

## PATH

05-26-2014 by Harry Zirkelbach

Every path has a known starting point. That's where you hoist anchor.  
And for any but the very young, this assumption; there's a goal.  
Forgot where their goal was? Changed the mind? That's acceptable; must not  
become a habit. I began, no idea where this rambling was headed.

Walk with me now.

My sister and I had a path. This two mile long walk began at home, ended at school  
in the morning; the opposite each afternoon. The school was in a western  
Pennsylvania small town on a river; the Palace was on a hill overlooking the river.  
Loitering to school was impractical, for Mom set us off down hill with lunch pail,  
time enough to reach the first class; also, we rushed to play with classmates  
before first bell and Pledge of Allegiance.

On return journey, my sister and I worked at discovering the path, daily.  
The road home began in the neighborhood we had lived, headed east to the edge  
of town, past homes and stores familiar to our family. Then, where Allegheny Street  
met Penn Avenue, Allegheny descended sharply into a lane,  
crossed the railroad track, onto our path.

Immediately right, the surviving walls of what must have been a porcelain factory,  
for the ground was covered with shards of white glitter; pieces of dinnerware still  
shone everywhere. Building doors were gone, but the upper walls had many  
window panes, and on the roof stretches of glass. All mostly broken. The rusting  
building seemed a spooky target. We never slipped the fence to look inside. We did  
consider what might have been made there, that yesterday not many years ago.

Further along our ascending sacred path, imaginations were exercised daily,  
except on downpours of rain or snow, when it was head down, watch your step,  
plod to secure the warm inner hall of Paradise.

Other days every step, a distraction. The small things. The unseen skunks odors  
crossing our path;  
the shy rabbit, big eyes seemingly as inquisitive as ours, seeing we're too small to  
be a threat ;  
the garter snake slithering for a meal in the grass, sees us too big to swallow.

Then the abandoned twenty kilns of the Smith Brick Yard. Each vandalized by some earlier explorer. The brick yard, each bee-hive shape kiln same design, now partially caved, inside bricks still as when fired, neatly stacked, useless now, welded one to the other, shining in red, yellow, gold specks, a neat definite clay glob.

The surviving circular walls trickled dirt, discouraging prying

Mr. Smiths' daughters were our classmates, dresses clean, immaculate.

Then it was over fence and roads, through abandoned yards, up, up,  
until farms near near home.

Chickens. The sight of the mother hen digging for a morsel of who-knows-what in the dirt, teaching her brood of twenty, or simply marching them to safety, a close single file, solemn, no peeping. And of course the noisy hostile rooster, who on occasion chased, caught, abused every hen; the farmer never complaining.

And the hog farmer. One sow, one boar. The sow really fat, lying on side nursing, perpetual smile; a small feeding army of noisy piglets, all over her and that mud, part of every feeding.

Finally home, greeted by Mom, with  
"What did you learn today?" I blurt  
"Nothing".

Corrected by my sister, I join her in that raucous youthful duet of words  
where we vie to tell Mom our version of the day.

It was so good to be snug in this piece of Heaven,  
anchored at todays end of the path,  
to enlarge our world, with Mom and one another.

Once a student at a University, large campus, few buildings, the elders prepared no paths. Instead, yearly, any path trod by the students, recognized as of general use, became a paved sidewalk. This reflects the origin of all roads, those paths of general use, worthy of maintaining. And many reflect the trails made by wild animals searching for water and food. These are visible today, on the sides of Colorado mountains, seen from the interstate.