

The Greener Grass

(Fortune Cookie: Focus on the color green for good luck today.)

By Nancy Martz

During most of three seasons in Iowa, chlorophyll reigns. Green field rows and pastures rise out of the ground and pulse for miles, breached here and there by strawberry colored barns, soaring corn cribs and rambling milky white frame farm houses. I remember how the rich black Iowa earth fed us green beans and peas, heavenly sweet corn, carrots and plate sized tomatoes, and how my dad would throw our watermelon rinds into the livestock yard and watermelons big as pails grew up before the hogs ate them. The bounty of our crops fed our horses and cattle and provided semi-trailer truck loads for sale at the markets. My dad and all the farmers around us worked sunrise to sundown most of the year until white-out winters allowed them hibernation from land chores.

Today on a rare visit back to the state, I see fewer homes and farm buildings. More and more of the land is plowed, seeded, and harvested without interruption from signs that families once lived there. On a late summer drive along Iowa country roads I see endless miles of green crops and black soil until it all blends together like an overlong ocean voyage. I get a headache from it as well as a heart ache when I can't find the boundaries of our farm anymore, the farm we offspring eventually sold to a rich man who was buying up all the land in northwest Iowa. All the bumpy gravel roads separate square mile sections of crops without differentiation. When I grew up there, dense groves of evergreens, walnut and apple trees, towering elms and oaks gave protection to homes and hog houses, chicken coops, and tractor sheds from the prevailing northern winds that also rocked the windmills above livestock tanks, and all of these were identifiable oases marking each unique farm as you drove down the road. But buildings, water tanks and windbreakers bear no marketable crops, nor do the wonderful, old wooden windmills.

I linger over my farm memories now, although I resented being stuck out in the country as a kid. I envied the city slickers in my class who lived in town with sidewalks that went to the soda shop and the bowling alley where everybody hung out. I hung out on top of the hog house and dreamed of being a city girl someday. Funny how some dreams reverse themselves as we grow old. Still, I'm content living in my Denver condo surrounded by acres of well-manicured flower beds and species of mature trees, and I walk my dog on the sidewalk trails that lead to the golf course and restaurant and canal. All things citified are within my reach, and I like the opportunities and convenience. But I know a literal truth about Iowans who never left. Their grass really is greener.