



**2012  
Valley Voices  
Writing Contest Winners**

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**Poetry Winner -- Youth**

**Migration**

by Kathleen McAlister

Ribbons of geese  
Ripple and snap  
Against the pale December sky  
Blown by a harsh winter wind.

They talk back and forth  
Their honks echoing  
in the vacant prairie  
Guiding them on.

Twilight, casting a purple haze,  
Finds them huddled at a pond  
Preparing for a long night  
In the lonely, snowy plains.

**Poetry Winner -- Adult**

**Pall Mall Cigarettes**

by Don Downing

U. S. Army, 1953, Germany.  
Learned the easy way,  
make ten or fifteen bucks.  
Takes less than an hour.

It's Friday night. Fellow GI's  
carry huge suitcases packed  
with thirty cartons of cigarettes.

They finish evening chow by 5:30.  
Hurry to catch the seven o'clock  
train to Frankfurt.

Back on Sunday, before lights out.  
Tell stories of fun, frolic, and frauleins.  
Funded by selling black market  
cigarettes to German citizens.  
Love our Pall Mall cigs.

Quick to learn my weekly allowance.  
A carton of cigarettes and a pound  
of coffee. Stood in line, paid my two bucks.

Sold my allowance to other GI's.  
Four dollars, a tidy two dollar profit  
for a lowly private.

My entrepreneurial spirit kicked in.  
Thirty days later, I'm in business.  
Ventured through the woods  
to German village.  
Cigarettes filled a grocery bag.

Saturday afternoon, knocked on doors.  
Man of the house asked,  
"Haben Sie Zigarett, bitte?"  
(Do you have cigarettes, please?)

Sold him my allowance, and four others.  
Easy to earn \$10 a week. Forty a month!  
That's more than my Army pay, until...

Army jeep pulled up next to me.  
Two M's (military police) asked,  
"Where are you going?" "Oh, only  
for a smoke and a walk in the woods."

"What's in the sack?" they asked.  
They got me. Better be truthful.  
"Cigarettes," I said. One MP looked in the  
sack.  
"Are you going to smoke all these yourself?"  
"No, I hoped to sell them."

"Get in the Jeep, we're going to call  
Provost Martial. He'll decide what to do."  
MP's made a phone call. Handed phone  
to me, "You know, this is against the law.  
Do you want this on your service record?"

The Martial, royally "chewed me out."

I replied, "Sir, it's true, I planned to sell  
cigarettes to the Germans. I promise,  
I'll never do this again."

Couldn't believe him, when he said,  
"I'll let you go this time. Do it again,  
and this is recorded in your 201 file."

Dodged the bullet. Took another chance.  
Had this bag full of cigarettes.  
A month's income, shot down the drain.

Three days later, nearly dark,  
took my bag of cigs back to the village.  
Knocked on the same doors.  
Sold them all, and never again.

## **YOUTH ESSAY—FIRST PLACE**

"ROAD TRIP"

by GARRETT McBLAIR

Finally, school is out for the summer. It is now time for my family to go to Colorado for our summer vacation. After we load our bags, we hop into the car and take off. As we continue, we turn onto highway 24, a road that I have heard about, but am not familiar with. I mean, I have been on it before, but I don't know very many of the towns or what they have there. Curious, I pull out my phone to research the towns that we cross or any town signs on many different websites. The first place that we pass is a small and rather humble looking town, Glasco.

A man named Isaac Biggs founded Glasco on July 18, 1871. It was originally called, "The Dell Ray Town." Seven years later it had adopted the name of Glasco. Glasco is known for its two main attractions, the downtown business area and the Pott's Ford Bridge, which is about ½ mile outside of town. According to the census of 2010, Glasco contains 498 people. In a person's point of view,

Glasco would look like a small town, but imagine how well they must know each other. I wouldn't mind visiting Glasco to see what is so special about the business district.

Wondering how awesome it would be to be able to visit Glasco I lost focus. Snapping out of my daydream, I see a sign about a town called Simpson. Simpson was founded in the year 1871. From the 2010 census, Simpson was the home of 86 people. An extremely small town but yet its townsfolk are extremely close. The thing that people love about this town is its main attraction, Trapper's Bar & Grill. I could taste the mouthwatering crunch of the simply divine Chicken Fried Steak.

Picturing this wonderful meal I notice another sign saying Asherville. Asherville was settled in the year 1867. It was the first town in Mitchell County to have a post office. By the year 2010, Asherville had only 28 people, another very small town like Simpson. A small town with no hustle and bustle to annoy its citizens. It would be a very relaxing spot to live in.

As we keep going along, I wonder about the life people around here live. Then, we come across a town that looks a lot bigger than Glasco, this is the town of Beloit. A. A. Bell settled Beloit in 1868, but it was first called Willow Springs. In 1870 Beloit became county seat. It is a myth that Indians advised Bell to place the town at a certain place so it would never be hit with a tornado but the legend is still proven true. The Beloit area has not been hit yet. The city of Beloit contains a limitless amount of attractions such as its brand new waterpark. In 2010, it was recorded that 3,835 people live there. I would love to live so close to a waterpark, it would be awesome.

Wondering about what the waterpark would have we go by a new sign that has the town Solomon Rapids on it. The town of Solomon Rapids was founded in 1870 and originally was a stockade from native attacks. It gets the name from the rapids close to the town. There is a lot of history in this old town that make it fun researching. In most census cases, Solomon Rapids is so small that its population is incorporated with Beloit's. I would like to see the rapids someday if I ever get the chance.

We keep going on and then we circle around a small town called Glen Elder. Glen Elder was established in the year 1871. From the census of 2010, Glen Elder contains 445 people. It is a cozy little town noted for its many festivities and general hospitality. Some of its holidays are the Glen Elder Chili Cookoff, the Glen Elder Funday, and the Glen Elder Trunk-or-Treat.

Imagining the many more parties that they have I wonder if it is not the town suited for me. Then we go through another town called Cawker City. Cawker City was established on March 20, 1874. It is home of the world's largest ball of twine. It is also sitting next to Waconda Lake. In 2010, 469 people lived in Cawker City. I would love to swim in the lake and get my picture taken with the twine.

Imagining me looking weak and small next to the twine brought up some laughs until we get to a new town called Downs. It was founded in the month of December in the year 1879. It is an old railroad styled town that contains many railroad themed attractions. It also has many more modern attractions, such as Strikers bowling alley. Downs contained 900 people in the year 2010. It would be so much fun to be able to go bowling more often.

This is the small stretch that has changed my mind, so I ask my parents if we can change our vacation plans. They quickly agreed since it was so much cheaper and it turned out to be the best road trip ever.

## **ADULT ESSAY—FIRST PLACE**

"THE CORNER STORE"

by SHARON ARNOLD

A little magic? Maybe.

The Corner Store is on the corner of Main and Fisher in Glasco, Kansas. This magical place was once a grocery store called Studt's Mercantile. Now it is owned by the Glasco Community Foundation.

Open every Tuesday, 10:00 am 'til 4:00 pm, you will find Joan, our local historian, behind the counter, taking care of the many needs of the store. This is the happening place. Joan has her work cut out for her.

Spring and summer produce is sold from local gardeners. Milt, one of the main suppliers, brings radishes, cucumbers, squash, tomatoes, lettuce, spinach, whatever the season brings. Wonderful pies from Betty, a long time resident. Others bring cookies and cakes.

If you are lucky to come in at this time you will hear the Fisher Creek String Band. The music is played by the retired doctor, Doc, we call him, and another local resident, Clark. Doc learned to play the fiddle in his early 80s and Clark played guitar in his youth. After retirement Clark learned banjo, mandolin, and fiddle. Sometimes we go to just sit and listen. Their music will tug at your heart strings. It does mine, taking me back to my childhood, remembering my grandparents or an old romance. Truly magic. Sometimes people come into the store and start dancing!

There are many events in the store, encouraged by Joan. One spring I came in at Easter time and helped stuff plastic Easter eggs with candy for the little kids to have for the Easter egg hunt at the park.

The Corner Store throughout the year features school projects that the kids do in school during the school year.

From this wonderful store I have made many connections I would not have. Joan encouraged me to join a book discussion group. I learned so much from that and enjoyed the people. It was there Doc mentioned he liked poetry. The next year at the Corner Store I started reading poetry. My mom used to recite it all the time. I didn't appreciate it at the time. Now in my 70s, I've gained a great respect for it. Even though I'm an amateur compared to Doc and the others that can so eloquently recite it, I love it.

I also started taking a Spanish class. My granddaughters' other grandmother encouraged me. She and I are known around town as "The Grandmothers." This class is taught by two retired professors that donate their time teaching in the school and us at the Corner Store. JoAnn and Eddie. Eddie is from Ecuador and we not only learn Spanish. We learn all about South America. It's awesome.

JoAnn had a stroke. She is back on her feet and doing well. Last year she needed to learn to eat healthier, so she wanted to share this with some of us. So she started a nutrition class. A few of us went. The book she was studying from had a section on depression, a little talked about subject. One person had suffered throughout life, another had a close relative who she had cared for, and myself—my spouse had one and a half years suffering from this. We found ourselves from nutrition class to becoming a support group. I'm a widow now, but caregivers suffer as much as the victims. We shared a bond that day, and left the Corner Store with a little weight lifted off of our shoulders. We are not alone.

This is the type of community I've found here.

Other events featured are: June—the Rhubarb Festival, a big event. Many bring in food, all from local gardens. Pies, cakes, puddings, punch, all from rhubarb. We have a sing along with songs written by a local woman, all about rhubarb. Tunes from Old McDonald had a farm to Amazing Grace, led by Marlene and with Niva playing the accordion. What fun and the food delicious.

This year, in order to celebrate the Farmers' Market, in July—Red, White and Brew. You come in and make your own salad, free to the community, sit, visit, have cold drinks. In August—Salsa Tasting. With chips, dips, all kinds of salsa. All donated by the local residents in this community.

The Corner Store features different speakers throughout the year. Don Downing does missionary work in Haiti. He is also a writer. His books are sold with a large part going to the Corner Store. Tom Glasco, Senior Poet laureate of Colorado, read his poetry and sells his books there. Verna Davidson's mother was a loved teacher in Glasco. Verna wrote a history book of her family and talked about it, then sold it there at the Corner Store.

This just touches on a few events I've seen here. There are many I haven't been a part of.

This year features The Way We Worked photo contest. It sets the stage for Glasco's role in the The Way We Worked Smithsonian exhibit, an event for this winter.

We just had Fun Day here. The Corner Store is open with a restroom for the public. Many come from out of town for the parade and events at the park.

Fall: a touch of winter coming. Many locals bring their plants to the Corner Store so not to lose them to the frost to be tenderly cared for by Joan! She also taught me and the other grandmother to knit. I'm not crafty. Josie, the other grandmother, is. So now I'm in a craft class. Everyone helps each other.

Winter: I'll be down at the Corner Store to help the little kids make homemade decorations for the Christmas tree at the Corner Store. This time of year there is a food drive and all the food is taken to the Corner Store for distribution.

So many volunteers I can't mention participate all year long. I am pleased to have met so many and been involved with this community.

Now that I've lived a long time, I see styles.

## YOUTH AUTOBIOGRAPHY—FIRST PLACE

“THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME”

by ALLYSSIA ROGERS

In life, everyone has something that they are talented at. People spend most of their life trying to find out what their talent specifically is and what they would like to do. For some, finding this talent is easy, for others it may take a while; some may never find it. High school is a time where one can really find who they are. There are classes that cater specifically to each person's interests and talents. I was one of the lucky ones; I knew what I was good at—volleyball. Many tell me it is just a sport, and yes, that is true, but to me it is more than a sport, more like a lifestyle. I began playing at a young age and have never stopped. Ever since I can remember, I either watch a volleyball game or practice. There was a very promising chance for me to play in college if I wanted, but college sports never interested me much.

I've played at numerous colleges and high schools for club volleyball over the years, but nothing was as exciting as the summer of 2012. I was 16 and just recovering from a hamstring injury that occurred during track season. My plan was not to play any sports that summer and just rebuild my leg, like I spent my previous summer. It wasn't bad not playing sports, but it definitely wasn't easy. Usually I would have practiced every day for four hours and weight trained for two. After so many years of that, of course I would be a decent player.

On last day of state track, I had just run the finishing leg of the 4x4 and everyone was getting ready to leave the stadium. Even with an injury, it was still a good season for me and even more of a promising season for next year. As our track team was headed back to our Suburban getting ready to travel the long road home, my phone rang with an unknown Wichita number. I didn't really have very good service but I could kind of make out what she was saying

“Hello,” I answered.

“Allyssia, this is Jason Hill from The Way Sports,” he faintly stated. “How are you today?”

“Hi, oh pretty good. Just leaving state track. Can I help you with something?”

“Yes, I am a coordinator for college scouts, and we have your name down as a player to scout from many colleges. This summer, we are going to Hawaii to participate in the Naokio Showcase, and we would be honored if you would join us on the Kansas team.”

I was shocked! The summer before I was asked to go to Italy to play but was unable to because the day we left was on state track. “I will talk to my mother about it and get back to you! I would very much love to play though; I will call you back in a few hours.”

I was so nervous I really didn't know what to think. I wanted to go, but I didn't know how my mother would react.

Hours later, we arrived back in Bern, and I was super excited to tell my mom what phone call I had gotten.

As I walked in the door, she said, “Ally, Jason Hill from The Way Sports called, and I know that you have talked to him, too. I think that you should go. I told him that you would be attending in June!”

I didn't know what to say! Excitement filled the air as we called Jason back to tell him I would be attending.

When it came closer to the time to go, I became a little more worried than excited. “What if I'm the worst player there?” This question ran across my mind many times. I thought of myself as just a decent player, but everyone else knew I was better than that. I had never watched myself play, so I was skeptical.

The day came that I had to leave. After many nervous hours, I arrived at the airport. I would be meeting half of my team for the first time in KC and then other half in San Francisco. It was awkward at first, but after a few hours, we were all talking and laughing. I was actually starting to get excited about going. We met the rest of our team in San Francisco, and for the most part, everyone was pretty nice. After a 5-hour delay, we took off for Hawaii. Our arrival time was 3:00

a.m. We had to get up at 6 a.m. and play. That did not give us many hours to sleep. There were two separate segments of days we would play— each of them were two day tournaments.

Nobody really knew quite what to expect that morning but when we got up, all of us were dragging our feet. Somehow our coach convinced the director to let team Kansas have a bye for the first day and not play until the next. Thankfully he agreed! For the first day, all we did was sleep— much needed if I must say. We stayed at the Hawaiian Hilton Village along with a baseball and soccer team, so the place was pretty packed everywhere we went. At about 3 p.m., everyone was awake, and so we walked around downtown to check out the different sites. It was absolutely breathtaking! There were flowers and trees everywhere we looked. The landscape was probably the greenest grass that I have ever seen. Even downtown was crowded with many tourists, but it was still fun. That night we ate at Senor Frog and had an amazing time. It was packed, as we expected since it was a Saturday night. Our curfew was 11 p.m. but everyone was in bed at 9. I am not sure if very many people had much sleep because of their nerves.

We headed out the next morning at 7 a.m. The roads were so confusing, and the drivers were completely crazy! If anyone thought that Nebraska/Kansas drivers were bad, they are nothing compared to the drivers over there. Cutting each other off at every opportunity that they got, it was complete chaos. I know for sure that I would never be able to live over there, let alone drive around and sightsee. The first segment we played at Kamahoma -a private school in Hawaii. The first thing we could tell when we went there was that the school was for none-less than the rich. As soon as we stepped off the bus, we were bombarded by reporters asking us questions and taking our names, numbers, and states. We were escorted into the gym by the tournament director, and we immediately see ESPN plastered everywhere: cameras, booths, video cameras, everything we could imagine were there. It was such a rush to see everyone there and all of the media attention. It did bring on more a lot more stress, but it was nothing that anyone couldn't handle. We went through the day undefeated and went back to the hotel for a good night's rest. The next day we played again and had a few losses and lost our ranking from one to five, but even if we didn't win the tournament, it was still an honor to be there.

Playing definitely was not the most exciting part of Hawaii. The sightseeing and attractions were beautiful. As far as parental supervision, we had none. If we wanted to leave the Island, we had to have at least one parent with us, but other than that, nobody really cared what we did. The girls never really associated with anyone from any other state because it was competition. There were sightseeing tours with all of the state teams, but we still did not talk. If visitors ever want to see anything beautiful in Hawaii, it's imperative to go on a tour. If visitors just drive around, they will find that Hawaii is smelly and crowded. The tour buses know exactly where to go and are less likely to get into a wreck. When we were not on tours or playing, we were practicing. Sometimes we would play against other states in sand volleyball which did get pretty intense at times. We tried to stay away from playing with/against other teams and just mainly played with the locals.

The food was very expensive. There was no set times for meals or anything, just as long as we were in our beds by 11 pm, nobody really cared. Mainly my team just snacked during the day then went out to eat for supper. We were lucky to eat out for under \$25. The shopping was pretty much the same. I swear they have the biggest stores ever! Each store was about four floors and completely packed with items. Most of the items were stuff that we could get from home, so we did not want to overload our bags too much.

At the end of the week, we knew that we had to say good-bye. The bonding time that I had with my teammates was unbelievable, and I would never forget that. Saying bye was definitely the hardest part of the whole week. Throughout the tournament, we received 12 out of 54. If I could have that experience again, I would take it! There is so much that a player can learn by going, not just about volleyball, but how to interact with others that someone has never met.

The plane ride home was an absolute mess. Two passengers had to get off because the plane was too crowded, and of course they choose me and another teammate. We waited in the San Francisco airport for nearly 12 hours before the next plane was to head out to Kansas City. Even though the plane rides were horrible, going to Hawaii was definitely the highlight of my summer and volleyball career.

## ADULT AUTOBIOGRAPHY –FIRST PLACE

“CLOSING THE FARM HOUSE”  
by SUZANNE WARING

I pulled the door shut on the farmhouse where I had grown up. Inside were all the furnishings, appliances, linens, and dishes to keep house. Missing were the people who had lived there.

Looking across the deck beyond two metal lawn chairs that were overturned, I focused on life that was springing forth in the yard. The hackberry tree that shaded us during those many noisy family reunions was bursting with buds. Carefully planted by absent toilers of the soil, spring flowers—tulips, phlox, and daffodils—swayed in the wind in a nearby flowerbed. New life was erupting all around me regardless that other lives were winding down.

Resistance awaited me, and I had to say, “No.” What was I going to say to my 91-year old mother and my 94-year father? How was I going to persuade them of the many perils to returning to the farmhouse for the summer?

The preceding fall my siblings and I had insisted that my parents spend the winter at an assisted-living facility. They were too isolated on the farm, they no longer drove, and we children lived too far away. They agreed only if they could return the following spring. When they left the farmhouse to go to the assisted-living home, my mother walked out the door, lovingly patted it, and said, “Good-bye house.”

It had been their home for a very long time. My parents had purchased the farm in 1945 when they were young and full of energy. Over the years, my father had wired the house when the Rural Electric Administration (REA) brought in electricity. He remodeled to meet the needs of a particular family—our family. A deck was built so that summer evenings could be enjoyed. Old elm trees died and were replaced with red bud, cherry, and pear. A maple that shaded in the summer and danced in a red dress during the fall held an honored place in the yard.

Four of us children grew up on this farm. We thrived in a world of cattle, horses, pigs, chickens, dogs and cats, plus mice, opossum, snakes, skunks, deer, and raccoons.

The farmland was fertile. My father always bragged that he had never had so complete of a failure that he left a crop in the field. Before the prairie meadow was cut for hay, we often gathered blooming wild flowers, such as daisies, salsify, and asters, and put huge bouquets in quart canning jars.

My parents decided to raise flax one year, and I remember the beautiful soft blue flowers rippling in the wind. The farm edged on “Flatrock Creek” that flowed over a concrete ford. Before the days of indoor plumbing, our family jumped into the creek at the end of a hot, sweaty day to bathe and wash our hair.

As my parents aged, they rented out the farmland but became avid gardeners. They spent a good percent of every day in the garden only to have so much produce that they gave much away to the neighbors.

After closing up the house that spring day, I drove to the end of the driveway where the mailbox with my parents’ name on the side stood. Again, I was saddened, knowing that a transition was imminent. On the way to where my parents were living, I saw a neighbor’s empty house. Paint had peeled away, windows were broken, and curtains had been sucked out and were being tossed in the wind. Was this the destiny of my parents’ home, I asked myself.

In minutes, I sat down on the bed next to my parents’ chairs in their living quarters. “I don’t think you should go back to the farm this summer,” I said. Tears welled up in my eyes. With all of my heart I wanted my parents to be strong and vibrant. I wanted to see them running the farm as well as their lives as they had always done. My mother had towered over me even when I was an adult. Now she weighed less than a hundred pounds and came up to my chin. I looked at their frail bodies; I had to say the right words. All of us had to be realistic.

Mother saw the tears in my eyes, and she started comforting me when I should have been strong enough to comfort her. “What’s the problem?” she asked as she patted my hand.

“Too many problems with the heating system and water system. You and Dad wouldn’t be able to fix the ongoing problems on your own.”

“The house is old like us. Is that what you are saying?”

I couldn’t answer; I could only nod my head.

“Well, you’re right. It’s not really safe for us to be so far from town without a car.”

"I agree," I sniffed.

"I think we had better stay right here. After your calls earlier today, I notified the management."

She was giving me an out by showing me that she had already made the decision. Later, I wondered whether I would have preferred a word-flinging argument. I knew I had to be satisfied knowing they were safe and wonderfully cared for, but is this what it leads to—being relegated to a small room with a number. I hated what I was urging them to do.

Several days later, my mother came to the front door of the assisted-living facility to see us off. As we drove away, she exuberantly raised two arms in the air and waved good-bye in her traditional way. That powerful wave with those frail little arms was her sign to me that she could and would participate in the next chapter in her life.

## ADULT FICTION—FIRST PLACE

"A WOMAN'S PLACE"

by KEITH SCHLAEGEL

The soft light pushed into the room through the window above the woman's head, dripping down the wall and pooling on the floor. Earlier, the black of late night had lost a battle with the gray of early morning and in turn that gray was being swallowed by sun rays which were filtered by the curtains on the window.

The anemic light grew, illuminating the walls, spreading across the room, making another day. The woman raised her head from the pillow, peering into the beginning of the new dawn, bringing her focus to the day ahead.

Her eyes drifted around the room, focusing on familiar objects...the picture on the wall of her family, dressed up in their Sunday best...Tom looking so stern in the picture...he actually was a happy man...had a smile for everyone. He must have already gotten out of bed and started his morning chores, she thought. Here she was sleeping late, not at all like her. She knew she needed to get up and start breakfast for the children. What was it her mother used to say? "A man may work from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done."

Then she remembered...the gypsies...Tom must have gotten up early to check to make sure the gypsies had not stolen anything from the barn. They would take a baby pig or calf quicker than a person could blink an eye. They had set up camp just down the road in that open field...would steal a person blind if you didn't watch them. She had even heard stories about stealing children...little babies who they would raise as their own and teach them their tricks.

Tom had talked about getting the sheriff. See if he could make them move on. But sometimes it was better to just let them be. In good time they would always be on their way. And good riddance...If you caused them too much trouble there were stories they would burn a barn. Up in Nebraska, just last year, she had heard tales of them stabbing a man who had crossed 'em...No, that didn't seem right, maybe it wasn't last year and Nebraska didn't seem to be the place either...

More light spilled under the curtains, exposing items in the room. Then she remembered why it was so quiet...it was Sunday and everyone could sleep in for another hour. The preacher first had services over at Glade before he came here. She chuckled to herself, thinking of the new preacher. He couldn't be much older than her boy Tad. Seemed too young to be preaching to those three times his age...but he appeared to be a good young man. Better than Reverend Fox had turned out to be. That was a man who had lived up to his name she thought. Couldn't trust him anymore than a fox who was loose in the henhouse. When that Shutter girl had turned up pregnant and she had announced right in church who was responsible...that had made for an interesting Sunday. The good reverend had asked if anyone had any announcements or concerns. Don't think he was expecting that kind of announcement. And to think the topic of his sermon that day was about he who was without guilt should cast the first stone.

The woman laughed to herself. More fitting if he had preached about going out to be fruitful and multiply. Should have ridden him out of town on a rail, but he just slipped out on the train that afternoon. Heard he was up in Iowa somewhere. Poor Shutter girl had lost the baby and was down in Wichita now. At least that is what she had heard, not talked about much anymore.



A loud buzz in the room broke the quiet and the woman's eyes shifted, searching out the fly making its arcing trips around the room. It lit on the end of the bed and the woman twitched her foot, sending it on another aimless journey.

It would be nice if her husband would take some time off this afternoon and they could go on a picnic...go down to the river south of town. But Sam wasn't one to stick to the "no work on the Sabbath" command. "Idle hands are the devil's playground," he would say and then laugh as he headed out the door. Oh, once and awhile he might take a few hours off on a Sunday after church, go fishing or churn up some ice cream, but not often.

The year the Hildebrand girl had drowned at the river, Sam had seemed as sad as if it had been one of his own. Never was very fond of taking the children anywhere near water after that. Maybe she could talk him into doing something today. Life goes by so fast and what you say you're going to do tomorrow gets put off and pretty soon tomorrow is next year, then next year never happens...children grow up, have their children, grandkids get older...it had only been a few years ago that little Tad had died from the flu going round. Tad had always been such a good son, never given her any trouble...no...that isn't right, he wasn't a son, a grandson?...now that's confusing. He was Richard's boy and Richard is still in high school, her oldest. Playing baseball with the others down at the fairground. Now how could he have a son who died...

Outside the door, someone spoke and a crash sounded down the hallway. It sounded like a plate. What were those children up to now?

The door opened and a lady walked into the room. She smiled at the woman lying on the bed, walked to the window and opened the curtains, letting the dammed up light flood into the room. Illuminating the walls and clearing up clouds within the woman's mind.

"Beautiful day out there, Goldie. You ready to get up yet?"

The old woman looked at the younger woman standing next to her bed. She was wearing light green scrubs and had pushed a wheelchair into the room.

"You tell me when you're ready for breakfast. I can bring it in here or can take you down to the dining room with the other residents. They're a lively bunch down there this morning. Mr. McGowan just broke a plate on the floor."

The young woman laughed and shook her head. "I believe Reverend Fox is giving the service today. He's always funny, don't you think? Keeps his sermons lively...You want the door open or closed?"

The old woman stared at the younger woman.

"Closed," she said.

The old woman rolled over, joints aching, and stared at the wall. The antiseptic white paint beneath the window covered imperfections her eyes sought out. She studied the tiny lines and cracks while her brain tried to understand the last minute's activities. She remembered the young girl, she works here...nice girl. But what was that scalawag Reverend Fox doing here? He had to be 100 years old now.

Her eyes saw the fly land on the wall and then walk from spot to spot. She watched the fly, focusing on something she believed to be real to separate reality from uncertainty.

She heard someone laugh in the hallway and frowned. That girl would be back soon asking her more questions. And why was that preacher man Fox here? That was year's ago back in her hometown. She had a big garden in the backyard and purple iris in the flower garden out front, there by the street. He'd snuck out of town like a thief in the night. Why was he preaching here?

The woman watched the fly climb to the ledge of the window, then take off on another search for food. Her mind drifted again, searching for something to hang onto.

Outside the window, the earth continued spinning, turning night into day; continued its revolution around the sun, counting down the seasons left in a person's life.

The woman closed her eyes, drifting off to sleep, then woke with a start when a door slammed in the hallway.

"Oh goodness," she mumbled, "I must be getting up, lying here like a slug bug all day. The children will be clamoring for breakfast. What is it my mother used to say? 'A man may work from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done.'" The woman laughed. "My Lord, isn't that the fact. I think I'll fry some side pork. They do love side pork and eggs."