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On Becoming Ninety: A Plainsman To His Great Grandson

Marge Cooke Porteus

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I'm ninety years today.
Georgia, Tennessee, then seventy here
Where I've lived even before there was a town.
You come too.

I'll sit on this bench
Against the building;
It'll protect me from the wind.
I'm tired, but I'll sit tall.

This is the old men's corner
As seen in every prairie town.
See, I'm the only one
To brave the wind and dust today.

He was the first Indian,
A silent, blanketed creature
Who appeared when Pa staked his claim.
We have been friends since that night.

There's the banker.
He'll stop to pass the time.
I only go in to cash my meager pension,
But years ago I was a big account.

Did you know I had owned a bakery?
I built it with love and labor.
On the day of final payments
The bank closed its door.

Only your great grandmother's understanding,
Her sympathy and deep love
Helped me keep my courage,
Helped me keep my head held high.

Now, when I was a boy.
I'd ride slowly into town and
Then spur my bay and shout
To let them know Hank was back.

All I wanted as a youth
Was a speedy horse, a gun, a fancy shirt.
I guess today is much the same —
A speedy car, a horn, a fancy shirt.

Here comes old Littleman.
He'll share our bench; he's my friend.
I've shared the Indians' confidence
Longer and stronger than most white men.

Ninety years well-lived.
Son, we'd best get the mail and go
Or Great Grandmother will start to fret.
She says I'm too old to mosey down.
You come too.

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A Plainsman To His
Great Grandson

— Marge Cooke Porteus

— a tribute to the late Henry Cooke, the poet's father —