

Lindenwood University

Digital Commons@Lindenwood University

Theses

Theses & Dissertations

2010

My Family, My Open

Deborah A. Herzog

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/theses>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

My Family, My Opus

Deborah A. Herzog, B.S.

An abstract presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Writing

Abstract

This collection of poems and non-fiction work focuses on self-reflection and family with all its perfections and imperfections. I believe this collection mirrors the essence of the writer and gives insight to the loved ones who shaped that life. It is a tapestry of emotional revelation derived from introspection and observation of the world.

The author has experienced the joy of reading for over forty years and spent many hours journaling throughout her life. The empty nest syndrome was the catalyst to pursue studies in creative writing. It became a cathartic exploration of life that blossomed into a work that focused on such themes as life, death, love, nature, and family. These themes are loosely threaded throughout the poems, essays, and memoirs.

The collection includes an introduction that suggests, as does the title, *My Family, My Opus*, the greatest honor betrothed a mother is the legacy she leaves this world. I leave this world my family and my literary work.

My Family, My Opus

Deborah A. Herzog, B.S.

A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Writing 2010

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY

Professor M. Elizabeth Mead, M.F.A.
Chair, Lindenwood University M.F.A. in Writing Program

Adjunct Professor Eve Jones, M.F.A.
Chairperson

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband, Dave, who is the wind beneath my wings. To my children and grand-children who are my inspiration and my legacy. To my sisters who are always there for me. To my mother, who introduced me to the world of books and taught by example strength of character and survival.

This is for all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	viii
Reflections of My Fears.....	1
Snow Angel Haiku.....	3
Survivor.....	4
Motherhood.....	5
Snow Memories	7
A Christmas Memory.....	9
The Search for Me	12
Fire Circle	14
Split Second Decision.....	15
The Winning Hug	17
Surviving Fifth Grade	21
Snow Walk.....	27
Empty Nest.....	28
Transparent	30
First Frost	32
Age of Innocence	33
Winter Melt.....	34
Snow Globe.....	35
An Aruban Sunset.....	36
Graceland	38

Ode to the Hedge Apple.....	39
First Snowfall.....	40
Inferno.....	41
Futility.....	42
The Letter.....	43
Another Day.....	44
Lamentation.....	45
Coming Home.....	46
Tragedy at Punta Gorda.....	59
Sugar an' Spice an'.....	60
White Flight.....	62
Works Cited.....	xv

An Introduction

So much of what is best in us is bound up in our love of family that it remains the measure of our stability because it measures our sense of loyalty. All other pacts of love or fear derive from it and are modeled upon it.

Haniel Long

1

The almost indiscernible heartbeat of her unborn child, the butterfly kicks that move her to reach for the slightly swollen belly or the womb gone still and silent causes her to mourn -- still brings motherhood to life.

In its primitive fragile moments of cellular chaos life teeters on the verge of survival or extinction. It gains strength like the run-away snowball atop a snow-covered peak, grows in size and force and looms toward its final destination. It emerges resilient yet pliant flexing to the contours of the path it took on its journey into being. A mother holds the miracle of that being and its journey into this world. While some will think that is the ultimate honor betrothed a mother, I say it is not.

The honor of a mother lies in the legacy of her family. It transcends all other. She delights in leaving the world her perfect yet imperfect opus.

Before I felt the first stirrings of motherhood I knew about love and loyalty to family. I learned it from my mother. Later in life I would learn on my own the fear of loss and ultimately the pain of loss. Poet and writer, Haniel Long so eloquently describes such love of family. What Long embraced as the best in man is love of family and *that* is the constant in life that perseveres when on any given day a sucker punch takes us to our knees and we beg to question, why? And life replies, why not?

The same loyalty binds mother and father to their children turned drug dealer, prostitute, gang member. It binds success and failure, rich and poor, sick and healthy – family looks beyond mere human capabilities and transcends the physical.

2

The literary whole of my thesis has no intention of grandeur, arrogance, or conceit. My works are but moments of truth stumbled upon during my creative writing journey here at Lindenwood. The seeds planted by my professors challenged me to dig deeper into my life experiences and break through the layers of fluff and sometimes denial and finally rewrite after rewrite allowed a piece of work to emerge somewhere closer to the truth than I had ever imagined before. They challenged the truths and the lies and in doing so allowed the real essence of my life to take root in my poems, essays, and memoirs.

I have been challenged to look inside and outside of myself to create characters and asked to bring them to life on paper. I have taken pen to paper and cried my way through the moments of truth for a character and found when finished writing I had slipped into the first person prose. "To know the character is to be the character," encouraged one of my professors, and I did.

My goal was to enjoy the journey, and that was accomplished many times over. Writing became the catalyst for self-discovery, reflection, and reclaiming self. As I set off on this voyage I was tossed about by genres I had never dared to embark upon. I would soon enjoy the knowledge of the craft, experience creativity of the craft, and the pleasure and magic of words.

When I embarked upon the challenge of completing a master's level creative writing program I needed the building blocks of the craft and each week built upon the next as I gorged myself on the principles of writing, concepts, and techniques. I learned from reading accomplished writers and artists of the craft. Writing that first poem was grueling and now, reading that first poem is exceptionally grueling. Learn and write. Write and learn.

From the three-line haiku to my family memoirs and all writings in-between I do not deviate from truth. My work is drawn from life experiences that touch on my past, present, and at times delves into the future. I write what I feel. A myriad of emotions allow for creative highs and lows in my work. I find peace and tranquility in winter months and have written a series of snow-themed poems. Upon reflection of a time of turmoil in my life I found a sense of anger and rage infuses my work. I filled page after page and ultimately realized the cathartic affect it had.

Family experiences, family members, hopes and shattered dreams, come under scrutiny as subjects of my work. At times family member identities are hidden within the ontological layers. I have written a loosely-threaded series of poems that touch upon such subjects as psychological abuse in a marriage, anger over a battle with cancer, a struggle to win over a life of cocaine use. My fears, hopes, heartbreaks, and joys in life find themselves woven into the tapestry of my writing. Some portion of the tapestry is weak and other portions strong. It is no longer mine alone, it is there for all who choose to read it and are affected by it. It is my legacy.

3

The work submitted for this thesis draws upon my poetry and nonfiction pieces. Poetry was the genre most foreign to me. Ultimately, it became the genre that most delighted me. In this genre I feel free to roam many areas of emotion and remain as anonymous or as soul-bearing as I desire. In my poetry there is nothing sacred yet everything is sacred. My innermost thoughts are held to no standard when they reveal themselves in my work. What was once sacred and concealed is now exposed in its naked truth. There is no such thing as trivial or absolute but there is a constant in each piece and that is truth.

Reflecting on my poetry I often times use dichotomy in the theme verses the message. For example snow for me can be a source of tranquility and peace; the beauty of a virgin snow. However, tethered to a “chilling blanket,” “snow flurry,” “chards of ice and snow,” and words like “survival,” “ebbing,” and “demise” allude to a quite different aspect of the snow in “Winter Melt.” In “Snow Walk” I pit Angelo, de Vinci, and Monet against mother-nature and boldly take the paintbrush from their hands and turn it over to a shooting star and the new fallen snow becomes tainted by footprints that “trace a snowy sojourn.”

Love, death, and nature are favorite themes of my work. I often attach the cycle of life to nature’s cycle. One of my first poems written and included in my thesis compares and contrasts the declining health of my mother to nature’s seasonal death suffered by the dogwood in the back yard. It speaks of their nakedness and beauty lost but allows them both to bear their souls. The reward is the beauty of the first frost that is the impetus of their eternal perfect shroud. Again, the dichotomy exists in the fear of death yet the hope of eternal life for my mother and the promise of spring for the dogwood.

Motherhood is a prominent theme that threads its way through my family tapestry. The strengths and weaknesses of motherhood identify themselves in moments of delight and moments to sheer anger and despair.

Stories of nearly two generations of women in my family are committed to memory. Their lives reflect strength of character, determination, commitment and loyalty to family. Connectivity and strength of generations of women who came before me serve to embrace the woman, wife, and mother I have become.

Observation of lives around me became a significant tool in my search for ideas and topics for my work. To look and listen to people, places, and things, the very nature of life, many times inspired the essence of my poetry and non-fiction. Observation moved me to reflection and truths were born.

In the reflection stage a myriad of emotion emerged; memories of achievement, contentment, ecstasy to powerful moments of rage, repentance and grief. In those moments I found solace in words. Words that could now spill out of me, I could now see, touch, and feel. But it did not come without passionate excavation of the psyche and heart with acceptance of the fact that what lies within may be an agonizing truth to live with the rest of one's life. My writing is now in a realm no longer hidden and no longer belongs solely to me. Profound emotion emerged before me clear, concise and refreshed. There were times, the deep sigh and "awe moment" finally came. In those moments I experienced cathartic tears of joy and sorrow, but ultimately, the tears came with liberation.

Freedom is an exhilarating experience. Writing moved me to seize the moment and find my independence and autonomy. It allowed me to lose years of emotional baggage that kept me roaming for so long. I have reclaimed myself, my purpose, and strengthened my commitment to my family legacy.

Long, in his quote, speaks of stability, loyalty, and love of family and that the best in us is bound up in that relationship. It is at times impossible to separate those elements from family. I find strength and solace in the connectivity of these qualities bound by a deep sense of responsibility and accountability to self and each other.

It is from the chaos of life that I choose to write and I leave these words to my family, my opus, my legacy.

Reflections of My Fears

1

I sit over the wing and tap out the beat of the flaps as they open and close. The drone of the engines keeps time on my tympanic drum. My brain adapts to an air tight tank numb and coma like. I close my eyes and fight the deafening silence and distant ringing. I breathe in and out. I do what I've been told. Swallow. Yawn. Chew. I imagine if engines silence I could hear breathing of passengers and hearts beating and gastric juices churn in stomachs. I'd hear the slight snore of the man with his head skewed and music from the pods of the young man who is killing ear cells as his head rests on the five by eight substitute for a pillow against the double sided plastic oval porthole. The roaring silence lulls some to sleep, some to sweat, some to silently weep. Others turn germy pages of *The Skymall Catalog* found in the pocket on the seatback in front of them. I am led to the brink of REM but not quite, and I startle awake to *may I offer you coffee, tea, or juice.*

2

I gaze out the port hole of the aircraft and below to a sea of blue gray, constant, relentless, lifeless, until it emerges translucent. My eyes grapple with a silhouette below, a formation. It materializes. Like cumulous clouds on a perfect summer day, they make the back drop for a game of see the dog, see the cat, see the dinosaur. Yes, the dinosaur looms below and breeds another and another and they mutate beyond recognition and collapse into another figment of my imagination. This dinosaur is a coral reef and sneaks out of sight far too soon, only to whet my appetite. My eyes grow hunger pangs as it dissipates and the engines put nautical

miles between us. Clouds cast shadows on the mossy sea. The aqua waters pulsate but sustain a vision of exploding aura reflected by the glint of the sun off the double sided plastic oval porthole.

3

The wing dips right and the plane ruptures the shroud of white that reveals a mountain range in twilight hues of lavender and crimson. My eyes rape the serrated bluffs below but pause to consume the painter's palette. Layers of time etched in rock and boulder left by an ageless sculptor. Cirrus clouds disperse to divulge an earthen treasure map created by endless risings and settings of the sun, strategically placed through eons, and eras, and periods, and epochs. Shards of ice and snow expose their treacherous mask and the miasma lifts to disclose crevasses gorged deep. Liquefied, desiccated, and thawed by the Ages leave their signature. A sleigh across the sky opens to a basin drought crusted and lifeless with the black brown mineral aggregate that surrenders its layers to the Great Salt Lake. Black blue she lies, listless, lifeless, alone. I rest my head against the double sided plastic oval porthole and close my eyes to the beauty of the twilight sun that breathes life into her depths and calms my fears.

snow angel haiku

walk onto the white canvas
it catches my fall
leaves my snow angel behind

Survivor

He walks away
I still see the
blonde curly hair at the nape
of his neck I once cradled in my arm
now bronzed from
hard-working days he
doesn't mind at all.

Strapping lad
strong and honest.
A friend to all
he makes me laugh
you'd like his laugh
but I fear
I pushed him from the nest
too soon
and so I ponder.

I shed a tear sometimes
to know
he is a self made man
and I had so little to do
with it.

motherhood

the brown hair I brushed
daily for more than a decade
spilled to her rounded shoulders
as she leaned back on the
green paint-chipped park bench
her fingers entwined like grandma's
when she sat in her rocker
resting her hands in her lap
eyes closed tight to keep
the blinding noon sun from
breaking through the slits
her hands rested too,
on her belly
mounded with life

deliberately she breathed in
and out
I watched her shoulders rise
and fall
as I did countless nights
peering over the crib
just to be sure...
I thought I saw her lips
turn up slightly,
growing an almost-smile on her
face blushed with motherhood
the face I washed
the nose I kissed, and
the chin, I
"chinny-chin-chinned "
at least a thousand times

laughter from the
play ground startled her
from her nearly prone position
she watched the little girl
climb the steps that took her to
the top of the slide
her pigtails flew back behind her head
as she leaned forward like a
skier at the top of a run
thrust herself forward, and
in seconds found herself at the
bottom of the side
in her mother's arms

my brown-haired beauty
repositioned herself
face drawn to the warmth of the sun
her hands moved in circular motions
over the gentle rise and fall of her belly
a contented smile pursed her lips, and
that's when I knew

Snow Memories

Wonder why I love the snow.

Suppose it could be that I watched it fall
as I sat in the baby swing and kicked and
squealed with delight when the flakes floated
past the window sill to only God knows where,
I was only tall enough to see the window
three feet off the floor.

Perhaps when they bundled me in my snowsuit,
added mittens, scarf, and blanket
just to insure I was safe from the wind.
That blanket blew off unexpectedly and
the white stuff hung to my eyelashes,
cooled my cheeks, gave me that glorious breath of air
that's when I fell in love.

Or, when I was three and built my first snowman and
Every year thereafter until I was, well
still building snowmen.

Maybe as a teen when I skated at Steinberg's Rink,
and snow began to fall, and the skater's waltz began to play,
the flakes kissed my cheeks and warmed me

though my feet were cold.

And I do remember

a night of nostalgia

when I helped my first-born

Build her first snowman.

That might be the day

I knelt in the snow

and fell in love all over again.

A Christmas Memory

I leave behind mounds of teddy bear, snowman, and Santa-red-and-white striped foil wrap now crumpled and wadded in the box that housed our newest grandson's "exer-saucer". "Old blue eyes" croons White Christmas from the big screen that reverently displays his face and song title. What's better than Christmas carols on Christmas Eve? I'm one of those who set holiday cheer in motion starting on Halloween. Radios are for twenty-four hour Christmas serenades and tracking how many inches of snow are coming. The kids catch up on life and one grandkid is louder than the next. If my mom were still alive, she'd say "tune it down a few notches." Hard to believe this is our fifth Christmas without her.

The long awaited "Eve" has come and almost gone. The first of my kids and her family begin to gather their mother lode. I check the silver and black round clock that lives on the wall above the big screen and notice its past eight-thirty. What was I thinking when I bought that thing. Eighteen inches in diameter and it shows the time, temperature, humidity and barometric pressure. "Frosty The Snowman" is now playing in the background. I lend a hand with toys and boxes and baby Ann.

"Sorry we have to leave so early, got to get to the other grandma's house by nine."

I reassure, "I remember those days, dragging kids from one house to the next trying to keep everyone happy. Don't envy you kids now. Glad that's all behind me."

“Mom, grab Raggedy Ann, will you? She’s on the floor under the coffee table where we opened presents.”

I loved buying that doll for Ann. It seemed so right for her first Christmas. I couldn’t wait to watch her open it. Camera’s ready.

“C’mon Ann start here and pull. See, like mommy’s doing. Grandma wants a picture. Pull it off like this.”

Not a chance. Oh well, there’s always next year. I drag myself up the thirteen carpeted steps from the Christmas mess to the great-room upstairs; following daughter, her husband, and Ann.

“Josh, need some help out with those things?”

“Nope, just get the door.” Before I can close the door the blustery night air rushes in, and the dusting of snow on the ground makes a perfect Christmas Eve.

I hear my daughter’s high-pitched baby talk enticing Ann to say “mama”. But, she’s rewarded with “da-da”. I swear, sometimes my daughter sounds just like me. The white lights from the evergreens draped across the white spindle railing reveal the pink of her cheeks. Probably from the wine she drank earlier tonight. She busies herself with Ann’s snowsuit, hat and mittens and kneels to lock Ann into the car seat. I remember the bundling and hauling of kids and equipment from house to house and it just doesn’t seem like it was so bad anymore. I remind myself, “time heals.” I walk down the hall to the “lost and found” before they leave, a box buried in the corner of my closet. I check. Nothing’s there that would fit a nine-month-old.

Scanning for forgotten items as I come down the hall, I'm brought to a halt when I hear the words, "I'm tucking you in like a little burrito." Her hands push the blanket under Ann's feet, legs, and arms. Tuck, tuck, tuck. The blanket is tight on all sides. Her double chin, pouting lips, crinkled nose and intriguing eyes are all that I can see.

I'm the *one* who says that. I fight back a tear and swallow hard. I hadn't heard or said that in years. I'm taken back to my daughter's bedtime twenty-some years ago. I guess it's the emotion of the holiday that causes the memory rush, or maybe the wine. That was part of the bedtime ritual I had with my daughter; bath, book, prayers, and tuck her in like a burrito and a kiss goodnight. My backside rests on the back of the love seat now and I enjoy the re-run. Tuck, tuck, tuck.

"Hey, I used to do that to you."

"Yeah, and Ann loves it too. Watch, mom, she really laughs when I say burrito. She emphasizes each syllable. "Burr-eee-toe" and grabs her toes through the blanket. I smile. She stands and lifts the car seat up so I can get one last Christmas kiss from our little Ann.

Thanks, Merry Christmas and hugs and kisses all around. They're out the door. I watch 'til they're gone and blink the porch light. On the way back down to the Christmas mess, I stop in the kitchen and pour myself a glass of wine.

the search for me

i comb the beach

in search of me

lost in you

invite the balmy breeze

wrap itself around my body

the chill wakes my spine

wind strokes my hair

brushes my cheeks

i close my eyes

toes wriggle in the sand

scorched by day

now warm and liquid

sea licks my feet

soothes them with her balm

gifts them with kelp

shadows cast shadows

sea urchins cling to their transient homes

white caps paint the waters

sands funnel to the winds

waves pound the shore

and the sultry breeze escorts me

to the pinnacle of white sand

it melts into orange violet haze

and i gaze

fire circle

each stone flexes to meet the next
support to each
allow room to breathe
expel the smoke and flames

some gray, others
worn smooth, creviced and pitted
embedded circles, cast shadows in
the orange and blue flames
like a slab of moon

white-washed, gray-washed
mossy-green by the dew
charred black by the fire
spider eggs cling
in the crack

Split Second Decision

I gingerly made the right turn onto the snow-packed four-lane road but still felt the back-end fishtail. My only task that day was to fill the gas tank and get back home before the major snow storm hit.

My two-year old squirmed, fighting the confines of car seat, snowsuit, hat and mittens. I didn't expect to see much traffic on a day like today, and there wasn't. Less than a mile from home I pulled into *my* gas station. There was only one other car in the station. I figured I'd get in and out in record time; I left the engine on to keep my little one warm. I closed the door and turned toward the pump, my back to the car not more than five seconds. I pivot around to open the hatch and begin fueling but the hatch is moving away from me.

My eyes widened and I dropped the hose to see my two-year-old standing in the front seat of the car. Her hands were on the steering wheel. I blinked my eyes to clear them. The windows clouded with steam. I'm confused. Then, I screamed for help. I think I screamed. My feet felt like lead. I picked them up and put them down. I slipped and fell and got back up again. I had to get to her. But I was on the wrong side. I must get to the other side of the car. The wheels were turning toward the four-lane road. I saw her face. She was scared and confused. Her lips mouthed "*mommy*." I choked back tears. Faster, faster, I had to get to the road. All I could think was to stop the oncoming traffic. I stepped into the middle of the street and raised my hands as in self-defense. "Stop, please stop," I screamed. I couldn't breathe. I was crying desperately for someone to help. I looked back over my shoulder and the car was about to enter the street. I saw out of the corner

of my eye a young man. Don't know where he came from. Running alongside the car, his feet slipped and he lost his balance on the packed snow. His hand reached for the handle on the car door and slipped off once then twice. Oh God, please help him. The hood of his jacket fell to his shoulders and I saw the breath forced from his mouth in the frigid temperature as he willed himself to match the stride of the moving car. At last he grasped the handle with both hand, swung the door open and slid into the seat next to my sobbing daughter. The car stopped. I shook uncontrollably and dropped to my knees.

The Winning Hug

I can't take my eyes off the lanky young man on the mound, Alex, our grandson. Dave and I find a place, first row of the aluminum bleachers to watch Alex's first High School baseball game. He made the Jerseyville Panther's freshman team. His baseball cap is pulled precisely over his eyes to shade the sun that is now behind him. The navy blue number seven baseball shirt is tucked tightly into the white baseball uniform pants. There's not a wrinkle in the navy socks that cover his calves. Fingering the ball he cradles it in his glove and pulls it to him, the set, the stretch, the pitch and he delivers. He brushes the batter off the plate. Ball one. Wow, I'm impressed. Elbowing my husband, "Great pitch, huh? Isn't he something?"

"What are you talkin' about? It was a *ball*."

"Hey, but it was a *great* ball. Did you see how he brushed that guy off the plate?"

"I think he just threw a *ball* because it was his first pitch and after he gets a couple under his belt he'll start throwing strikes, that's what *I* think."

"No way, he planned that pitch and was showing the batter whose boss, that's what *I* think."

"Shhh, watch the game."

The elbowing, cheering, and clapping continue through two innings. But I noticed the last couple batters got some pretty good hits. I began to quiet down a little. Then it happened, the coach came out from the dugout and approached the mound. He took the ball from him, just like in the big leagues. Alex pulled his hat down over his eyes a little lower, his shoulders seemed to droop but he “high five’d” the new pitcher as his teammate took the mound. He headed toward the dugout but coach called him back to take first base.

“Hey, did you see that? He plays first base too! Did you know he played first base too? Why didn’t I know that?”

“Shhh, watch the game.”

The remainder of that inning was pretty uneventful, but then, our boy took his place *on deck*.

Elbowed Dave again, “Look, look how intent he is on the pitches. He’s scrutinizing every warm-up pitch just waiting for the one. He’s deciding which one he’ll be hitting when he gets up to the plate. His head is really in the game, he’s thinking all the time, isn’t he?”

“Yeah, he’s in the game.”

Just what I’ve been waiting for, he gets the “batter-up” call from the umpire. He digs in at the plate. He’s a “southpaw”, harder to pitch to you know. First pitch, over the plate, a swing and a miss, strike *one*.

I offer some encouragement, “You’re ok, hang in there, make him pitch to you, make it be there, come on you can do it.”

My husband encourages me too, “Pipe down.”

Here it comes, second pitch, over the plate, a swing and a miss, strike *two*.

“It’s ok buddy, that’s only two, look ‘em over good, get a piece ‘a one, let’s do it this time. This is it.” Here it comes, he connects. I love the ping of the aluminum bat. It’s a bullet just over the heads of the second baseman and shortstop and it drops in front of the center fielder. Alex rounds first base, split second decision, and he goes for it.

“The umpire calls it, “yer out.”

I jump up and clap with all I got, “good try, good try, shake it off, there’s always next time.”

My husband asked, “Did the first base coach flag him on to second base or not?”

“Who cares? Why does that matter? The kid gave his all, second effort for the team.”

“Well, it usually matters to the *coach*.”

The Panthers took the field, top of the last inning. The score is Panthers 10 and Eagles 9. Our boy took his place on first base. It all came down to two outs, man on third and batter at the plate. Batter stepped in and took a swing, easy ground catch by third baseman and a throw to first. But the throw is low and in the dirt. No play at first. Alex comes through. He scooped the ball out of the dust and fired it into home plate.

I held my breath as the umpire made the call, “Yer out.”

The teams clear the field and line up for the congratulatory march.

“Dave, did you see that? Alex won the game for his team. He saved the tying run. What a thrill that was.”

“Don’t you think you should give the catcher a little credit for making that great play at the plate?”

“Yeah, he did okay too.”

Not too long after we got home from the game, our youngest son stopped by the house. My husband asked, “Aren’t you going to share the highlight from Alex’s game?”

“Yeah, it was great. He ran out of the dugout, hugged me, and kissed me and thanked us for coming to watch his game. Oh, and he pitched and played first base too!”

Surviving Fifth Grade

Fifth grade brought with it the normal highs and lows of an eleven-year-old. Besides the onset of puberty, there's the whole thing of wearing the right clothes, which shouldn't have been an issue for me because I went to the local catholic school where uniforms were required. The navy blue uniforms resembled two full-length bib aprons that were sewn front to back and up one side and down the other, drawn together at the waist with a narrow band that tied in back. Under navy gabardine we wore white cotton; short-sleeved blouses with rounded collars. The length of the uniform was measured to about three inches below our knees. At a time when mini-skirts were "in", that was *not* cool. As I remember, we were not quite the fashion plates that fifth grade year. I didn't quite know how I would survive a style that was supposed to flatter all shapes and sizes when in fact, flattered none.

But then there's dealing with peer rejection; now that's where girls' "clicks" wreak havoc on fragile psyches. Not getting an invitation to a PJ sleepover was devastating. I remember being left out of one sleepover at Nancy's house. I didn't have the nerve to ask why I wasn't invited. But I engaged my best friend, Pam, to go to bat for me. *She* could ask the forbidden question since she already had her invite. Pam reported back that her parents limited the sleep over to four girls. I knew that was a lie. If you didn't want someone at your house, you either blamed it on your parents or that your room wasn't big enough. Pam's efforts on my behalf were fruitless and I sat in my room that Friday feeling sorry for myself.

The summer before fifth grade we moved into our house in the suburbs and would start a new school in the fall. We made one trip to see the new house while it was being built and the next time I saw it we were moving in -- it was August 15, 1962. Our house was six blocks from the main street with a dozen houses per block. Each new owner picked the color they wanted for their house and ours was green, flanked by pink and white on either side. Each front yard had a sapling maple tree and ours turned harvest yellow in the fall. School always started in September, the Monday after Labor Day. That's when I met my forever friend, Pam.

My mom had been after me for the last few weeks to take a walk down the block and see if I could find any kids my own age. I ventured as far as the end of the driveway and back. Why would she send me half-way 'round the world when just weeks before I was confined to a concrete slab of the backyard and a lot across the street where I could be seen from the front porch? I was convinced if I were going to have any friends, they would have to find me. The thought of being the new kid on the block and the new kid in school brought me to tears.

We lived too close to the elementary school to be eligible to ride the bus, so we had to walk ten grueling blocks. My shoes felt like concrete slabs that morning as I stepped foot off the front porch and down the driveway. Turning out of the driveway onto the street, in my peripheral vision I saw a girl that looked about my age. I kept walking with those butterflies in my stomach until she finally caught up to me and asked what grade I was in. After we established I was not an under-classman, we exchange names. "Hi, I'm Debby."

"I'm Pam".

It didn't do much to relieve the perceived torture of being the new kid in class; my only hope was I wasn't the only one.

The first few months of that school year were grueling. I endured the silence in the recess line, the lunch line, and even the bathroom breaks when the rest of the girls chattered about tests, homework, and boyfriends. I wasn't included in the conversation and made no attempt to join in.

Pam, however, soon became my best friend. I was lucky to be in the same class and even more so that we lived eight houses apart. Her house was pink. I could now have friends over and could spend time at my friends' homes. Things were beginning to look up for me following the move. But in the spring of the year, perhaps April, a Saturday, I learned a valuable lesson.

As I recall, Saturdays were work days around our house; I can still hear mom say, "Don't think about going anywhere until your jobs are done." That meant having the job completed and inspected to her satisfaction. Dad was on the road a lot with his job, so it was mom who made the household run and doled out the discipline. I imagine I was called out for inspection of my room at least a couple of times before I was released from cleaning duty.

The routine was pretty much the same, whoever finished their chores first, Pam or I, would call the other. This particular Saturday, I called to see if she could come to my house. She came shortly after that and we embarked upon the world of Monopoly. Somehow the conversation got around to a certain classmate that most of us despised. I tried really hard to like Marybeth because she only lived a few blocks from me, but her hygiene wasn't the best, she was teacher's pet, and turned in notes that were passed through her during class. Some kids in

my class overlooked these habits because she was such a whiz in math and she helped them with their homework. I had to sit next to her in class and I sure didn't want to spend any more time with her than I had to. But I'll admit I tried to cheat off her paper during math tests a few times, but she'd usually lean forward, give me a nasty look and cover her paper with her arm. I didn't do well in math during that fifth grade year.

The Monopoly game was going great until the subject of Marybeth came up. Pam was the type of person who finds good in everything and everybody. She's the cheerleader for the underdog, sees the glass half-full, and would give you the shirt off her back. I should have known where the conversation would go and where it would end. Typical catty girl talk got the best of me and in-between buying houses and passing "go" I declared that I couldn't stand Marybeth. Pam, being the person that she is proceeded to defend her. But Marybeth was teacher's pet, aced all her math tests, and always had her nose in a book. She wore thick glasses that always slid down her nose. I suppose now I'd have to admit it was the green monster that really got the best of me. But there was no going back now. I was determined to make my point and so was Pam.

"She can really be nice sometimes you just have to give her a chance," Pam insisted.

"No, she isn't. She's always figuring out a way to get in with our teacher and get everyone else in trouble and brags about getting the highest grades in math. She cuts into line all the time and is a bully on the playground."

"Well she's not like that to me. So maybe it's *you* and not her."

With that, the Monopoly board flipped houses and money, and *Get Out of Jail* cards went everywhere, but not before Pam vowed never to speak to me again.

I felt betrayed by the only friend I had in my eleven-year-old world. I was mad, I was hurt. I rationalized, she picked her over me; she'd rather stand up for Marybeth than spend time with me. I needed Pam more than Marybeth did. She had been around since the first grade and I was the new kid. In my mind, Marybeth was ruining everything. No, perhaps I had ruined everything. I wondered why we ever had to move and hated school, the new house, and especially Marybeth. I had plenty of time to think about things the rest of the weekend.

I went through the motions of a Monday morning and walked out the door as usual. Just about the time I got to the end of the driveway I could see Pam out of the corner of my eye. I wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of knowing how bad she made me feel. After all, she's the one who didn't want to speak to *me* ever again. I was determined not to apologize. After all, I thought I had nothing to apologize for! I felt the same way about Marybeth as I did the day before. Begrudgingly, I had decided it was absolutely fine if she wanted to pick her over me. I tried to convince myself I would live through it...but I really didn't think I would.

I picked up my pace and tossed my head to avoid eye-contact. Soon Pam passed me on the left; I sped up and passed her on the right. The game of tortoise and the hare continued 'til we reached school. Single file we walked the short hall to our classroom on the left, Miss O'Connor's room. We put our belongings and books away and continued our silent warfare. Pam pulled the shades down to block the early sun; I waited 'til she sat down and I put them back up. She opened the windows; I closed them. I followed her to the corner of the room, right inside the door to the light switches. As soon as she turned them on, I reached across her to snap them off. Somehow arm brushed arm, elbow nudged elbow. Neither one of us, to this day, knows or will admit who pushed first. A few pushes and shoves with fisted hands and it was all over. I can't remember who laughed first. But, in an instant the pushing stopped and we were laughing and hugging and saying "sorry." We vowed never to fight like that again. Kids were coming in so we decided to finish our apologies later and we took our seats.

Marybeth took her seat next to me and the eight o'clock bell rang.

Snow Walk

Frozen air numbs the nostrils

Paralyzes the throat

Shortens the breath, but

Behold a work of virgin art

Dilates the black pools of my eyes

Black and white explode on the frozen canvas

Michael Angelo, Leonardo de Vinci, Claude Monet

Mere men

She paints in hues of moonlight

A shooting star her brush

Magnifies the night, and

Hollows of footprint shadows

Trace a snowy sojourn

Empty Nest

She didn't sleep very well that night and woke in the dawn hours thinking about Amy's first day of school. The summer flew by and it was hard to believe the leaves were turning already which marked another school year. She'd been through this three times before but knew this was the last and that's what bothered her most.

It was time to wake her sleepy-eyed, 5-year-old to the smell of cooked oatmeal which was the routine. What wasn't routine, it was Amy's first day of "big school". With pre-school and kindergarten behind her, this year she would meet her three friends at the corner bus stop and ride the mile and half trek to school without her mother.

Amy had no trouble getting through breakfast, brushing teeth, and getting dressed but mom did. The hands on the clock seemed to move way too fast this morning. Amy squirmed impatiently as mom tried to tie the pink bow on the second pig tail as she reached for the new princess lunch box picked out for first grade lunches. One chime on the half-hour from the grand-father clock in the hallway signaled 7:30 am and she got that pain in the pit of her stomach, grabbed Amy's jacket, trying to get it on her before she got out the door.

Amy opened the door just in time to hear the squeals of the other little girls just as excited to get on the big yellow bus and go to the big school. The other moms gathered in a huddle behind the girls at the corner; looking like a football team huddle planning their next play. It turned out they were just comforting each other as they stood teary-eyed exchanging other “first day of school” stories.

The throaty sound of the engine and the squeal of metal on metal were heard around the block. The bus driver rounded the corner and pushed the lever to open the door that welcomed the girls to their first school bus ride. The bus driver called out their names and checked them off the clipboard. Yes, they were all ok to come aboard. One-by-one they climbed aboard and scurried to find a seat. She never took her tear-filled eyes off the little girl with the princess lunch box as she took that big first step.

Transparent

My daily prayer in high school was,

“Dear God, please make me
invisible today.”

I pushed my way through the coffin halls
reached for the door knob slick as ice
that stood between me and Mr. Wells
felt the dried pyramids of gum
on the underside of the wobbly desktop
slid into the chair that held me against my will
fifty minutes of torture in the green room every day
I obsessed over the face of anonymity, and
hated those jocks trimmed in school colors
the games they played
“Bobby Jones is a monkey today”
no, I wasn't giving them a chance to mock me
always did my homework, and
carried a pile of books on my hip
couldn't stop my pounding heart
when Mr. Wells peered over those wire-rimmed glasses
with those gray stone eyes
so I slouched a lot and learned to block his view
by holding my chin in a sweaty palm

clicking my ball point pen in steady rhythm, as
I drew my brows together and
practiced that thoughtful look, while
thumbing through my biology book
like I was looking up the answer, but

I was happiest when the bell announced
I had made it, anonymously
through

first frost

softly sways side to side

her disguise is shed

piquancy for life cannot hide

displays her head

the autumn equinox draws near

more beauty lost

she stands bedraggled – her worst fear

chill of fall, frost is here

shiver down her spine

a skeleton reveal

bumps and bruises over time

mother nature healed

her nakedness stands

to bear her soul

uplifted hands at last,

the perfect shroud

glistening white sands

Age of Innocence

She lay awake when I enter the room

A smile on her angelic face

I lift, powder, and diaper

One arm above and then the other

slip her PJ's off

Freshen her with a damp cloth

Lotion her baby-like skin

Stop in-between spoonfuls of hot cereal

Wipe her chin

She never stops smiling

Through the eyes of a child

She peers out the window

Watches blue-jays play tag

Story-time, it's her turn to pick

Her eyes grow heavy and she naps

Another day comes to a close

Dinner and a bath

I tuck her in

Kiss her cheek

She never stops smiling

I whisper...goodnight mom

Winter Melt

Winter yields a virgin snow
that lulls to sleep
autumn life that mocks
and taunts her chilling blanket

a game of survival

She deposits another
snow flurry
more cruel than the last
autumn bleak and weary
struggles to embrace the earth

life is slowly ebbing

Relentless and steadfast
she strikes another blow
chards of ice and snow
glaze another sheet of
frozen skin to end the fight

for life – she thinks

Silent and patient
summer awaits
winter's spring demise

Snow Globe

hands block my view

capsized, tossed, turned

clockwise

counter-clockwise

faces loom and recede

noses press against

a convex skylight

swirls, drifts, snow showers

the tiny roof-top

and mounds outside the door

trapped inside

forever winter

An Aruban Sunset

The Atlantic trade winds blew relentlessly that day, not much different from any other day in Aruba. By ten o'clock the beads of perspiration on my upper lip appeared and did not leave until sunset. This day included a journey to the northwest tip of the island. Our route took us over rolling hinterlands that eventually brought us nearly five-hundred feet above sea level.

My fascination with lighthouses heightened my impatience as we drove the backcountry roads to reach the rugged northwest coast of Aruba. It was there we planned to explore the area known as Hudishibana where the still active California Lighthouse stands silent sentry over the rugged coral coastline. She was built in 1910 and named for the steamship *California* which wrecked nearby about two years earlier. It is one of three lighthouses on the twenty mile long island in the southern Caribbean Sea that boasts a population of only 110,000.

We arrived by noon to experience the contrast of the coastline. Sandy beaches and rolling sand dunes met with the rugged shards of coral shoreline. My feet sank into the fine white sand and like quicksand drug my shoes below its surface until only my ankles shown. High-stepping like a proud stallion, I made my way from the dunes to higher ground where the sand became coarse and scattered with pebbles.

I reached the summit and my eyes were drawn heavenward and I stretched to see the light atop the octagonal base. I continued beyond the light to the placid blue sky with cirrus clouds that appeared and disappeared before my eyes. I pivoted on one foot and took in the panoramic view of a lifetime. The sea was all around me. On the western horizon the crimson sun barely met the midnight blue of the sea. A sailboat in the distance approached the setting sun and silently moved across until for only a moment appeared to take position in the center of the sun's eye. My hand did not lift the camera strapped to my wrist. I could not take my eyes from the sacred union of the firmament, the sea, and the sun. It was over in moments and the perspiration above my lip dried and the tropical evening breeze brushed my face.

Graceland

The vantage point from the barn
exposes the low slung branches of
the sixty year-old maple that
hangs over the white split rail fence
and housed the black stallion she rode.

The katydids echo the primitive call of
the fall and the wooly worm
plump, black and red
slithers across the now cracked and faded
bricks she walked daily to the stables.

Her hair, black like her stallions'
held back from her face
dances from side to side
like a metronome
as she races to the stall.

She saddles-up and
in one graceful movement
mounts her steed and
leans into him as
he sprints to the open gate
and takes her wherever she wants to go.

The Memphis humidity pulls me back
from a moment in time she'll never know.

Ode to the Hedge Apple

Oh how I delight at the fallen hedge apple
that takes her annual leap
from the thorny branch of the
Osage Orange tree.

Lumpy, bumpy, hard and green
she is no delight to the eye or the palate
no luscious fruit to be had
and yet,
I am captivated.

Her birth was with the Osage Indians
in Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma
not an easy transplant
we were lucky to get her.

I take pleasure in her fall appearance
before the corn stalks, pumpkins,
and the golden delicious.

I feign the thought of
the golden yellow two by eights
hewn from her stocky trunk
stacked on lumberyard shelves.

I despise the load of four by fours
hacked from her flesh and dumped
in the pasture where fence posts are
her demise.

And the hunter awaits his
special-order archery bow,
made of the world's finest hard wood.

She is endeared to the wildlife
that homestead in her thorny shelter
and delight in her forty feet lofts.

All too soon she leaves me, and
I mourn the decomposing heap
of green scattered below her.

She is all of these.
She is my fall.
She is forever mine.

First Snowfall

i need my snow fix
hats, gloves, ear muffs, boots
held hostage in their resident closets
sleds and cardboard boxes
cobwebbed in basements and garages
Frosties await their birth
hot chocolate to be conjured
children and young at heart
noses pressed against
the frosted window
break into smile, when
first flakes fall

inferno

why another day?

today I will not stay

the gavel bellows

bite your lip

'till it bleeds

look the other way

deaf ears all around

no one hears me

beg forgiveness

don't know why

close your eyes

drift away

spiral to the pit below

pick me up

go another round

until I sleep again

dawn unleashes my inferno

futility

i am putrid gray

be gone, slimy soul

revenge, evil friend

linger for the trophy

you agonize

no...

take me like a samurai

toy with me and be amused

a game for you

i am repulsed

futile and pathetic

don't ignore, but

love or hate

grant me reciprocity

you chose me

i don't even know you

give me back my stolen gem

make up your mind you fickle beast

The letter

June 15, 1970

Dear Deborah and sisters,

I write this letter while deep in mourning. It has been nearly six months since your grandfather passed and I am plagued with sleepless nights. Oh, the usual night fears, sleeping alone, remembering your grandfather's ritual each day causes my heart to ache. Greater than the ache in my heart is the guilt I carry concerning the circumstances surrounding your grandfather's death. Please believe me when I say that I only had your best interest at heart when I told you your grandfather died of a heart attack. I don't know if you and your sisters will ever be able to forgive me, and I don't know that I deserve it. I wanted to save you the pain and agony I suffered when I found Ed that day. I had called for Ed several times from the back porch as he was working out in the barn. After forty-five minutes or so I walked from the porch to the barn. I entered the barn where he spent many hours a day and did find him there on the floor as I had previously reported.

I noticed a dozen or more cigarettes stubbed out on the floor and the hay was worn away in a path-like pattern to and from the barn door. It appeared he had made several trips to and from the door to his work table.

I could still smell the lingering smoke from his cigarettes. I saw his revolver just a few inches from his hand on the floor of the barn. I found a suicide note on the work table that simply said "I'm tired of doing this day after day. I'm sorry." Questions of a secret illness still trouble me. Perhaps his retirement was not what he envisioned. He began to spend more and more time in the barn and less time in the house. I suppose I should have paid attention to the signs and for that I am guilt-ridden.

I hope in time you may come to understand why I kept this from you.

Deborah, please share this letter with your sisters and give them my deepest sympathy and regards.

With sincerest regret and sympathy...

Another Day

Flesh and bone refuse

To lift me from my bed

No light in this day

Beg to stay, my cocoon

Fear drags me out

Resume my prayer

And lumber to the cave

Will his door to open

Negotiate with god

again

Lamentation

my soul cries out in pain

as I grieve the loss of

the son I had

before the cocaine, pot and pills

I am anchored to his guilt

his mother

my flesh

we are one

Coming Home

I talked to the unit nurse on the third floor of Cape Coral Hospital in Cape Coral, Florida the night before. Dad was losing his battle with pneumonia that set in following a regimen of radiation and cancer surgery and had taken a turn for the worse. I asked a hospice nurse be called in for a consult. I'll always regret waiting until the next morning to book a flight. My heart sank into the pit of my stomach. "This is Cape Coral Hospital calling for a...Deborah Herzog."

Stanley Joseph Kutrip, known affectionately to family and friends as "Stasho" died at seventy-six years old with no one at his side. He joined such greats that appeared on the 1999 list of notable deaths, George C. Scott, Cal Ripken, Sr., and Joe DiMaggio. I smiled when I thought about dad being on a list with Joe DiMaggio and Cal Ripken, he loved baseball.

My hands trembled as I struggled to open the zipper on my purse searching for the single key he gave me on my last visit. Damn, I couldn't see what I was doing; I blinked hard a couple times to clear my eyes and it forced the tears to roll down my face. Fall in Florida took on a dank life of its own and my cheeks burned. Found it, the bottle opener my dad attached to his key ring. I jiggled the knob that opened the door to dad's mobile home and we stepped in. Two of my sisters traveled with me for moral support.

I breathed in cigarette smoke and the smell stale whisky. I felt a sob well up in the pit of my stomach and work its way to my chest. I steadied myself at the kitchen counter just inside the door. My eyes were drawn to the dirty water glass that sat on the counter next to his favorite drink. I can still see him dump ice cubes into the glass as he reached for the bottle of Old Kentucky and filled it half full. He topped it off with Peppermint Schnapps and gave it a stir. I thought dad had called it a Tailspin. I remember he looked pitiful. His blue gray eyes stared into the glass just before he lifted it to his lips and swallowed.

That's the last drink I watched him make and the last drink we had together. I sat with my wine cooler and watched TV with him, "Everybody Loves Raymond".

I'm not a TV buff but enjoyed sitting side by side in matching tan recliners, seeing my dad laugh. He deserved to laugh after the last six months of his life undergoing radiation treatments on his neck and throat. His lifeline, a piece of plastic tube inserted in his stomach demanded nourishment three times a day. I watched him pour the nutritional drink through the tube at breakfast, lunch, and dinner hours. A McDonald's commercial appeared on the television and he joked.

"I think I'd just about give away my life savings for a bite 'a that burger."

"Hang in there dad, it won't be long before they take that tube out and you can enjoy some real food again." I thought how tormenting it must be to tantalize the senses but deny the human desire for food.

He smiled at something "Frank" said and I noticed the skin pulled back to reveal his cheekbones more obvious since his significant weight loss. He was about six foot and always carried about a hundred and sixty-five pounds but dropped about twenty-five or so leading up to his surgery. It deepened the crow's feet at the corners of his eyes and brought wrinkles across his forehead that weren't there before.

I loved his ears. He had disproportionate ears that he moved up and down at will and I was fascinated by them. I remember when I was just a little girl I'd sit at the kitchen table and watch him put on a show while he had his morning coffee, black with a half teaspoon of sugar. He'd stare into his coffee cup and pretend he was stirring all the time wiggling his ears up and down. I'd demand an explanation and try to mimic his movements but to no avail. I'd always beg for *one more time*.

Oblivious to my sisters, I moved through the mobile home toward his bedroom and the bathroom at the end of the hall. I've always been drawn to the scent of Old Spice that was distinctively his. I thought older men wore that after-shave but I never thought of Dad as old. He maintained his youthful stature and aged very well. I hoped I'd take after Dad in that respect. He had a real zest for life always out for a good time, a happy guy except when he was home. Eventually, I realized a trucker's life on the road was his home.

My mother ran our household and was the constant in our lives while dad made a living as an over-the-road truck driver. Most of my childhood memories center on my mom and sisters. When dad was home, there were always arguments over money and bills and my mom complained about him never being there. Its true dad was absolved from the daily household obligations after all he couldn't make money and stay home at the same time. I always thought it was fun for dad to travel around the country and see all those places. Mom led us to believe he was having all the fun away from home while she was dealing with us. I'm not so sure now the reality of the situation was as enjoyable as it was made out to be.

I envisioned a lazy drive along a stretch of highway with a picturesque backdrop from state to state; rolling hills, wheat fields gently swaying in a summer breeze, the sun painting mountains as it dropped out of sight. The reality of the situation was very different.

The driver's responsibility for his truck and his products start long before he gets behind the wheel. The driver must be accountable for a series of safety checkpoints on the tractor and trailer, mechanical maintenance, weight check, manifesto check, log book check, personal items check to name a few.

Once the delivery route is plotted he hits the road. The *long lazy drive* is now a race against time to meet the delivery and pick-up deadlines. A layover due to a missed delivery time is lost money, when not moving product the truck driver is not making money. He might pop “no doze” as he drives well into the night adjusting his log book to make it all legal; it is state law truckers can drive ten hours and must be off the road for eight. There are no *rolling hills, wheat fields gently swaying and the mountains painted by the sun* at dusk. He naps in the truck’s cab and turns in a fake receipt for the local motel, an extra twenty dollars in his pocket. Makes it on two meals a day, turns in receipts for three, a few dollars more. Meets his destination, drops his load, picks up another and does it all over again.

So many times we were “shushed” to be quiet while dad slept. He was either sleeping before leaving on the road or sleeping when he got home. He was either picking up his expense check from the garage or stopping at the corner bar. We’d beg to go with him against mother’s wishes; she knew his first stop with a paycheck in his hand was the corner bar. She was right, Dad cashed his check and stopped at the bar right around the corner from the garage, it was called the Paragon.

He always said, “We’ll stop for just one before we go home.”

Sometimes we’d make it to a second bar, Kulage’s on Broadway and sometimes we’d stop at Mr. B’s, a liquor store not too far from the house and he’d pick up beer for the rest of the weekend. He drank Stag. I liked going with dad, he’d show us off to his friends at the bars and when we got to Mr. B’s he’d let us pick out a bag of candy. I usually got red licorice.

I wanted to believe he tried from time to time to be a father, but I just don't think he had it in him. Like the summer of 1959, I was almost eight. I remember coming home from church on Sundays, to the swimming pool almost filled and the smell of chicken grilling on the barbeque pit. The back yard was a concrete slab about thirty feet square. The eighteen inch deep swimming pool took its place in the middle of the yard, an old blanket underneath protected the plastic from the concrete. A hose ran from the cellar like a green snake slithering across the hot concrete to refresh itself in the cool water. You could always find a dish towel draped around dad's neck to catch the sweat from his face before it rolled down his neck and reached his bare chest. His bottle of beer sat next to the bottle of Maul's on the steps that led to the back door of the house. The baseball game was blaring from the radio that took its place on the steps.

I'd hear him yelling at the radio as the batter stepped to the plate, "C'mon, get a piece 'a one, 'ya miserable SOB."

The longer he barbequed the harder it was to understand what he was yelling, except for the "SOB." I could see the disgust growing on mom's face, another weekend, another binge. She couldn't let it go.

"Stasho, give me that platter of barbeque before you drop it. What, you can't set your beer down for a few minutes to bring in the chicken?"

"Back off Lorraine, I got it. Can't you just let it go for once? You got to constantly nag, nag, nag."

Mom and dad disappeared inside the house and we heard the dish slam on the table and another fight began. We were always afraid of what might happen to mom, so we ran into the house in time to hear mom yelling at dad to "Go sleep it off." He brushed past her toward the couch.

Only twice in my life did I see Dad get physical with her. We were in the kitchen at the house in the City and mom got right in Dad's face during one of their nagging arguments. He pushed past her to walk away, I think, and she lost her balance and fell back against the kitchen window. Her elbow hit the window and made a terrible sound. I didn't see any broken glass but mom was holding her arm. My older sister ran to get our grandma who lived right behind us across the alley way. It wasn't funny then, but now when I tell the story I have to chuckle when I picture my Grandma, barely five feet tall roaring through the back door with a black cast iron skillet raised back up over her head yelling, "Where is that son of a bitch?"

The other time was a similar situation at the new house in North St. Louis County. My dad was drunk and mom and dad got into the usual shouting match. I stuck my head out of my bedroom door just in time to see dad push past mom in the hallway and knock her back up against the wall. I ran out of my room and told Dad to stop and leave Mom alone. He staggered down the hall and to his make-shift bedroom in the basement.

Family dynamics seemed to change when we moved from the City to St. Louis's suburban North County; I was twelve that year. Over the next few years Dad's over-the-road truck driving trips turned into weeks instead of days and mom and dad's tempers exploded more often than usual. I woke one Saturday to mom's voice yelling at dad.

"I'm tired of being both mother and father to these kids. You moved me all the way up here away from my mom and the rest of my family. You got what you wanted and what did I get out of it? I got nothin'. I thought the move might help straighten out our marriage and it hasn't done shit for it."

I knew mom and dad fought; that seemed normal. But that was the first time I realized my mom didn't want to move to the new house. I waited for a response from my dad but none came. I was sorry for dad, just sitting there and taking it but on the other hand, I got a pain in my stomach knowing mom felt so strapped by me and my sisters. It was all so complicated. I wanted to be anywhere but where I was. She continued the attack and I'm not sure how long it went on. I buried my head in my pillow.

Shortly after that fight, maybe a week or so, dad moved his things to the basement and slept on an old roll-away bed. His clean clothes were stacked on top of an old chest of drawers. I hated seeing him live in the basement, an outsider in his own home. I guess he couldn't take it anymore and after about a year, he moved out. That's when I started blaming my mom for our dysfunctional family, a decision I lived to regret.

Dad told me once, "A truck driver is no occupation for a family man. I was never around when you kids needed me. It wasn't fair to you or your mother, but she knew what I was when she married me. Still, I've got no one to blame but myself."

I've thought about this confession from time to time and I think it was his way of letting me know being a truck driver and a family man was incompatible for him. He admitted he couldn't be both and truck driving won out. Ultimately, the house we lived in became his stopping off place and the road was his home. Where's the logic in that? Was I supposed to be comforted? Did he expect me to forgive him for not being around?

"Hell no!"

I hit my teenage years and it became clear Dad played a significant role in our family's dysfunctional behaviors. Mom chose to share some things about her relationship with dad. It was painful for mom to disclose that she found letters from other women left in dad's travel bag, trips that lasted a lot longer than the paycheck reflected, and hang-up phone calls when she answered the phone. I think she carried a misguided guilt that she somehow let him down because she never gave him a son. I'm not sure she understood how that admission affected me. It opened a self doubt that this daughter may not have ever lived up to Dad's expectations.

I was quite the tom boy growing up and often wondered if I played softball, was on the bowling team, played powder puff football, and sought jocks for boyfriends, even one with a motorcycle, to make up for the boy he never had . Maybe I tried to be the son Dad never had and maybe I didn't, but I'm convinced my innate desire to *please* ultimately influenced who I became. As the second born in the family pecking order I always did feel the need to *try harder*.

I saw very little of dad during my high school years but I guess I was more traditional than I realized. There are some things for me that are *not* negotiable. My dad walking me down the aisle was one of them. At nineteen he walked me to the altar and that's when I decided, for the sake of the children I hoped would be in my future, I wanted to keep dad in my life. I decided to do the things that are expected of a daughter, even if he had never fulfilled my expectations as a father. I acknowledged his special days with a birthday card and father's day card. I sent his favorites, a three-pound bag of pistachio nuts and a couple bags of barbeque pork rinds at Christmas and followed up with a phone call to wish him happy holidays. I knew from the beginning I was walking down a one-way street but that was the choice I made

I hit my thirties and realized life waits for no one. It doesn't wait for kids to grow up, marriages to reconcile or for dads to come home. My fifteen year marriage was over and at thirty-five I divorced and remarried at thirty-seven. Why my marriage failed is another story, but what I learned in those fifteen years led me to accept my failures and above all, learn I was not perfect and neither was my dad. I reconciled the internal conflict of the divorce and acceptance of it. With the desire to experience a new life, I turned my back on the past. The allegorical similarities of my dad's failure as a father and his battle with alcoholism became obvious to me. If I was able to reconcile my divorce, I could reconcile with my dad. That is not to say that memories still don't bring me to tears, or that I won't experience a "could've been or should've been" in the future, but dad being part of that life took precedence over all.

My life eclipsed. It unleashed a lust for life and I wanted to make my dad part of it. I contacted him and asked if I could spend a few days with him in Florida, where he moved after retirement. I wanted to reconcile and make things right with us. That was the first summer visit and they continued until he died. I'll always wish there were more. It seems you long for a time you never had and work like hell to play catch-up. But you never can.

I needed to concentrate on the issues at hand and spent the next two days taking care of dad's final arrangements in Florida. It still plays in my head like a video. I went through the motions and sometimes wonder how we accomplished closing up his mobile home, attending the memorial service set up by his friends, and arranged to get Dad back home. Each time I moved on to another task it forced me to revisit a place or a moment in time with Dad. There were times I thought I was losing my grip on reality. I struggled to pull myself together. I needed to be strong, he would want me to and I couldn't let him down. It occurred to me, it didn't matter that I was nearly fifty years old I still wanted to please my father. I still wanted his approval

We planned to take Dad back home to bury him at Jefferson Barracks Cemetery he was a World War II Army veteran and deserved that honor. I found myself going through the Yellow Pages to find a funeral home that would pick up his body from the hospital and somehow get him home. The Yellow Pages, it was ludicrous, it felt so cold and ugly. I could just see him stuffed in a body bag in the cargo hold of some plane and I broke down in sobs. I slid down the wall and sat on the kitchen floor. I cried my way through the next hour or so. Now I realize this cathartic experience is what allowed me to finish what needed to be done. Two days later we were on a plane back home.

My flight home gave me time to think about the burial arrangements and organize the tasks facing me in St. Louis. I recalled a conversation dad and I had a couple of summers ago.

With no warning at all, dad asked, "When the time comes, where would you like me to be buried?"

Without hesitation, I said, "We'd want you back home with us, of course."

I felt compelled to ask, "That ok with you?"

"If that's what you want baby, then that's what I want."

I'm not really sure when he started calling me *baby* but I remember the last time we spoke on the phone he ended with "goodnight baby." It's just a word. Yes, it's just a word, but for a moment I was little again and Daddy was there.

We never talked about funeral arrangements again but I've thought about it from time to time. I should have asked *him* where *he* wanted to be buried and not the other way around. I think it had to do with his desire to come home but fear of rejection. We encounter many opportunities in our lives to come home. Fear of vulnerability, rejection, and exposure of our humanness often stands in the way. His pride, his guilt, his womanizing, his ignorance of family life, the call of the road, whatever kept him away is in the past.

I believe life brings us full circle, from dust to dust. It's natural to establish a dwelling place in life and equally natural to seek a resting place. Death ushers life to a resting place and for Dad that place was home.

Tragedy at Punta Gorda

The dog-eared photo
reflects
the rippled gulf waters that unite
horizon and shore at
Punta Gorda
where they walked before
her life without him

Still she devours
his bronze Florida tan
but for the place where the hues of light
shades the face
that holds his smile

It arouses memory of moments
at the end of the pier
where she rested her head on his shoulder
he gently kissed first her eyes,
lips, cheeks, and breasts

He calls her
from the photo she holds to her breast

She is drawn to him
like the moon's pull
at lunar tide
she is drawn to him

She cannot demur
her eyes fix on the pier
where she envisions his figure

Photo clenched in her fists
she enters the water and it eddies
around her ankles, thighs, waist, breasts
a final wave pulls her into the depths
eternal embrace

Sugar 'n Spice 'n

The Life Magazine pages
brown, cracked, and worn
bundled and tied in the box
with letters from my
Vietnam Saigon Warrior
holds secrets from my teens

Dried corsages, ticket stubs
and stained napkins
notes folded like origami
tell of broken dates, broken hearts
and lies

The pink five-year diary
the key hidden in one of the pages
only the pink ribbon in sight
still opens those memories
and locks them up again

The ballerina resurrects and pirouettes
on cue
I open the jewelry box with the
key that hangs from the lock
I finger the ice skater pin
I wore on my peach cashmere
and I drape the silver charm bracelet
across my wrist and smile at the
Sweet Sixteen Heart engraved
Forever Yours, Jim
a Jim forgotten years ago

The top dresser drawer
opens to the imaginary scent of a drawer freshener
made by my girls for mother's day
four bound journals, hand-made,
embody the work of my children
never to be written in

And four cheese cloth towels proudly display
a series of stitches they learned
in sewing class that year
never to touch a dish

From the corner of my dresser mirror
hangs a three diamond necklace

that promises love
yesterday, today, and tomorrow

I delight in all my treasures

White Flight

We lived in a four-family red-brick flat on the north side of the city of St. Louis with a concrete slab for a back yard and an alley out back where we were never allowed to play. Rusted and mangled trash cans littered the cobblestone street behind the yard. Shattered soda bottles and pint-size liquor bottles were scattered from one end to the other. Once I saw an old dirty man with tattered rags wrapped around his hands and tied in a knot. He pushed a small hand-made cart that reminded me of a wheel barrow. I could see a rusty tricycle sticking out of the top. My mom said he was a “rag-picker”.

Five concrete steps led to the front porch where the milkman left two gallons of milk, every third day, except Sundays. The paper boy tossed the newspaper in the corner of the enclave that housed four doors. Ours was the downstairs apartment on the left.

Directly across from our house was the corner confectionary, today it would be called a convenience store. After the move to the suburbs, the only corner store was the Seven-Eleven, but it wasn't across the street and not within walking distance anymore. Before the move, if we ran out of something, we had the luxury of running just across the street to buy a loaf of bread for twenty-cents and eight slices of bologna for a dime. I returned a soda bottle for a two-cent deposit in exchange for a bag of penny-candy. The beveled glass case that housed the candy appeared huge to a six-year-old. With my nose pressed against the glass, I could view the expanse of candy laid out in neat little rows. I was quick to select a candy that was “five for a penny” or “two for a penny”. I walked away with a brown bag full.

There was another advantage to living on that corner. We had the neighborhood water hydrant right out in front of our house. During a grueling St. Louis summer heat wave we prayed for the water department to order the opening of some of the city water hydrants. We prayed especially hard it would be ours. There was nothing like the chill of water rushing from the hydrant cooling off the neighborhood's sweaty kids and the steamy cobblestones that wound their way down our street. I would soon be forced to trade the rush of the cool hydrant water and the burn of the cobblestones on my feet for a lawn sprinkler and a patch of grass.

Summers in the city remind me of the Fourth of July's from the roof-top of our four-family flat. We drug our canvas beach-like lawn chairs up a couple flights of stairs to the roof. We were held a good distance back from the edge, but still a perfect spot to take in the city's fire works. To this day I don't know where the fireworks were shot from, but living in north city gave us a grand view.

The tiny single silver rocket, barely visible to the eye, shot straight up into the night sky. The second before it burst into thousands of glittering fragments the shrill sound of its travel came to an immediate stop. It was as if someone were riding along and at precisely the right moment, applied pressure to the breaks bringing the rocket to a screeching halt. Our eyes were fixed, bodies immobile, and never paid a bit of attention to the hot tar roof under our tennis shoes, just beginning to cool down under the evening sky.

We celebrated after the last visual with the traditional Fourth of July watermelon treat. I can still feel the chill on the nerve-endings of my teeth as I bit into the half-moon shaped piece of melon iced all day. We wore the sticky melon juice from ear-to-ear. Our first stop upon entering the house was the crawl-leg bathtub where we were stripped, hosed down, and PJ'd before bed.

Summer slipped into fall rather uneventfully in the city. Very little green space lived around our house except for a large maple tree on the vacant lot across the street. Dried brown maple leaves blew into the street and took respite in the sidewalk gutter and piled up forming its own compost until spring rains washed it away. There was no visual change of season. It was not until we moved to Suburban North St. Louis that I experienced a change of seasonal colors.

The vacant lot across the street used to have a house on it. The reason I knew it was a three-sided cinder-block perimeter still stood. The ground was black gravel dirt with chunks and slivers of glass and bottle caps in the mix.

A bunch of older boys played a game called "bottle-cap". They used what looked like a broom handle for a bat, long and skinny. The pitcher tossed a metal bottle cap that came off the top of a glass soda bottle for a ball. The cinder-block perimeter served as a great guide for the bases. There was no outfield in this game.

I didn't much care about the bottle cap game, but the perimeter was built up a good two-and-a-half to three feet off the ground and it was perfect to climb on. And we did. My sister and I boosted each other up and walked around with arms held straight out, like the performers in the tight rope acts at the circus. It was high enough to turn your stomach, high enough to make you just a little dizzy

and high enough to cause some real good skinned knees if you fell. Mom would know exactly how and where they came from. After she bandaged me up and gave me a good swat, I knew I'd better be a little more careful the next time.

Mom never wanted to work outside the home. All she wanted was to stay home and raise her family. In the 1950's that was expected of you. She wasn't much of a housekeeper, but she always said, "The dishes, the laundry, the dusting; they'll all still be there tomorrow, but the kids won't."

She loved the holidays. I am her legacy.

We trick-or-treated in beautiful hand-made costumes, like the "Little-Bo-Peep" costume my sister got to wear the year I was the clown. I was too young to complain, but I made up for it over the years whenever I saw the pictures from that Halloween. I chided Mom for favoring my sister and that's why she got the better costume. I truly had no reason to complain. I remember being a gypsy, an angel with wings and halo no less, Cinderella with wand and crown, cat with pointed ears, tail and whiskers, and Little Red Riding Hood.

From Halloween to Christmas I thought our home was *the* place to live and be. Preparing for Christmas held certain rituals some to this day I've kept as my own. There was always the trip to Famous-Barr downtown to see the windows decorated for Christmas and the Christmas Wonderland that led us to Santa Clause and the grab-bag toy given as we left Santa's throne. Three generations baked Christmas cookies and the family's traditional Boston Brown Bread. The kitchen table looked like it could have been a pre-school work table covered with red and green construction paper, scissors, and glue. We strung new construction paper garland every year for the Christmas tree. We celebrated the

eve of St. Nicholas Day, a Bohemian-Czech custom. We hung our stockings from the mantel on St. Nicholas eve and found them the next morning filled with nuts and oranges and a few pennies that made their way to the toe of the sock.

I would come to know living in suburban north city we couldn't reach downtown by bus and driving a car and parking kept us from the traditional Christmas Window experience. There was no mantel on which to hang a sock and construction paper garland was replaced with green and red beads from the store.

I felt a new awareness as I hit my pre-teen years. The third and fourth grades brought new privileges and permission to move beyond the concrete slab back yard and cross the street for more than the corner confectionary.

We lived in an area of the city that was a cultural melting pot. People of many nationalities lived within blocks of each other, yet each group upheld its own customs. My father was of Polish decent and my mother was of German-Dutch decent.

My dad's mother and father came to America from Poland and lived on the north side of the city. There were neighborhoods of Italians, Germans, Irish, and Polish. My dad told a story about my grandfather looking for a job but the only place he could find work was at the slaughterhouse where cattle were butchered. It was a very undesirable job no one else would take. My grandfather had huge hands, twice the size of my father's and he took the job as a "splitter."

The sides of beef hung from large meat hooks and his job was to split the carcass in half. He went home carrying the stench of the cattle's blood. The smell permeated work clothes and shoes and there was always that distinctive smell of my grandparent's house. No matter how many times we left and returned to visit, it was still there. No escaping it.

My father's side of the family never celebrated Christmas after coming to America because my grandmother's home back in Poland suffered a terrible house fire during Christmastime when candles on the tree caught fire to the house. But, one Sunday a month was set aside to spend with my father's side of the family at my grandparents' house. Grandma made the worst chicken soup. I think it was made with chicken blood. It was a Polish "old world" recipe. We ate it because we were told to. The women cleaned up after dinner, the kids were shoed out into the yard, and the men smoked in the living room until the kitchen table was cleared and the Sunday poker game began.

Both sides of our families held proudly to who they were and where they came from as a *people*. It was customary to spend Christmas Eve at home and Christmas Day and Easter with my mother's side of the family. We spent the holidays with cousins playing games or occupying ourselves outside while the aunts and uncles visited. There were hams and baked goods and canned pickles and German potato salad to feast on.

I never spent the night at any of my classmate's houses and no one spent the night at ours. It seemed we lived a very family-protected life. Family was our connection.

I did have a girl friend over after school one day. I think I was in the fourth grade. She was a girl I played jump rope with at recess, a classmate at the local catholic grade school. Her name was Laura Sigh. We walked straight home after school and played ball in the back yard. The game was called "twelve's." You threw a small rubber ball against the side of the house to the count of twelve. There were twelve sets to the game and for each set the ball was thrown differently. I don't remember the order now, but one set was thrown overhand against the wall, one was underhand, until a total of twelve sets were completed. Whoever made the twelve sets with no mistakes was the winner. I'm not sure we ever finished the game.

We played a game called "steps". One of us held a rock in their hand and extended both closed fists. If the other person guessed which hand the rock was in they moved up a step. If the wrong hand was chosen, the other player now held the rock. The goal of the game was to get to the top step first. I don't remember a lot of conversation just companionship. That's how it was on the school playground and that's how it was in our concrete-slab back yard.

Mom called me in for dinner and Laura left for home.

"See you at school tomorrow," I called after her.

"See you," she called back.

I still wonder what she thought when I never asked her over again.

At bedtime that night, we said prayers, and that's when mom told me it would be best if Laura didn't come back to our house to play. I wondered what was wrong. Everything seemed fine, just like on the school playground.

I asked simply, "Why?"

"She's colored. And coloreds should keep with their own kind."

"But we play at school and the nuns let us play together."

"Yes, and that's fine at school. But you just can't bring her home. They are just different from us and I'll bet she lives in that high-rise housing project you pass on the way to school. So you stay away from those projects and don't let me find out you ever went to her house."

"Promise?"

"Yes, I promise." And that was the end of it.

I think about this now and wonder why I wasn't at least angry or ask more questions. As a young girl, living in the late 1950's and early 1960's it was a different way of life. We were brought up to be seen and not heard and don't do as I do, do as I say. For the most part I didn't question my parents. I was ten years old. I complied.

My grandma used to take me on the city bus to Soulard Farmer's Market. We carried back fruit, vegetables, and sometimes sausage and meat. My favorite time was the summer grandma took me and my sister on the bus to the market and bought us hula hoops. They had just hit the market. Mine was lime green and my sister's was hot pink. Grandma was loaded down with bags from the market and we proudly boarded the bus with our hula hoops. Somehow they made their way down the middle aisle of the bus on a quick stop and we retrieved them under the discerning eye of the bus driver.

The bus and trolley line was St. Louis' commuter system in the 1950's. We didn't have a car, the bus and trolley was how I got around town as a young girl. It was not unusual that colored people generally moved to the back of the bus or that there were two separate water fountains in the small park on the grounds of the Farmer's Market. That's just the way it was. But it wouldn't remain that way for too much longer.

I was told to stay on the right side of the street away from the housing project. If a colored man walked toward us on the side walk grandma would lead us across the street and tell me not to look up at him. Our pace quickened, my hand squeezed grandma's just a little harder and I obediently followed.

One day, we were not able to cross the street to avoid a colored man. I couldn't help myself, I looked. His hair was kinky and around his face were tiny curly gray hairs that stuck out from under a light tan almost yellow hat that had a wide dark band around it. The white of his eyes were a little yellow but his eyes were very dark brown. He smiled and tipped his hat to me. I smiled back.

It made no sense at all to an eight-year-old. What was grandma so afraid of? I didn't know what segregation was but it was all around me. My family was silently passing on the transgressions of their generation to me.

It wasn't until I was much older that I really understood the snapshot of history I experienced. The housing project my mom referred to was the famous public housing project failure, Pruitt-Igoe. It was completed in 1955 and less than twenty years later was demolished. Ironically, the project was authored by architect Minoru Yamasaki who would later design New York's World Trade Center that was demolished under much different circumstances.

The housing project consisted of thirty-three eleven story apartment buildings on a fifty-seven acre site on the north side of the city, not far from our house. This complex housed almost three-thousand apartments designed with small kitchens, undersized appliances, “skip-stop” elevators stopped only at the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth floors, forcing residents to use stairs in an attempt to lessen congestion. Only these floors were equipped with large communal corridors, laundry rooms, and garbage chutes. It was well known the stairwells and corridors attracted muggers, ventilation was poor and centralized air conditioning was not installed.

There were restrictions on colored people owning property and segregation in neighborhoods existed. While it was okay for Polish, Irish, German and Italian’s to intermingle, the coloreds were not. As a result, the project provided continued segregation for the city’s housing under the guise of a beautiful new housing project.

Typically, its failure was explained away as purely architectural. But other critics bring in social factors like the economic decline of St. Louis and the *white flight* into suburbs as contributing factors.

De-segregation changed my world. I would come to realize our family became part of this suburbanization process. We, like hundreds of families on the city’s north side took part in the white flight.

We managed just fine, I thought, in our four rooms; a living room, two

bedrooms, and kitchen with a small bathroom for our family of six. The four kids slept in the same room; four single beds, one in each corner of the room. There was one dresser my sister and I shared and it had a round beveled mirror on it. I remember the vine-like etchings around the perimeter; like you see sometimes on fancy glasses. The other two sisters shared a chest of drawers that lived between their two beds on the far wall; none of our furniture matched. But, that didn't seem so important back then. I remember the linoleum on the floor was a hideous gray and white pattern of what appeared to be a peony flower in full bloom, like the field of poppies in *The Wizard of Oz*. I remember lying on my stomach half hanging off the bed, chin in hands, squinting to make the flowers small, then large, back to small again. I could almost make them disappear if I closed my eyes really tight; just enough to let a squint of light in.

One morning watching TV in the living room I heard a knock at the back door and made my way to the kitchen. I got there just in time to see my mom count out forty, one-dollar bills and hand it to the landlord who came to collect on the first of the month. That was the first time I understood the cost of renting. She didn't appear very happy to see him. I remember the conversation going something like this:

“Here you go Benny, forty one-dollar bills this month. Let me count them out for you.” She deliberately placed each bill in his hand one-by-one.

She muttered something like, “There, that's some of the last few dollars you're gonna get out of me. I'll let you know as soon as I know.” He left and mom was in a bad mood for a while. I wondered what she would let him know.

It would soon become clear to me she would let him know when we were moving out.

I remember the first place I lived because it holds my fondest childhood memories. It's where I lived for the first twelve years of my life. I didn't know it, but we were poor. My Dad was a truck driver and worked out of several garages taking whatever loads he could get. Some were long trips and some were short. I can't say it really mattered to me as a kid. Mom did a good job of being both mom *and* dad.

Living paycheck to paycheck made for some strange combinations for dinner meals. Like the potato pancake supper. To make food dollars and meals stretch, mom would peel a couple big potatoes and grind them up to make potato pancakes and served them with canned peaches. We would spoon the peach syrup over the top of the pancakes and she made it seem like something really special.

I overheard adult conversation from time to time that "the neighborhood was getting bad because so many people were moving out with the planning of the new highway." It was clear by the end of my fourth grade school year our four-family rental flat had been bought by the city to make way for the Highway 44/55 construction that would cut right through our neighborhood.

Early that summer my dad got a "full-time" truck-driving job in the City and worked for Bardenheier's Wine Company and was able to drop the piecemeal runs he got with several local trucking firms. He eventually retired from the wine company after twenty-five years of service. The security of the full-time job loosened money up a bit and we could afford a home of our own. We bought a

small three-bedroom house with a kitchen, living room and bathroom and it had a basement. In 1962 the cost of this small house in a suburban subdivision was \$13,200 with a mortgage payment of \$92/month. Even with dad's permanent job, there was concern over whether or not they could make the payment.

One night dad said, "I hope we can make it without you having to work."

My mom's eyes began to tear, "You know how I feel about staying home with the kids. Your job takes you on the road and I need to be here for them." "We'll cross that bridge if we have to." And that was the end of the conversation. It wasn't the end of the conversation at all; eventually my mom took a retail job in a discount store to make ends meet.

Shortly after that I was told we were moving and would start a new school in the fall. We made one trip to see the new house while it was being built and the next time I saw it we were moving in -- it was August 15, 1962. From a four-family flat to rows and rows of houses, like the song, "*rows of boxes, little boxes, all made of ticky-tacky, all look just the same*".

I took my place in suburban sprawl.

WORKS CITED

Long, Haniel quote. <http://www.quotationsbook.com/quote/14287/>