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Imogene Barger

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A Morning Walk

By Imogene Barger

When I went out to take my morning walk today, I found everything shrouded in heavy fog, very unusual for a July day in Western Oklahoma. The cars and trucks, unseen on the nearby highway, were the only sounds that could be heard. The birds were silent—there were no bobwhites calling to one another—no songs could be heard from the cardinals in the orchard; even the bluejays couldn't find anything to scold, and the sparrows were not chattering up a storm. It seemed as if a hush was spread over the whole world.

The trees along the creek bank were just hazy outlines, and it all gave me a sense of being very much alone in a fantasy world—I almost felt like a child again. I could smell the pungent odor of the wild gourd vine in the nearby fence row, and for a moment I was tempted to see how far I could still throw the little gourd balls. I picked a soft lavender blossom from the "shame-me" weed and absorbed its light sweet smell and watched its leaves fold at my touch. I picked a few wild plums and could almost taste their pleasingly tart flavor when made into jams and jelly and spread on hot buttered bread fresh from the oven.

Then on I walked, down by the yucca plants like the ones that had furnished their blooms to make hundreds of dancing ballerina dolls in the years gone by. A rabbit with its powder puff tail sheltered under them and a nearby covey of quail were startled by my presence and took flight with a whir-r-r of their wings. I went on past the huge lightning-scarred, ivy-draped cottonwood tree that stands like a sentinel with its limbs spread to shelter squirrels playing hide and seek.

Finally I reached the creek where I saw a mama coon and her three babies on their way home from their nocturnal ramblings—probably in someone's sweet-corn patch. They looked at me with masked, indignant eyes and moved on, leaving their babylike footprints in the damp sand. I saw the red horse minnows as they flipped and flitted through the water, and I could almost feel the cool water on my bare toes the way it felt as I ran and splashed as a child.

The willow trees were on the creek bank like the ones I climbed in those long-ago days and with the help of a friend rode to the ground after which one of us would jump off and the one left would get to take a wild whipping ride as the tree swung back and forth.

I started homeward, and by the time I reached the house the sun was burning off the fog. The mundane things of everyday farm life and the mantle of responsibility took over my dream world of yesteryear, but the dreams somehow left me a more contented and perhaps a better person. ●

IMOGENE BARGER, in addition to her other interests, has finished a study guide to Oklahoma history for her older grandchildren and an illustrated story book for the younger ones.

Illustration by Trey Wright

