

When Butterflies Hurtled

by Dennis Payton Knight

The summers of my youth on the high plains of Laramie were short, bracketed at one end by a spring loathe to relinquish winter, and at the other by an autumn quick to reclaim it. But when the desks were emptied and the school bell dismissed us, going silent for the season, and we skipped home to the chant of no more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks, I knew it was summer.

When leaves were full on the pussy willows and high brush thicket that formed the boundary between our house on Spruce Street and the Laramie River, I knew it was summer.

When butterflies hurtled about the yard and busy bees tended to Mom's sweet peas climbing up the white picket fence, I knew it was summer.

When I heard the whirl of the blade as I pushed the mower and felt it respond to the power it drew from my growing arms and legs, and I absorbed the aroma of bluegrass newly cut, I knew it was summer.

When my brothers and I slept under the stars in our backyard, and our cocker spaniel, Pixie, picked that night to have puppies at the foot of my bedroll, I knew it was summer.

When dad fired up his home-built barbecue pit in the back yard, put a roast on the spit, now and then basting it, and himself, from a jug of rich Virginia Dare wine, I knew it was summer.

When the Snowy Range Road was cleared for the season and Mom spontaneously gathered fixings for a picnic at Mirror Lake, I knew it was summer.

When we ascended from the Laramie Plains and negotiated Pumpkin Vine Road, and the lush green vistas of Colorado emerged before us on our way to Loveland, I knew it was summer.

And there, when Grandpa Payton brought out ladders and buckets to pick from his Frankenstein of a cherry tree with branches of different varieties he had grafted to it, I knew it was summer.

When we heard our parents annually discuss whether to take Washington or Federal into Denver, meaning they were deciding whether we would go to Elitch's first, or to the zoo, I knew it was summer.

When the sticks we fashioned into stilts to give me and my brothers elevated dominion over our world lay strewn in the yard because we had been called to breakfast, I knew it was summer.

When our games of hide-and-seek went past dusk and into a nightfall that didn't come until after nine, I knew it was summer.

And when I could kick a can from one end of Spruce to the other, and back, and not have another thing to do all day, I knew it was summer.

And then the wind came up, the first snow fell, the school bell rang, and I knew it was – have I

ever told you about Indian Summers in Laramie?