

## Something About a Fence Post

After Pop died I spent a lot of sad time remembering things he had done and said, especially as I walked around the farm just before the sale. I shed some tears on this next verse, and I resolved to take my kids back to that farm and walk them over the hills and show them the big osage orange corner post in the center of four fields a quarter of a mile each way. I would tell them how I used to sit on its three-branched top and count growth rings and stuff rusty iron rings, nails, and bolts into its crevices; how I would watch and wait for Pop to plow or disc or plant or shuck his way to the end of the field so I could tell him that dinner was ready, or that it was time to do the milking, or take him a drink of water, a cookie, or a sandwich. The tree from which the post came had lived longer than Pop lived, and now the post has been in the ground 25 years longer than he lived, and about as long as I have; and still it is holding up the same two quarter-mile stretches of fence. And my kids have been there and climbed it and heard all about it.

I stopped beside the great osage corner post,  
remembering suddenly that my father had set it there,  
twenty-five years before;  
a young, strong, black-haired man  
I wonder how he thought of the future then?

Gone now, his graying, high forehead supine,  
this is his handiwork, left behind,  
solid and strong still to my touch;  
no rot, no insects boring, this post is as good as new  
and will last a long, long time beyond the one who  
dug the great deep hole in this black soil  
and tamped and set it so well.

I latched the gate behind the cows at dusk  
and watched them move away into the pasture, munching;  
the western sky was purpling above their ambling backs –  
the gate my father swung, the latch he made – his cows –  
I leaned across the gate as he had done a thousand times.  
This was his hour, his moment;  
he relished it each purple dusk, leaning,  
elbows across the gate,  
gazing contentedly at the sky, the fields,  
the broad plump backs of his cows.

Sometimes he lingered till the purple deepened over him,  
and anxious eyes were cast from porch to lane.  
I found him there when sent to look.  
We never spoke; my child mind tried to share his savory.  
I wished he'd stay and not go when I came –  
supper could wait for that.

And now no more savory  
or contentment  
or sharing  
or anything.  
His half-century has been  
and is past.

Evidences of his handiwork, his labor,  
his far-sighted creations,  
left behind by their creator.  
Some will remain, others will be changed by the new ones;  
this place I see, these fields I know,  
each gully, dip, rock, and tree will be changed  
as he is changed.

The cows will go, the gate will sag;  
even that corner post will rot, I guess,

and then the fence line may be changed  
to fit some newster's different plans.  
Gullies will be filled, or wash out deeper;  
rocks will be moved and the trees cut down,  
and I won't come back to reminisce.  
I'll forget.

And with it I'll lose some of him, his memory,  
for here, his life, his love  
is tied forever to these fleeting, once so solid substances.

And nothing is left but memory,  
conscious – unconscious,  
tangible – intangible,  
fading, fading – losing,  
until the light snaps out into indirection.

And yet so long as I live  
the solid evidence is not gone,  
for that's what I am:  
a piece of something he sired,  
molded, shaped, and formed,  
and my children, and theirs,  
and all those affected by him,  
and affected by those affected by him.

Part – the bad, perhaps –  
will fade to nothingness.  
but the good, the best,  
the overwhelming truth of him,  
will grow forever –  
memory of memory,  
in actions, thoughts, ideals,  
a fanning web of intricacy,  
immeasurable.

Is this then the right, the claim,  
the fact of eternity?  
Impressions never to be erased?  
Existence never to be denied?  
Here diluting, diluting,  
here growing, swelling,  
*ad infinitum?*

Who is there to know?  
I only know today I lost a father.  
I stand here, first realizing this loss,  
and these are the thoughts that fill my mind.

But these are mostly sad thoughts, and although at the time of Pop's death I think I believed that they would always prevail, it turned out not to be true. My clearest memories of Pop stretch from about 1932, when he was 30 and I three, until his death in 1953. Mostly they cluster before 1946, when I went away to college. And mostly they are the best kind of happy memories of a father that any boy could expect to carry into his adulthood.