

Rural Poetry

Nebraska Student Submissions

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It's Saturday

Roaming hills up and down Rollercoaster Road
Hit the fields, fly terrace to terrace
Looking for lost license plates
Most likely stuck to a hay bale in some old farmers field
But hey, it's Saturday,
We're young country kids just having a good time.

Squirm out of a piled Chevy pickup truck
At the country church we all know.
The traditional Cha Cha slide takes place
That's where all the road trippers go.
But hey, it's Saturday,
We're young country kids just having a good time.

Right up the road it's old mans slow pitch softball league,
Tailgates down, coolers surround,
Little munchkins run from swing set to merry-go-round.
Fingers stuck together by the taste of a sweet cotton candy cloud.
Lights shine bright but bugs are swarmed around.
As the night goes on the big blue trash cans begin to over flow of beer cans.
But hey, its Saturday,
We're young kids just having a good time.

Back on the road down Lover's Lane we go,
That good ole country tune, blaring through the radio.
Everyone sings way off key,
No one cares; we're all young and free.
But hey, it's Saturday,
We're young country kids just having a good time.

Saturday nights refuse to die
But sooner or later, the night rolls to an stumbling end,

As dawn breaks early Sunday morning
We gather up at the same old country church,
Repenting our sins from the night before.
What can we say,
We're just country kids, doing the country thing.

Back In My County

Back where I come from,
Fields roll for miles
And the gravel roads just keep on trucking.
Dust clouds formed quickly,
And cows randomly crossed the road.

Back where I come from,
My dog chased cars,
But never left the farm.
She nursed kittens,
When their mom cat betrayed them.

Back where I come from,
I was the girl in the Gage County Fair,
Showing pigs and raising hell.

Back where I come from,
We road tripped to tractor pulls and late night softball games.
And partied at rodeo's and mud volleyball.

Back where I come from.
The story's only begun.

**Chelsea Amundson
Arlington High School**

Where I'm From

I'm from Barbie's to farm sets,
And riding bikes down dust clouded gravel roads.

I'm from the little gray house in front of a corncrib, machine shed, and pig lots.

I'm from the over stuffed Thanksgiving, Christmas,
And any other holiday dinner our family comes across.
From Mom and Dad, Grandpa and Grandma.

I'm from the Gage County Fair and hayrack rides.
From "Take off your shoes," and "Who cares if ya get dirty, it all washes off."
I'm from early Sunday morning pancake feeds following church.

I'm from endless steak, green bean casserole, and corn on the cob.
From baking homemade ginger snaps with grandma,
Four-wheeler accidents, and horse back rides through the valley.

I am from the memories down a never-ending dusty gravel road.

**Chelsea Amundson
Arlington High School**

Weighing and Tagging Calves

I launch off of the four-wheeler
Racing after the calf
If I want to get a hold of it
I have to be fast

I grab a leg
And hold on tight
It wiggles and kicks
And puts up a good fight

The calf cries to its mother
And she turns to see what's wrong
She's on her way back
It won't take long

Dad gives it a shot
I take the weight
He puts on the tag
And we head the pair for the gate.

With its bright new tag, the calf stumbles away
The job is done until the next day

Fixing Fence

We throw in some posts
And a new roll of wire
A can full of staples
And rusty fencing pliers

With the windows down
Garfield rolls through the hills
Past the cedar tree groves
And the creaking windmills

We come to the fence
Begin hitting the posts
And find one broken
So we pull up close

I get out of the truck
And gather my tools
Buried under creosote posts
And heavy wire spools

With my holey glove
Covering my right hand
I throw a post in the hole
and push in some sand

I tamp it in tight
Then staple up the wires
I throw in the tamper
And pocket my pliers

With a glance over my shoulder
I look one more time
Then get in the truck
And move on down the line

Hayfield

The sun comes up over the hills.
The grass is damp under my wheels.
I wait to start mowing,
The dry grass begins to fall under my bar.
As I begin around the land.
I keep on mowing,
The heat waves rise,
It's getting hotter every minute.
I just keep on mowing,
Half of the meadow is cut,
The grass lying flat on the ground.
But I just keep on mowing,
I take a break for a drink,
From my dirty water jug,
Then I just keep on mowing,
The sun starts to fall behind the hills.
The grass becomes heavy from the dew.
It is time to stop mowing.

**Kellen Ballagh
Burwell Jr/Sr High School**

The Summer Night

The cool, crisp air floats
Throughout the night.
The grasshoppers
Start to sing their
Lullaby and
Darkness begins to fall.
Yellow lights
Pop up,
As the lighting bugs start
Their midnight
Dance.
The wind softly blows
Grandmother's rocking chair
On her screened-
In porch and
The door swings open.
Footsteps
Running out
Into the
Yard making
Their own melody.
Glass jars
Filled with lightning bugs
Start to glow like lanterns,
Lighting up the
Dark night.
But then all is calm, the
Grasshoppers fall asleep
On their grassy beds.
The lightning bugs' midnight
Dance fades away,
And darkness turns to
Light.

Summer Days

Sun shining down
On the green grass,
Yellow tractor
Sprinklers
Shooting water over
The nicely mowed lawn.
Little kids pedaling their
Bicycles down the cracked
Sidewalk.
Cracks of baseball
Bats hitting
A homerun.
Splashes
Of water
When the
Kids
Jump into
The cool pool.
Red and white
Bobber,
Bobbing up and down
In the rippling
Water.
Fireworks
Shooting up into the
Dark sky
Lighting up people's faces.
Warm summer
Nights
Watching the
Sparkling stars,
As summer days go by.

Bus Ride

Cracked, painted white lines,
Yellow, flashing lights.
Screeching to a stop.
Old, dirty, cracked hand reaches
For the handle and
Doors swing open,
Footsteps running toward
The blinding yellow bus.
Little, white untied shoes
Climbing the
Dirty steps.
Smelling of gray
Ripped and torn
Leather seats.
Pink and blue
Book bags.
Hitting bumps
In the
Gravel road.
Sharing different
Colored candy,
Screaming and yelling
Windows down,
Warm spring breeze.
Dust trail left
Behind.

**Candiac Clark
McCool Junction Public School**

Summer Storm

A brilliant cobalt spectacle
stretches across the sky
like tepid pliable taffy

Spotless clumps of white
stick to the backdrop
like cotton candy to fingers

Streaks of pink
glide past
like a child's finger painting.

Turn Around

Ominous onyx
locks up the heavens
like pearls in a safe

Faded gloomy lumps
sag on the horizon
like mother's under-eye bags

Muffled grumbles
torment in the distance
like a crescendoing oil drum.

Main Street

Concrete cracked
like grandmother's worn china
Pickups paralyzed
by the unyielding farmer
Storefronts stagnant
as a lazy cat lying at your feet

Mom's Café crowded
with daily weather and weak coffee

Newspapers prompted
by influential founding fathers

Telephones tired
by well-upholstered whispering women

Silence shattered
by the newborn's outcry

Mufflers magnified
above sociable small-talk

Dissonance disintegrates
Silence is restored

Prairie Lane

Beware the thistle
Admire its amiable lavender blossoms
Fear the threatening, thick thorns
It seeks to deceive and squelch

Grasp the unshaven milkweed
Snap its crisp top
Allow the sticky center to saturate your fingertips
Draw in the bitter aroma

Tread through the path worn by bicycles
Let the sharp grass pierce your ankles
As you stretch your neck toward
Low, bloated clouds

**Julie Coddington
Fillmore Central High School**

Grasshopper

This green thing that crawls on the grass blades
This green thing that jumps through the weeds
It's like a restless spirit, always leaping and
searching
Never settling for more than a moment
This green thing that tickles my skin
This green thing that disrupts my composure
It's like the little brother that won't stop poking
Never letting you enjoy the still
This green thing lives where I live
And for that I admire it

Old Fence Post

With one mile between us we take to our feet
Too young to drive, too old to be driven
The gravel kicks up with every step
A few more paces and I hit the old fence post
It's the middle point, or so we've determined
Grasshoppers chew on my shoelaces
While I wait for him to come along
He waves a long arm as he makes his way down the
hill
Quick greetings before we settle in the grass
Hours pass, talk still flows
The sun sets and we part ways
Each walking back down the gravel road
Away from the old fence post

Country Road

My tires sway and swerve in the gravel
My curls are gripped by the wind
My skin soaks up the sun and my mind wanders
Wandering like the breeze that stirs the dirt
In my rear view mirror
Wandering like the grasshoppers that leap
through the ditches
All the years I've spent here on this country road
With whirling thoughts and leaping dreams
Like the wide open place that surrounds me
What will my thoughts be in the city of concrete
Will they freeze and stand still like the buildings
above?
Or will they still be free and wide like the country
roads of home?

Jamie Crist
Cedar Bluffs Public School

Farmer's Daughter

A fourth generation farmer's daughter . . .

. . . Drives Grandpa's 720 John Deere Diesel
away from a well-built country house on 80 acres.

. . . Awakes like an early bird in planting season,
appreciates an October sky during Husker
Harvest Days.

. . . Enjoys morning cartoons with "Tom and
Jerry,"
afternoons filled with "Gunsmoke" re-runs,
evenings of local news and weather at 10.

. . . Carbon copies Aunt Betty's younger years,
loves Uncle Glenn kicking back with a Busch
Light,
imitates Cousin Mary Louise at an O'Brien
family reunion.

. . . Walks cracked sidewalks,
crushed rock driveways,
jagged gravel hilltops with bare feet.

. . . Becomes the banker of Monopoly,
three kings in a game of checkers,
the wildcard in a game of Uno.

. . . Values Papa's slogan, "It's a great day to be
alive."||

Mama's, "Cross that bridge when we get there."||
Paul Harvey's, "Good day!"

. . . Falls in love on muddy dirt roads,
finds comfort in Daddy's cornfields,
listens to the rhythm of summer's heartbeat.

. . . Chases trapped skunks out of 8-inch-pipes,
owns a lazy golden retriever named Daisy,
captures giant snapping turtles in flooded ditches.

A fourth generation farmer's daughter . . .

**Tracy Fessler
Fillmore Central High School**

Stuck in Mud

Kick your pink sandals off

Skip along a narrow pivot road

Let your sun burnt feet get stuck
in mud.

Notice how the wicked mid-morning
thunderstorms

Make black birds glide graciously
across the wet cornfield

Vast clouds create images like
white cotton candy
at a county fair.

Resist the stench of black angus grazing
nearby

Wrinkle your nose for only a second
Enjoy the scent of sweet corn.

Listen to wind whistle through rows

As you heed a lone honey bee buzzing
close by

Landing on a dandelion.

Shutting Down the Wells

Drip.
Drop.
Drizzle.

Angels graciously open
the floor of heaven
lightly showering God's gift
across Grandma's south eighty acres.

Daddy's yellow raincoat
quickly vanishes in the soaked crop
as I wait for him alone
in the old jeep willys.

Galvanized augers,
grain bins, and machine sheds
cast shadows to my left.
Chills chase down my spine.

Typical seven-year-old,
frightened without
my one-eyed teddy bear,
I track behind Daddy's imprints.

Squish.
Slosh.
Slop.

Tall cornstalks scare me
as I follow Daddy's footsteps
through the muck.
Water sinks into my shoes and socks.

A long pivot road
leads my golden pigtails
to a deafening motor
when, alas, I discover my safe haven.

Brown eyes behind wet glasses
smile at me from the back of the well.
Suddenly, the piercing sound ceases.
His yellow coat draws nearer.

Daddy's irrigating boots,
strong and sturdy,
carry me back,
down the damp dirt path.

**Tracy Fessler
Fillmore Central High School**

The Birth of an Ash Tree

Ash cracks above,
Array, where
the stretched cerulean filament
wore thin.
Swollen and sagging,
Accumulating obtuse,
like a drip.
Until, at last--
The levee can hold no more and
Black tar lava bursts downward forth
Erupts riotous against the earth
Harrowing itself in prickly grass and
dusty ground,
My head at its base.

Frozen it then stood.
As sudden as started.
Stolid posture,
cold bark grooved and grey,
Branches, twigs
Nerves, veins
Sucking the sky

Dead Leaves in March

Though it's March,
The leaves have not decomposed.
Why do they still blow?
Still they blow, and
Still they blow.
As scattered madmen,
My chasing thoughts.
They are dead for sure,
Shown sure, in their dark allure.

Oh, this, this show,
Of what little I know,
the little I know.
The futility of hope,
Sprought nought of gold,
-gift of the sun,
but more and more,
dead leaves.
Still they blow, and
Still I let them.
Still they blow, and
Still they blow

Of Warmth

Icicle spikes cry.
Snow shovels gnash their teeth against wet
concrete--
The green frames grow on snowy lawns.

Our made-up monsters degenerate back to
carrots, sticks, and coal
Glacial piles on the corners of parking lots,
Dirtied with gravel,
Shrink like shadows.

Even the hanging sky surrenders,
Bright rays dissecting
Cloud's dam.

All this,
All tells--

Cold melts.

Luke Hollis
Fillmore Central High School

Antique Farm Equipment

The Iron Moths have done their worst
Wood once stiff has gone rotten
And when I look at it
I can't tell what it is
An ancient tool – forgotten
Big iron wheels
A seat and some levers
All have succumbed to the wrath of weather

Horse-drawn for sure
What's left of the tongue tells me so
How old could it be – I'll never know
It once was a hay rake
There're still some tines left
One of the worst?
Or one of the best?
It served someone well
It's tattered and worn
From time
And the weather
And the work that it's born

Every time that I see it
I see the man
Don't know what he looks like
But there're reins in his hand
He's riding that rake
As the sky turns to dusk
He's a man born to work
A man of the land
And he's riding that rake
With reins in his hand

With You

You grab a blanket
I'll grab one too
I've waited all week
To spend time with you

Over the fence
And follow the tracks
Hand-in-hand to the gate
We slowly climb through
And head for the night
The Nebraska sun sets
And the sky starts to dim

As we lie here together
I start to shake
One of life's risks
I'm ready to take
I'll wait for the stars
And give one to you

The ring's on your hand
My heart's in my throat

You start to cry
Then press close to me
Lips next to my ear
And tell me the word
I wanted to hear

You grab a blanket
I'll grab one too
I've waited all week
To spend the rest of my life
With you

Morels

No map
No clues
Only treasure
Spread across the river bottom floor
Along the banks of the Platte River
They spring beneath the cottonwoods

And the elms
Like tiny pine trees
With tops of sponge
No map
No clues
Only treasure

I'll wait for the sun
A few days after it rains
That's the best time to go
Pick one
Pick two
But save some for later
And next year I'll be back
For more hidden treasure

**Brandon O'Neal
Burwell Jr/Sr High School**

The Walk

I'll go for a walk
It's pleasant outside
There's nothing to do
It's good exercise
Don't know where I'm headed
And I don't care
Just keep right on walking
I'll know when I'm there

The wind's in my face
The sun's on my neck
I'll soak it all up
Let it fill me - inside

I've walked cross the pasture
Now I'll follow the fence
Down to the corner
And take a short rest
Should I go home now?
I start to head back

I've discovered something
Out here today
Sometimes a walk
Makes the pain go away

We keep things locked up
Dark shadows within
That suck out our energy
And leave us empty inside
A cold, sharp barrenness
Painful - as the stab of a knife

"Just walk it off,"
The coaches all say
I've learned that it works
On my journey today

Amber Waves of Pain

Oh the plains
The rolling hills
The endless sea of grass
What a pain in the ____
Especially if you're a guy like me
All I ask for
Is one stupid tree
Is that so much to ask?
One tiny tree in that ocean of grass
Something to break up the skyline
An oak or a birch
I'd take a pine
If I found a tree I'd make it mine
I'd carve my name on it
But then it would die
And I'd scream
Why God? Why?
I killed my tree!
The only stupid tree for miles around
Now it's just a piece of useless driftwood
Sticking out of the ground

Conversation with the Devil

A man sat in the dark, sad and lonely was he.
On the verge of depression,
When the devil came to console me.
Yes, dear friends, I had a conversation with the devil.
A perilous action indeed;
We spoke of things in the present, and of the way things
were to be.
It turns out we had a lot in common,
Or so he made it seem.
One dark night, I had a conversation with the devil.
Now he has a hold on me.
Be wary, dear friends, of the devil's consolation.
He mixes truth with deceit.
Tarry not long in conversation with the devil,
Or you will share my fate with me.

**Brandon O'Neal
Burwell Jr/Sr High School**

The Caker Pickup

Bent at the frame
No driver side window
Rusty and gray
Needing a pull start every other day
Big metal silver box bolted to a worn out flat bed
Ugly to the human eye
But a chuck wagon to a cow

Father's Cowboy Hat

Worn for special occasions until it resembled dirt
Then worn every day and late nights while calving
Years of sweat and dust forming on the brim
Sweat band gone like the original gray color
Shape formed naturally by weather and soil
Taken off only in the house
Forming a figure that my father is bald without

Fathers Spurs

Shiny silver through thin layers of dust
J T triangle branded on the sides
Quarter sized rowels spinning at the back
Worn leather straps buckled to his boots
Put on when the cattle need worked
For the horse then needs ridden

The Co-op

Men of all ages, but usually older
Some missing limbs and fingers from farming years ago
Always a story or a political debate
Telling me how lucky I am for not having to walk to town
Or how glad I should be for not having to till my land with a horse or a mule
Or how unlucky I am for not having to learn to love the land the hard way
The salt and mineral finally loaded, and the charge account ticket signed
My dad says it's time to head for the hills
So we load up in the pickup and head out of town
Another couple weeks to wait
Until I see the men of the co-op again

The Cane

Grandpa's legs weren't what they use to be
For he was eighty-two
The bulls and the horse he used to ride
Had broken his bones and sprained his ankles
He told stories of World War II and the rodeos
But only if you were to ask
He'd rather talk about the weather and the cattle prices or ask what you are up to
He rarely said a word that was bad especially not in front of a lady
The day the doctor gave him a walker, he stood it in the corner with out one word
He just carried a cane with him to sturdy him self a little
The day he passed away I did what he would have done
Took it like a man and thought about tomorrow

**Carl Pelster
Burwell Jr/Sr High School**

Apart

I feel ostracized,
Like some kind of alien with bright green antennae
Sticking out of my head
Blinking out bright neon lights
Pointing out,
"I am the intellectual."
Is it so obvious?

I am the immigrant amongst the natives,
My clothes, foreign
My accent, obviously foreign,
And the fact that I am apparently
The articulate one in the group
I am the letter in the group of numbers
The neutral color in the vibrancies,
Waiting for them to pounce and evaporate my plainness

I fell down and skinned my heart
On the hard pavement of obscurity
The cold hardness that I am the only one
Who has read Hawthorne
Leaves me cold and lifeless
Against the illiterate ignorance
I'm supposed to learn to bear

Ode To My Senses

Smooth, polished wood glares back
With a gleam of light from the window
Polished six times over
Because once simply wouldn't suffice
The textured strings of my guitar are worn
Easily seen from a distance
And it sits in its black metal stand in the corner
Across from my crude wooden trunk,
Made for me when I was seven
The rough-looking wooden closet doors lean inward,
Bound to fall off someday
And a multitude of colors peeks out from behind them
A soft, blue light radiates from the glitter lamp on my
headboard,
Shiny specks of metallic blue plastic swimming around
In the narrow glass container that will never break,
No matter how many times I've knocked it to the ground
Rivaled only by the pink and green neon streams
Emitted from the flower-shaped light in the top of my
lamp
Countless posters of bands long forgotten
And movies barely acclaimed
Litter my walls,
Restraining the ugly paint beneath them
Soft tan blankets layer my bed
And I realize,
Observing this glorious splendor,
That without sight,
I would be unable to view any of it,
This manifestation of my personality in a single room

Childhood Memory

Down to the gritty dark-colored gravel
My knee connects with the miniature rocks
Cutting,
Bumping,
Scraping,
Tearing,
And all because I refused to listen to what Lauren said
That taking my bike down there was a bad idea
Blood gushes from the wound, slick and sticky in the
heat,
And I abandon my bike,
Once shiny,
Now dirt-covered
Climping the two blocks home
That,
With a torn-up knee,
Feel more like two miles
I collapse on my porch, waiting against the concrete,
Until my mother comes out,
Sees my knee,
And goes into a fit of sorts
Causing me to wonder if she'll drop dead any second

And it is this fit,
This cold fear of hers
That has caused me to ignorantly ignore
The warning I was given
In the first place

**Amanda Saveley
Tekamah-Herman High School**

Life In Nebraska

The thing about Nebraska is,
It's flat,
Each small town similar to the one ten miles from it,
And there's corn,
Corn everywhere,
And the distinct thing about our accents
Is that there's really no distinction at all
But it sounds strange to other people
All the same

In Nebraska,
Time flies by and crawls
All at the same time
You could be in a field one mile,
A small town the next,
And a city thirteen miles after that

Things seem to escape in Nebraska,
Escaping mediocrity,
Though you're surrounded by it,
Is hardest of all

Small Town Dying

Boredom is a knife,
Slicing into the heart of the comfortable monotony
Of small-town living
The economy is slowing down,
Shifting into neutral,
Simply getting stuck in the mud
Like dust-laden, worn-out tires that won't turn
That are stuck in the eternal rotation
The everlasting neutral
That could easily bring
A small town dying
To its very end

**Amanda Saveley
Tekamah-Herman High School**