

The Blessings Bench

By Bill Peck



My parents used to sit in their backyard at the end
Of the day under the oaks on a bench overlooking
The creek. They would listen to the quail, the creek.
They would listen to the wind in the leaves. One
Summer's day, I walked down the garden path and I
asked them, "What are you doing way down here?"
"Counting our blessings," they said. "Oh," I said.
I didn't understand why they did that. I didn't see
The percentage in it, so I, having joined the work force
At nine, went back into the house to count my cash.
The frogs and crickets then would burst into sound;
The moon soon rose. My parents counted; I counted;
My sister counted; we all counted; it ran in family.
All appeared well in the little town. I thought that
There would always be pink blossoms, steam trains,
Doctors who made house calls, persons known as
Milkmen who would deliver fresh milk to your door.
I knew this was how it was and always would be.
That's why I was so surprised when Dad seemed
In such a rush to document it all: the steam trains,
The blossoms, as well as the lilac, mustard, and
Wild violets on the hills overlooking the little town.
I followed as he took pictures of orchards, barns,
Windmills, saloons or anything built before 1945.
I got the feeling something bad was going to happen.
"With the sunlight come the shadows," Mom said,
"But they only make you stronger." Soon they came,
The shadows. Then, as I walked down the garden
Path, it was as silent as a chess game with Death.
Not one quail, cricket or frog call could be heard.
Night was closing in as I found my parents talking
About saving trees, orchards, arches, gardens, houses,
Stores and schools. "I don't understand why," I said.
"You will," Dad said. He often said things like that;
Things like, "Someday you'll thank me." I only wish
I could now for I know how they lived "to serve
Without reward, the public good." But that night,
I just stood there in silence under the moonlit oaks.
Finally, I asked, "Are you still counting your blessings?"
"Yes," they said. Then I asked, "Don't you ever run
Out of blessings to count?" "No. Never," they said.