

Make yr peace; say yr goodbyes

Meowl od'ed two Sundays from
last Thursday the phone call came to me in Chicago
while I was in The Globe, drinking; this didn't happen
while I was telling the story of when
Dr. E fell past nine stories before
landing on a parked car beneath (*I hate remembering*
folks at right angles) the deck of an apartment
in Prague. How much further are we
from next Sunday. Pull up seat, "sparky,"
as my Paw-Paw used to say. All sorts of folks used to
tell of the afternoon when my Mom became
famous for turning loose
of my great Maw-Maw Ruth's poodle
while holding it out-over their
back porch railing, it's piss-stained hind legs
idling an invisible paddleboat stationary in thin air. They owned Stump's Motel

right on the berm 119. They told that story lots, he said. Sometimes,
where I'm from, a good while is just how long it takes

to see it through. We stopped visiting Elkview Baptist
Church Sundays and Wednesdays when I was blowing
off Christ Jesus in my fussy, early teens. When I saw the ghost
of Sarah Gunning, long before she was deceased,
I saw her move like a gun butt down a washboard
on a radio program. I was pigeon-toed, and obvious. But, at least I swear.

During the Christmas cantata I yelled,
“hey mom they got a great big giant bathtub back here!” She smiled.
Pastor Sizemore's wife shunned us after that. Nowadays,

all I sense is folklore, and hills. And the rest, presence
immaterial and immense, swarms all. The timber rattler that bit Jason's cousin's bottom lip
clean through, thusly no poisoning (out Quick road). That pet raccoon Ronnie had,
its name now escapes me, wider than a metal trash can
lid it was, and he found its body one morning
in a ditch up the road, near the next hollow missing

all its feet and its tail (out Frame road). “Lore—the materials of folklore
rather than the people who use

the materials.” Told, we all have one thing
in common, we do—“we feed our hearts
on fantasies and they become
savage.” We had nothing
to do with nothing, I swear. And I am,
of course, not speaking literally

of the names I did and will speak of here.

The people,
rather than the materials.

The first time I ever touched
a condom it was the bottom ring,
after being fully unrolled, and a stringy burst
piece which horseshoed my ear. Jeremy,
who hit me, experienced this too.

I ended up with a wet head; he ended up with a kid.

He, the father, and Crystal, the mother, and me
used to ride the same school bus home, down 119
from Hoover, past Elkview Baptist and then past
the Dairy Queen, left (*she was real pretty,*) across the Elk River
bridge, and up N Pinch Rd and on past New Hope Road,
(*she was, wasn't she,*) and all the way up to our stop, Roger's IGA.

They sat across the aisle from me on occasion. The seats green and near straight
up and down, just like this, a strange textured rubber. They were cool. Josh and I usually trailed

far behind them, stoned (normally). While skipping Erik and Shannon
once stole dodge balls from the Pinch

Elementary Basketball court (*I saw Randy Moss
and his brother and cousins school everyone there one evening*), and they
wore Halloween gorilla masks and green hoodies
to hide their faces, and so did I. When I was in 9th grade,

rednecks rocked the DuPont High

School buses as they were leaving

our school after a football game. Randy Moss,
who my Maw-Maw adores, was uninjured, but many of the band kids
in the bus behind the team's bus
ended up in the hospital, or covered in broken glass. My claim to fame
after that, as I tell it to people, is when
I threw two alley-oops to Randy Moss

up at the Charleston YMCA. None
of my friends were there.

But it happened. I swear.

To help the families of the hospitalized
band kids, the DuPont PTA boosters
sold T-shirts screenprinted with the words
“I got stoned at Hoover.” We used to laugh
because

so did we. Living along a river in Appalachia
is not like owning rechargeable batteries.

Or a battery recharging housing unit, though we,
my family that is, got one to save money,
but then rechargeable batteries got real
hard to find. We were the first ones in Kelly Bottom
to own an Atari, firsts with a VCR, too.

The first film my family and I watched was
The Karate Kid. I went spin kicking and chopping
all over the air of our cool basement, which doubled
as my folks' master bedroom for a good while,
as well. My Pap-Pap's favorite game
was *Missile Command*. My dad and I

played a lot with the GI Joe train

set they bought and built me late one x-mas eve. We also
played a good bit with this GI Joe vs Cobra
game where you launched Styrofoam shuttles
tipped with rubber domes back and forth, aiming them at these

soft spots that were located all over our big, fancy green
homebases. The cardboard pieces of armor were spring loaded
and would fly off after a direct hit. My dad and I invented “chest ball,”
as well, which is how my throwing motion
became so mechanically sound. I was
like 10 or 11 when he started wearing a catcher’s mit; my dad
his joints between his bones
are a substance akin to
those that constituted the rubber
bands that propelled our shuttle-rockets,
and so much hope. My dad has worked in the coal
mines his whole life (he “wanted to be
just like his dad” he told me once on a long drive
between Evansville, IN, and Hurricane, WV, on the way
to see Pap-Pap).

My Pap-Pap was a Marine Sniper. Told, he used the GI Bill

to work his way up from the mines, like wells, until that day
he finally became a coal company VP. My dad drove, after getting up at 4 am each morning,
120 minutes both ways
to Wells No. 1, Robin Hood, Montcoal, and so many others
for something over

like 20 years. He didn't want us to have to live

in the actual coalfields. My Dad's company,
Peabody, moved the three of them recently
from the house both of my grandfather's
lent hands to my father, a blue-sided building on Elm Street
in Pinch, out to Evansville. We all, the four of us including my sister,

all lived in a tiny two-bedroom apartment there

until the blue house on Elm Street was built. My Mom cries now
when my Maw-Maw, daughter-in-law to Ruth, demands they put up
the old x-mas decorations,
is what my Dad explains to me. West Virginians

can be bitter folk, I tell him. He laughs.

Maw Maw swears up-and-down to me

“It ain’t Christmas in this stupid house

without them up. I know we live in hell,

but at least for a while, *maybe*,

we could just *maybe* not act like it.” I laugh

because I’ve never had to live there.