

Lost & Found in Ohio

By Steve Myers

My mother hides from me. I search everywhere but I can't find her.

I went through every room at the old house on Day Street. She wasn't there. I checked the back yard by the apple trees -- not there. I looked behind the garage where the clothesline stretched between two poles. But she wasn't out there hanging clothes so they would smell of fresh air and sun, clothes pins in her apron pockets and one or two in her mouth, her black hair shining in the sunlight.

I went all the way to Bakerton, Pennsylvania, to the old stone house that is now a stone cold shell, to the yard where clothes froze on the line, stiff long johns standing in a corner. I went to the large rock where my grandmother stopped to break open a watermelon celebrating my mother's graduation. There was nothing -- no traces, no tracks.

I went up into the hills, into the woods, looking for anything left of Thirteen, the row of houses named for the mine. I looked for the road where my father walked past the porch where my mother sat shaking a jar of cream into butter. There was no porch, no house, no road, no young woman making butter.

I went to Rossiter to find her in the deep Christmas snow at my grandmother's house, the house where Uncle John took a string of sleigh bells up onto the roof and stomped and shook the bells to prove there was a Santa Claus. But even the house and the wooden tippie where we rode the coal cars were gone and the road up to the mine was nearly invisible.

I went to that lovely lonely green-shaded clearing with the Catholic cemetery and my grandmother's grave. There where my mother screamed and tried to throw herself onto the lowering coffin. But she wasn't there -- not even the lavender handkerchief she dropped.

I went to the country outside Ravenna, to Peck Road, where we slept on the cement floor of an auto repair shop. I went down the road to find her in the house my dad built but the house was gone, burned down that January in 1951. I looked for her there in the fields where she raced the old Plymouth learning to drive. I walked through the old apple orchard where we picked the apples for her pies and apple sauce and apple butter, but the few trees left were bare.

I ran all along the road, brushing past the elderberry bushes, and down the path to the creek where we went swimming and picnicked and fished and my dad kept his beer cold in the quick stream. I

searched along the railroad tracks, the tracks where she stood next to the wind-rush of the train but decided not to. I called her name but she didn't answer.

My mother still hides from me.

She's escaped into a flat black and white two-dimensional world where she stands next to my father's 38 Ford or in front of Uncle Steve's new Buick there in Boston in 1941 or in the high white grass by the railroad, standing there shading her eyes with her left hand.

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