handfuls
to their cheerful greed.

We stoop to enter the chicken coop; smell
of old straw and feathers fills the dark.
Nearly every nest holds an oval offering
to be placed carefully in our bucket,
carried home and washed.

One old hen sits stubbornly. I am afraid to reach
past the pointed beak, under her warm featheredness.
"Gone broody," Nanny says, pushing the setting bird aside.
I carry the bucket of brown jewels,
accessory to the crime.

Death, Imperfect

Rhoda Greenstone

Mattie Stepanek had no ambition for heaven.
Earth for him was an eternally singing white water
Mystery, a school where Harry Potter invented alchemy
Just for him and his stuffed menagerie companions.
All taught him unconditional love. Imagine it!
Not even the wheelchair harness, the filthy tube,
Not that continuous, crotchety, motorized tedium
Could interfere with the mint-edged musical
Score of his sweetsea current which willed, which bore
That unnatural body of his, bloated above useless legs
Yet graced with dancer's arms, fifth position fingers
Which often bled. (Shortly before the end he vainly
Asked the public to pray to halt his bleeding.)

His mother spoke to Oprah through a film of tears,
"I consoled him 'God couldn't possibly want more from
You; God is so very pleased with all you've done.'"
Misinterpreting, the boy feared he had work left to do.
Did she get it? That her son was bargaining for
One more day, one hour, just one minute more
He so loved being above unhallowed ground.

"Hard work keeps the wrinkles out of the mind and spirit." Helena

The Art Gallery

Brenda Kay Ledford

Although it was a chilly morning, I knew spring had sprung. You see, the robins had flocked across my front yard, little purple crocuses popped through the ground and the mountain air smelled like jonquils.

Inside our little red plank house, it was toasty warm. In the corner, a wood heater had a roaring fire and the heat wrapped my body like a blanket. Above the couch hung a tapestry of a big, beautiful sunflower. Sunshine seemed to radiate across our living room.

My sister made the tapestry. She was very talented. Barbara could do anything. She could sew, sing, draw, paint, cook – anything. I admired her and wanted to capture her style of drawing. Since she was still at upper school, I slipped into her bedroom and got one of her charcoal pencils and two pages of drawing paper.

Her records were stacked in the corner. I picked up one and studied Anita Bryant on the album cover. She was so beautiful and I wanted to draw her face. I drew, erased, drew, drew and erased until I got her portrait completed.

Then I picked up another record and gazed at Johnny Cash. He was playing a guitar and I thought he was so handsome. So I decided to draw his picture, too. I drew, drew, erased, drew and drew until I captured his image.

I wanted to hang my portraits in the living room. I put Scotch tape on the back of the pictures and stuck Anita Bryant above the sunflower tapestry. Next I displayed Johnny Cash beside the tapestry.

And I could just hear Johnny singing, “I fell in to a ring of fire.... And it burns, burns, burns. That ring of fire.”

I called to Mama who was fixing supper in the kitchen. She came into the living room and looked at my pictures. “Those are really good, Brenda. I’m so proud of you.”

I could hardly wait until Barbara got home from school to see my art gallery. I just knew she would really be impressed. The time tick, tick, ticked so slowly. Finally, I heard the school bus and Barbara slammed the screen door as she came into the living room. She froze in her tracks, pointed at my drawings and asked, “What is that? Did you do that, Brenda? Well, we just can’t have that in our living room. People will see them and think we’re a bunch of poor white trash,” and she yanked my drawings off the wall.

Mama heard the confusion and trotted into the living room. She put her hand on her hip and exclaimed, “Girls, I’m not having this! I’m going to put Brenda’s pictures up in the house, and nobody better not tear them down,” and she gave Barbara a mean look.

My mama rushed into the kitchen, opened a drawer and got the hammer. She dashed into the bathroom and I could hear the hammer pound, pound, pounding. She nailed up my portraits in the bathroom.

When Barbara went into the bathroom, she whined, “Mama, I can’t use the bathroom with all those people staring at me. Take them down.”

Mama said with a firm voice, “You wouldn’t let Brenda display her art in the living room, so it’s staying right here in the bathroom. And you better not touch her pictures.”