

Next to Heaven

by Marilyn Reeves

Last fall, while visiting my ageing parents in a small town called Salida, I stepped outside in the night and was delighted to see the forgotten stars of my childhood shining down on me. There it was – the Big Dipper! – still there after all these years. Nowadays I count myself lucky to see Venus shining through the lavender murk as she sails the western sky flirting with the moon. Those of us who live in the city are no longer treated to black velvet nights strewn with the white diamonds of the Milky Way. I'm just happy to know the stars are still up there, even if hidden from view.

In pondering my eventual demise, other than people, animals and trees, I think the thing I'll miss the most is the sky.

I have been held spell-bound by spectacular sunsets, painted in brush strokes of deep magenta with bright accents of red and gold. I have witnessed the serenity of the soft blue coming of morning with long, smooth veils of lush pink satin gliding through the air. I have been awestruck when the heavens burgeoned ominous with green-black leviathans – harbingers of an approaching storm.

But I think that standing on a mountain top on a warm September day, looking up through the aspen leaves shimmering in shades of primary yellow against a dome of robin's egg blue, is about the closest thing to Heaven as one can hope to find anywhere in this beautiful place called Earth.