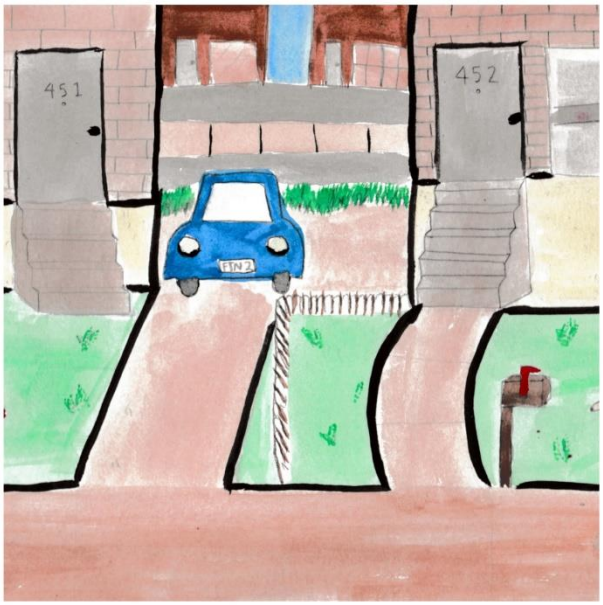
Franklinton Story-Telling Projects

Stories by Mike Ingles, curriculum by Mona Gazala



This booklet contains 7 short stories written by Mike Ingles, about growing up in Franklinton (the Bottoms) on Columbus's near west side.

The stories contained in this reader are:

This booklet will give you some information about Mike Ingles, and about Franklinton in the 1950's and 1960's, and provide you with art, research, and writing projects that you can conduct based on these stories.

Mike Ingles and Franklinton.

Mike Ingles is a writer who grew up in the neighborhood of Franklinton in the 1950's and1960's. This was from about the age of eight through his teenage years. Mike is now in his seventies and a great-grandfather, but he wrote many short stories about what it was like growing up poor in "the Bottoms." The Bottoms was what they used to call this neighborhood, because it was next to the Scioto River, and the flat land surrounding a river was often called the river-bottom. But it also came to mean that people here were poor and working class.

Mike's family came to Columbus from rural southern Ohio because the father was looking for work. Sometimes the father found work with the railroad and in construction, but other times the family had very little money coming in.

Many of Mike's stories talk about serious issues like poor working families or his homeless childhood friend. But Mike also used to get into his share of trouble (and fun) as a boy, and he writes about this humorously.

As you read through the stories, see if you can tell how old Mike is at the time that the story takes place, and notice what things he describes from around 60 years ago that are different now.

Here is what Central Plaza on Broad Street looked like in the 1950's.

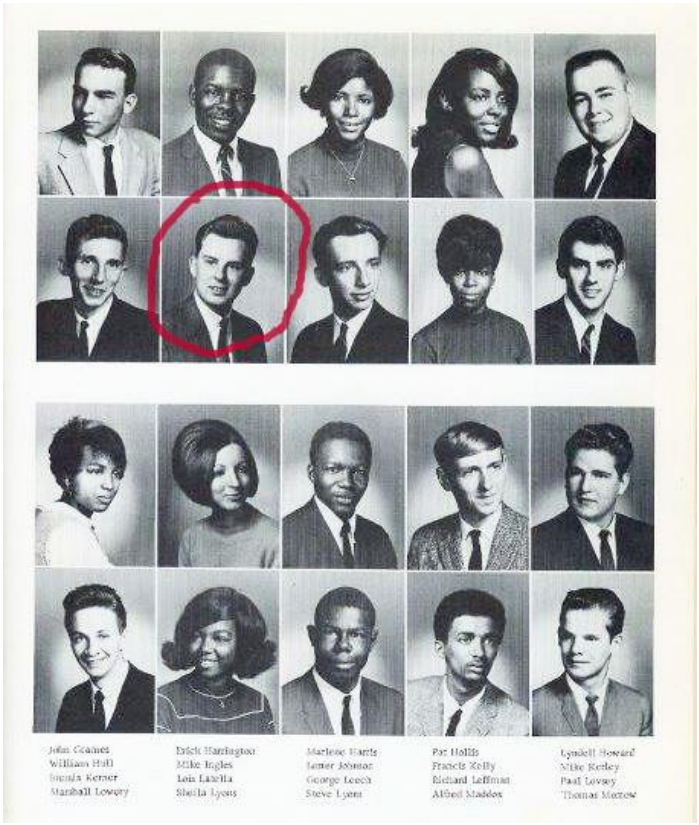
An old-fashioned Coke machine.

BELLOWS AVE. SCHOOL PATROL

FIRST ROW—Left to Right: Cathy Hartley, Mitzi Smith, Peggy Gibson, Carmen Sowers, James Palmer, David Morris, Charles Vincent, Terry Salts. SECOND ROW —Left to Right: Jackie Oaten, Linda Estep, Sharon Evans, Robert Smalley, Kevin Jones, Richard Lyles. THIRD ROW—Left to Right: Wanda Baisden, Charles Hensley, Steve Thompson, Janice Butts, Gene Bundy. FOURTH ROW—Left to Right: Louise Anderson, Barbara Duff, Joyce Wassmuth, Donna Stump, Bill Downey, David Montgomery.

Dec - 1967

These are Franklinton elementary school kids in the 1960's.



Mike Ingles' yearbook picture, from the old Central High School.

Friends hanging out at Gladden House community center in 1962.

Photo taken during the flood of 1959, outside a deli on Stephens Ave. and Broad Street.

Story Projects

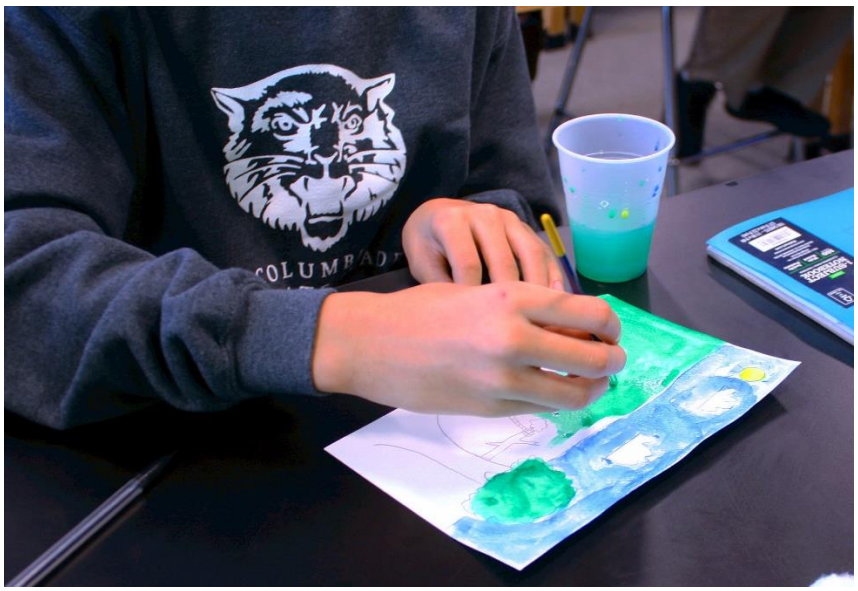
Project 1: Watercolor illustrations. Choose one of the Mike Ingles' stories. As you read it, picture in your mind what the scenes from the story would look like. Do you imagine a scene in a room, a classroom, or outdoors? Are there many people? Or are you zooming in to focus on just one or two characters? Or closer still, are you imagining a particular object or objects from the story? Choose the scene you would most like to illustrate, as if you were creating an illustration for a picture book.

Use a full 9 x 12 sheet of watercolor paper - or if you want to spend less time on the project, use a half-sheet (6 x 9). Start with a pencil drawing of your illustration; sketch out where everything will be in your picture, and if there are certain small details that might be hard to paint, draw those details in using pencil. Not sure how to draw something? Google it to get ideas and pictures of what it looks like! Use a google search such as "drawing of a possum" or "drawing of a house."

Next, add color to your illustration using the Prang watercolor set. Remember to keep a small cup of water handy to wash out your brush between paint colors, and paper towels to dab off your brush or mop up spills.

Experiment with: washes, blending colors together, dry-brush technique, or applying paint with a sponge or something other than a brush. This link will show you just a few different methods you can use when painting with watercolor: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-KYHJriivw&t=63s&ab_channel=Mr.OtterArtStudio

Feel free to search the internet for more fun and instructional videos!



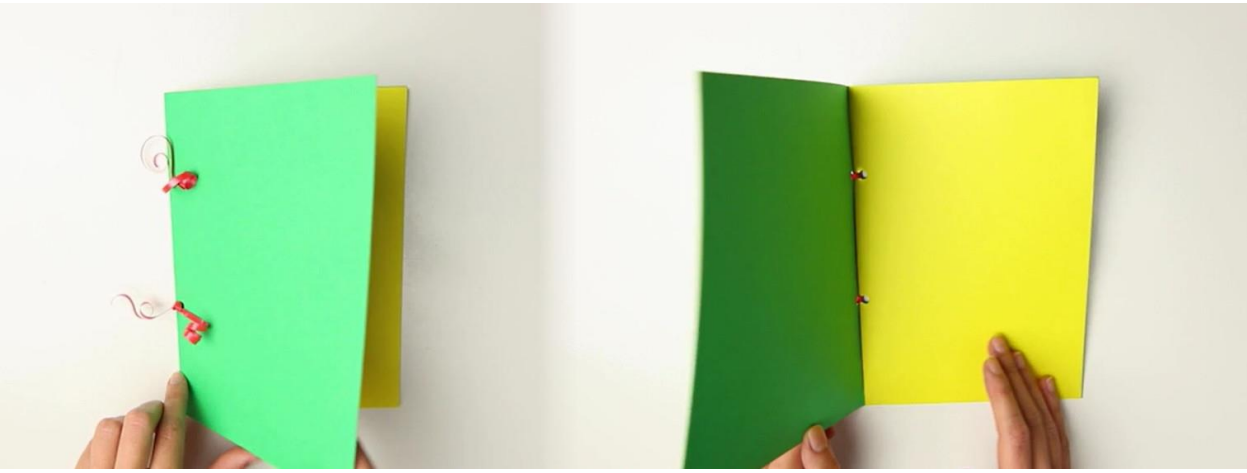
Project 2: Your Own Story as an Art Book/Zine:

Cut 3-4 full sheets of paper in half. You can use the watercolor paper or plain white printer paper depending on your project. Fold the half-sheets so that they open like a book. For binding the pages together, punch two holes near the paper folds with a hole punch or (carefully) with pointed scissors. Thread a piece of string or yarn through the holes and knot it. Now you have bound your book!

Think of the stories Mike Ingles told about growing up in his neighborhood. The people, places, and events that he remembered. Now imagine YOU are telling young people in the future what life was like when you were growing up. What did you experience, see hear, smell? What places in your neighborhood were important in your memory? Be creative: this can be a narrative story (funny or serious), it can a series of feelings/impressions or poetry, or a collection of things that are important to you. There are no rules except that you try to communicate some part of your life growing up to someone in the future.

You can draw, use watercolors or write words directly onto the book pages. OR you can paste artwork in, make collages using words, photos or drawings that you make or find. Again, there is no one way to make this book, so make it uniquely yours.

If book-making interests you, there are many how-to videos online to help you make and bind your own books. Here is just one link: https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Paper-Book (we are using method #3, suggestion #4 from this link!)

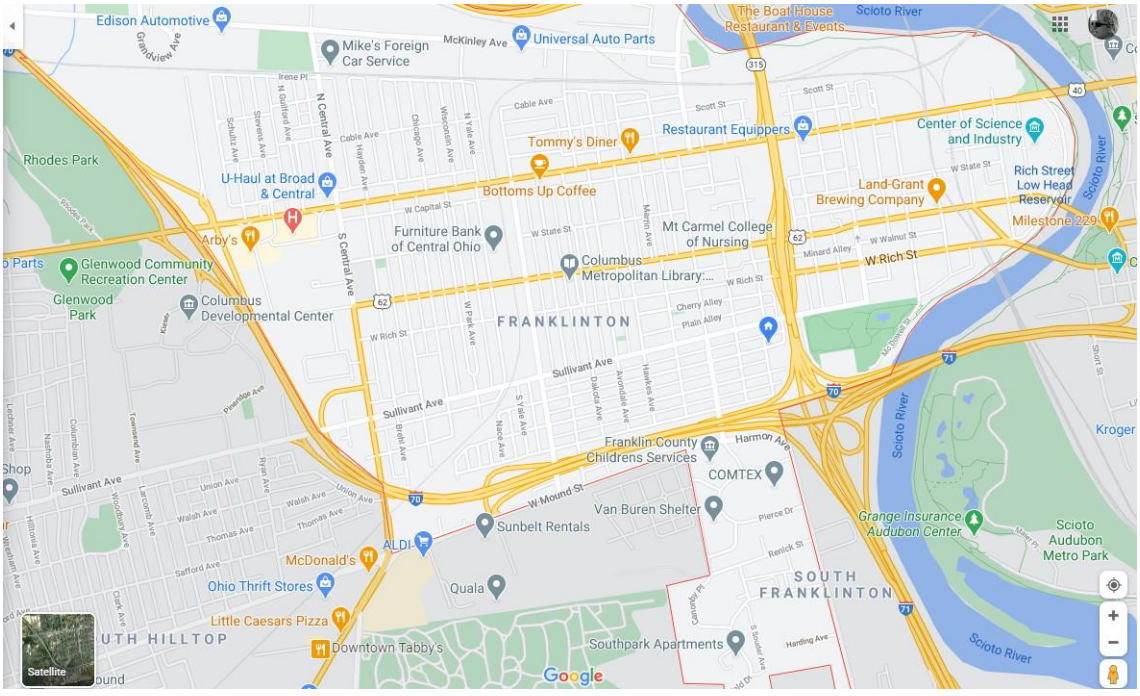


Project 3: Story Map of Franklinton:

(Note: this is a great cooperative project for the class to do together). Read through the all the stories written by Mike Ingles. Look for clues to “landmarks” in the stories, like school names, street names, community centers, or stores. Can you figure out where these places were, or might have been, using a real map? Create a large-scale map of the Franklinton neighborhood. (It can be hand-drawn or created by printing out portions of a google street map). Draw small landmark illustrations that show where portions of a Mike Ingles story took place. You can draw or write on small pieces of paper and paste these onto the larger map where you think they belong. Talk to classmates to get a consensus on where they should go on the map. Note: some place locations may need a little detective work. For instance, Sunshine Pool/Park (from “The Quarry”) is now called Dodge Park.

If it’s impossible to do one large map, this project can be done in map sections.

Another Option: Create a map of the area around your own school or neighborhood. Think of your school or home as one landmark and draw that on the map. Now, fill in at least 3 other landmarks and think of stories surrounding those places that can be shared with the class. What stories do you have about the different places in your neighborhood? They can be stories about family, friends, a store owner, a festival you went to or even strangers you saw. Fill in those landmarks on the map with illustrations.



Other Research Topics:

Race and community: The neighborhood of Franklinton has been home to both white and Black families for a long time. This does not mean people always got long. Find a relative or neighbor who has lived here for a long time. Interview them about what it was like live here. What, in this neighborhood, made it a good place for Black families to live? What were some laws or social norms or conditions that made it hard? Can they recall a specific incident having to do with racial differences in the neighborhood?

Central High School: Mike Ingles attended Central High School. Research the history of Central High School. When was it built? When did it close and why? Go online and see if you can find yearbook photos or old pictures. How did it later become COSI (Center of Science and Industry)? Again, try to interview older people in the neighborhood about the school. Did they attend school there? What was it like? How did they feel about the school building becoming a science museum?

Optional: Study a different school in the neighborhood using these same strategies.

Flooding. Franklinton was built on low-lying river bottoms, and there have been at least two catastrophic floods in the neighborhood in historic times; one in 1913 and again in 1959. In “Floods and Mittens” Mike Ingles briefly mentions that his family survived the 1959 flood. Research these floods; see if you can find pictures of that time. What happened to the neighborhood then? What has the city done to prevent future flood damage?

Neighborhood revitalization. (This can be a photo-journalism project.) Franklinton has always been a neighborhood for working class people, as Mike Ingles’ stories illustrate. Older houses have not been repaired nor new stores and restaurants opened in the neighborhood for some time, unlike in richer suburbs. Why? Discuss with your class some things that could be improved about your neighborhood. How would you go about making things in the neighborhood different or better? Are there already people in the neighborhood working on some of the problems? Who are they and how do they help?

How is this neighborhood different from others, and why? Do other neighborhoods have things that Franklinton does not? What can be changed for the better?

Mike Ingles Stories

The Hawkes Avenue Flats

Now that they are no more, I can tell the simple story of the flats across the street from Gladden House. I'm sure you remember them, they were two-story, brick apartments with tiny porches and wet basements. They were, for the most part, transient apartments when I grew up in the Bottoms. Folks would come and go after a short time. It was where you moved when your dad got laid off or there was a sickness in the family.

Kids played out front on tiny spots of grass in their front lawns from morning until night. Behind the apartments was a concrete causeway interspersed with clothes lines and hanging laundry. Kids would play hide and seek where aluminum trashcans offered cover, or move up the branches of a stink-weed tree to peer out across the concrete play land.

I was a teenager and was cursed or blessed (I have never been able to figure out which) to empathize with these tots playing out front by a busy street and sometimes crossing an even busier street to go to Schultz IGA or to the concrete grounds of Avondale school. They were a rag-tag bunch. But they couldn't help their circumstances, they simply ignored it and played on.

Gladden offered a few programs for them and so I'd see some of the kids in the lobby, excited to go to their art class or to their woodshop class. They'd be giggling and full of raw energy. Later they'd amble across Hawkes Ave. to those modest apartments where fried potatoes and maybe sauerkraut and wieners would be cooking. You could almost hear the bellies grumbling in anticipation.

On holidays - kids holidays like Halloween or Easter or Christmas - their anticipation couldn't be restrained and they played harder and longer and with even more glee. On Christmas, Gladden held a party and each family was given a basket of food for their holiday meal. Only the neediest would come because, somehow, there was more pride than need inside that poverty of the 1960's. And this year the Gladden folks needed a couple of boys to lug the baskets to the waiting people, because the husbands were too ashamed to accept charity, and the baskets were very heavy with a frozen turkey and lots of canned goods. We teenage boys would carry the parcels home for them.

I'm pretty sure Rick Hicks and Danny Southward and Kenny Reed helped out, but there were quite a few of us boys willing to help in some small way. Directly across the street in those flats, I must have taken half-a-dozen parcels and for the first time went inside the apartments. They were as humble inside as they were outside and the kitchens

were like closets. But they were very clean and well-maintained and the children were polite and so very thankful. It is my best memory of Gladden, and I have many.

Years later, I was doing quite well and had a flourishing business, which means you have more money in the bank than you have needs to spend it on, and I went to Father Huber and told him I'd like to donate some money to help out a family living in the parish that needed Christmas. He knew of many families but one in particular, he said could really use the help. So he gave me a list of what the three tots might want from Santa and I remember my Gladden days and so prepared a basket for Christmas dinner and gave it to Father. I didn't want the family to be embarrassed by another parishioner showing up with charity. Father simply told the family it was from the church.

I'm sure they were shocked and happy to receive such a Christmas surprise, but I received the greatest gift—it is true that the greatest gift is in the giving. I felt so good that I decided to do something a little crazy. I put forty bucks into six envelopes and several days before Christmas, I dropped the envelopes in the mailboxes of those flats that I remembered delivering to all those many years ago.

I never got to see one kid's face light up with the joy of a gift, like I had all those years before with the Gladden's baskets, never saw the satisfaction on a mother's face when maybe something a little special was on the Christmas table. But I had my memories, and they were more than enough.

The Quarry

It was 90 degrees and days before Memorial Day and Sunshine Pool opening…it was the summer of 65...

We walked on Central Avenue north, past McKinley and up onto the railroad tracks…then we'd walk east about a mile, skipping over the railroad ties two by two, till we reached a path that headed off north through dense underbrush, which then opened into a sort of jungle, and we could see the green waters sparkling below us in the reflective sunlight.

There were four of us, but when we got there, we met other guys we knew from Starling Jr. High. Some of the guys were from the Chicago Ave. area and some from the Glenwood/Bellows area…and a few more from Grandview Heights.

We traveled light. No swim trunks or beach towels or suntan lotion. We'd swim in our tighty whities. One guy, Rocky Seabolt, had a rope and we tied it off on the limb of an ash tree that had a lot of spring to it. Then we'd line up to take turns swinging out over

the deep waters and letting go to see who could make the biggest splash. After a time, the guys would try tricks—backflips and somersaults and then two guys at a time on the rope and then three…

Exhausted, we'd sit in the shade and begin telling the story…it was said that if a guy could hold his breath long enough, he could reach a cave deep under the water where there was an air pocket and you could get your breath and swim back to the top. One guy swore that the quarry was fed off of the Scioto River and that hundreds of years before, the Scioto and the quarry were connected, back before they built Grandview. And pirate ships sailed the Scioto, and some guy said that the cave was home to gold bullion…

So for the next few hours we'd swing out, dive deep, and hold our breath for as long as possible. Other guys, on the shore, would count the seconds the diver was under-water. It was determined that 94 seconds was the time needed to reach the cave.

But 67 seconds was about the best anyone could do before panicking and swimming to the top. One guy came up holding his gut and said he'd gone so deep that he'd gotten the 'bends;' but Rocky said the guy was a dope and that he'd gotten that from watching "Sea-Hunt" on T.V. the night before.

By 4:00 p.m. the sun and our stomachs told us it was time to go home. Of course, none of us had permission from our parents to swim in the quarry- because it was too dangerous, they said. They said that just a few years before one kid had been swimming and gotten cramps and drowned. But we all knew that was just a story to scare us away.

Still, we didn't want to leave any evidence, and if we put our jeans on now over the top of our wet underwear, then our parents would see, and they'd know…

The consensus was drawn that if we could walk the mile back when on the railroad tracks in just our underwear, that would give them time to dry before we came into public view. A bit damp, but not enough to show through our thick jeans.

In just one more week, the public pools would open. Sunshine Pool was much closer for us than the trek to the quarry and much safer, I supposed. But at the pool there were all these rules we had to follow… Still, for only a dime the cool water and the driving boards and the hot sun was too good a deal to pass up.

We had the best of both worlds and I wouldn't trade an instant of either world. And of course, there were all these transistor radios, playing music from WCOL...

Carol's Birthday

She lived on Cypress Avenue between State and Town Street in a house that I thought must be the grandest home in the world! I was 7 years old and in the second grade at Avondale Elementary School. So was Carol.

I can't recall her last name, but she had blond straight hair and blue eyes and was the best four-square player in school. She was missing her front teeth and that is something we had in common. Earlier that year, at the annual Christmas Play we held at Gladden Community House, she and I were center stage in a line of second graders chosen to sing "All I want for Christmas is my Two Front Teeth." It was my duty to start our choir singing by beginning the song singing clearly and forcefully one single word—"ALL"—as in "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth."

I froze.

Carol, standing next to me, kicked my shin and ignited my trepid voice.

Somehow, after that, we were best friends even though she was just a 'yucky' girl.

Spring came, as it always does, muddy and wet and warmer. But once in a while spring brought blazing sunshine and the promise of flowers to break the grayness. It was on one such a day that I was invited to Carol's birthday party. The invitation came in the afternoon mail and it featured a clown holding balloons and it said "Please come."

But I heard my mom and dad whispering in the kitchen in hushed tones, and the conversation turned, as it often did, to money. We were poor most of the time, but nearly destitute in the muddy month of March when, after being laid-off all winter, my father who was a union carpenter, had just returned to work; and things as always were tight and there was simply no money in the budget for a gift. My mom suggested that if they didn't mention it I might forget by Friday, the day of the party, but I'll never forget this birthday party.

On Monday, mom fixed my brown-bag lunch and as always dropped a nickel inside for my milk money. I had decided that I'd save my nickels that week to buy Carol a present, and so go to the party. My mom and dad didn't have to know.

It was hard. Having no milk to dispose of a mouthful of peanut-butter sandwich is difficult; but a nearby water fountain offered some relief. In class I made a birthday card with a piece of crepe paper folded neatly in half, and inside I drew a clown holding a bunch of balloons. Each day the nickels added up and by Friday, the day of the party, I could hear the five silver pieces jingle in my pants pocket.

I had only about an hour after school to go to Schultz's IGA store to select a gift for a girl and then walk to the party. But Schultz didn't have any gifts I could buy for a quarter. He did have a package of 10 jacks and a rubber ball for 29 cents but I didn't have time to go home and get two empty pop bottles to make up the difference. So I decided instead

that I'd trade the five nickels in for a shiny quarter and tape the quarter to the inside of my card.

Bob Schultz even gave me the tape.

It was another pleasant early spring day and I found myself skipping the few blocks over to Cypress Avenue and bounding up the five steps to her porch. The door was open and inside were six little girls all wearing party dresses and patent-leather shoes, each holding brightly covered packages with bows and ribbons and giggling, like girls do.

But after cake and ice cream, I forgot that I was the only man at the party. And as we sat around in a circle on the living-room floor, Carol began opening her presents.

There were doll babies and doll clothes and a hula-hoop and more doll babies and somehow, she had opened all the boxes and the only thing remaining was my modest card. She read it and my heart sank. I had always been poor, but I never felt the shame in being poor until this moment. Tears began running down my checks and I stood to leave, and Carol stood with me and held me for an instant, hugged me for two seconds until I thought I might never breathe again.

Standing there, with six little girls staring at me and that simple birthday card, I had to run. I was a good runner and whenever I felt lonely or sad or lost in a world that didn't really want me—I'd run. It was a release I suppose; it was therapy.

One block over, just off Glenwood Ave, was a densely wooded area beside the railroad tracks, full of overgrown mildewed trees and brambles of every kind. We called it hobo jungle and some of us boys would venture there to play Robin Hood. It was a safe place, and I ran there in the midst of the thorny bushes and the quiet that it offered and sat under a stinkweed tree; embarrassed to ever show my face again.

Carol's mom watched from her porch as I scurried off to the briar patch and she called my mom, who had no idea that I had gone to the birthday party. Soon my mom and dad were making their way through the briars and bushes to find me there, wailing even harder when I spied them.

At home I lay down on the sofa and once again heard the whispers from the kitchen. My mother's firm voice ended the conversation and I heard the kitchen door close. An hour later, my father came home with a toy from SS Kresge's and within moments mom had wrapped the gift in bright paper and ribbons. Dad drove me to Carol's, and I delivered my present.

I didn't go inside but I could see above the fireplace, on the mantelpiece, my card hanging by itself; and I wanted to grab it and tear into pieces. But I knew, somehow, it was the greatest gift she would ever receive.

Possums and Snakes

Sometime in 1959, we moved from The Avondale Elementary School district to the Dana Elementary School district. The population of my world doubled overnight. I was not a good student; my mind had a tendency to wander. So did Rocky Seabolt's. At recess one day, he told me about a place he called “Hobo Jungle,” a thickly-wooded area that ran parallel to the railroad tracks between Sullivant Avenue and Mound Street. It was a great place to be eight years old. Full of garter snakes and possums. Rocky showed me how to catch a possum, and, more importantly, how to handle one (always by the tail). Often we would have contests throwing a possum. After you catch one, you can grab it by the tail, and, spinning around like a discus thrower, you can let it fly. When it lands, it will play dead. So, you can pick it up and throw it again.

Rocky and I got along well.

I don't remember our 3rd grade teacher's name, but she was pretty and nice. When she announced, one clear spring day, that the next day would be “share day,” Rocky and I thought it would be a great idea to catch a possum and share it at school. We got up at dawn to meet at Hobo Jungle. I brought a burlap sack. But the possums were holed up and we couldn't catch one. There were, however, plenty of garter snakes about; so we settled on collecting three each.

At school, out on the playground, we were the big men on campus. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to touch our snakes. When we went to class, our pretty and nice teacher asked Rocky what was in the bag – and he showed her.

The scream could be heard, I'm told, all the way east of Hobo Jungle. She threw the bag at an open window, but missed. A couple of snakes landed on the window sill and the rest started squiggling around on the floor, much to the delight of other boys and to a choir of screams from the girls. The class was quickly evacuated from the room, and two janitors were brought in to collect the snakes. But the custodians were also afraid of snakes and screamed about as loud as the teacher had. The principal told us to go into the classroom and retrieve our snakes, which we did.

Rocky was suspended for three days. My parents were brought in and it was decided that, perhaps, it would be best if I returned to Avondale. Far away from Hobo Jungle and the nice teacher.

Floods and Mittens

In less than a month, I would embark on the greatest adventure that any 8-year-old boy could hope for. On January 21, 1959, several inches of rain would join snow-covered streets in the Bottoms, and the flood water would begin to rise. My family would be evacuated, by rowboat, to the Veterans Memorial building, and I was more than happy to sleep on an army cot and eat soup from a cafeteria.

But before all of that...was a very white Christmas. And, because both Mom and Dad were working this year, the gifts were great! I got a spring-loaded rocket that shot 20 feet into the air and a toy truck that had real working headlights. And, of course, I got the mandated and necessary bits of clothing—chiefly among them was a pair of rabbit-fur leather gloves that set Mom back $2.99.
They were to be worn only to church and on really, really cold days. They were soft and so very warm. I could make a dozen snowballs and my hands remained just as toasty as if Mom had just taken them off the top of the heater-stove. Within a day or two, because of all that snow, her dictate that they only be worn to church and such would go unnoticed.

After the snow had been scraped off of giant hills - like Glenwood and behind Quality Bakery - by an overabundance of sleds and trashcan lids and cardboard boxes, there was still plenty of snow left on the side-streets—Avondale, Town, Glenwood, and Cypress Avenues were all packed with plenty of powder—all you needed was to follow Newton's First Law of Motion—a body at rest tends to stay at rest, but a body in motion tends to stay in motion.

Cars, especially big cars with huge chrome rear bumpers could give us the motion that we needed. We called it 'hopping cars' and the technique was simple—wait until a car came slowly down the street, keep low and duck behind it so the driver didn't know what we were up to, and then grab hold of the rear bumper and allow the car to act as your sleigh. The guy who held on the longest won. Many times three or four or even five guys would hop the same car—Buicks were favored because of the enormous size of their rear bumpers. If you were lucky, and you didn't hit a hole or an errant piece of ice, you could hold on for blocks and blocks. One guy, it was rumored, hopped a car heading west on Broad Street and ended up in West Jefferson!

Rick Hicks' dad drove a Buick. It was the perfect urban sleigh. When I saw him driving west on State Street at the corner of Dakota Avenue, I knew that I could hop him all the way Glenwood, providing that he didn't know I was aboard. Three of us attacked the

rear of the car. What you have to understand about the technique is that you would grab hold of the corner of the bumper and then, when another guy on down the block grabbed hold—you had to scoot over a little and allow him room to come aboard. It was a dangerous maneuver, and had to be taken with caution. On this ride, I had the corner and when another guy grabbed hold, and so I found myself in the rear center, losing my balance, and with a thump—falling off.
Pride cometh before a fall. I didn't mind the bruise on my derriere. But as I looked up, with cold snow pounding my round face, I could see one of my new gloves still stuck on the bumper, waving goodbye to me.

Of course, next morning my mom asked—"where in the hell is your glove?!"

“Over at Ricks house,” I said. More of a half-truth, but not a direct and knowing lie. No sinner, I!
I was ordered out of the house and told to retrieve that glove. At that moment, my life was over. As I walked aimlessly to and from nowhere, I considered moving in with my Aunt Betty in Sabina—that would teach my mom a lesson. But one thing for sure—I was never going home again.

When I rounded Avondale Avenue moving toward Rick's house, his father was just pulling out of their garage. And there, still on the back of the bumper—was my missing glove, hanging on to the frozen chrome! The race was on. I had to reach that car and that bumper and that glove before he could pull out and gain speed. I was well trained, as hopping cars is the perfect practice for running down cars from behind. In a moment, it was over. The glove was mine!

I decided to forgive my mom and walked home, hoping that *she* had learned a valuable lesson.

The Coke Machine

There was a laundry on Rich Street between Avondale and Dakota Aves, on the south side of the street. A brick building, with steam rolling out of the exhaust on the roof and floating on to forever in summertime skies.

Black men and women would escape outside the building from an overhead door at 11:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.; the men wearing white tee-shirts soaked with sweat and the

women with head-scarves neatly folded and absorbing their perspiration. You could feel the heat from a block away.

Just inside the overhead door was a Coke machine and the employees could buy a Coke for just a nickel. Across the street from the laundry was a small mom & pop grocery, where that same bottle of Coke cost 12 cents.

That 7 cent difference seems insignificant now but, when you are a poor kid and about the only income you have is returning pop bottles to a grocery, sneaking a five-cent Coke from an industrial laundry and bargaining a 2 cent return at the grocery across the street for a return bottle was a win-win.

The men and women working at the laundry paid little attention to me and my secret maneuvers. They sat at a picnic bench outside the building drinking their pop and trying to smoke two cigarettes within the confines of their short break-time.

This daily activity for me stretched through the summer months until one day the owner of the laundry caught me. He was nice enough about it but told me that the pop machine was off-limits to non-employees and that the cold pop was a benefit for his workers only and that he subsidized the cost of the pop for his employees. I had to look up the word “subsidize.”

Which led me to Avondale Elementary School in September, where a nickel for a 4oz carton of milk seemed unfair and which was hardly enough for a growing boy, and so the more I thought about it the more I decided to take my complaint to the principal. “Seems to me,” I told the principal, “that the school could subsidize the milk for students and a kid could get the amount of milk he needs.”

The milk never became subsidized to my satisfaction. But the idea of a ten-year-old coming to the administration with a milk-subsidy idea did get a pretty good laugh from people in the office who I supposed were all at least 100 years old.

Today, not only is milk subsidized but many kids at Avondale probably get free lunch and some may even eat a free breakfast. Progress and regress at the same time, I reckon. I’m glad the kids get their nourishment and I am disappointed that they must rely on it.

The mom & pop store is still there (I just googled it) but the laundry has long gone, closed when I was at Starling and now vacant for many years. I suppose the laundry was there to service the needs of Mt. Carmel Hospital? I don’t know, but I remember these huge baskets full of white linens being carted about and couldn’t imagine anyone in our neighborhood who could afford to have their linens laundered.

But I’d sure love to get a five-cent Coke just one more time, out of that red one-armed-bandit Coke machine in the corner of that old brick building—Coke as cold as the Avondale Principal’s heart.

Peanut

I like dogs.

When I was six or seven, my grandfather, Tom, taught me how to pray. Once a month, as regular as a full-moon, we'd load into the old Pontiac and travel the 85 miles to the southern Ohio town of McDermott, my father's hometown and residence of my grandparents, to visit. Grandma always made dinner, and before partaking we'd bow our heads in prayer. We never prayed at home; my mother was an atheist my father uncommitted.

After supper we'd sit out on the porch and watch as neighbors passed and whispered "Evening" to my grandfather as they went by. Grandfather was well-respected in this tiny town. I'd crawl up on my grandfather's large empty lap and he'd rock easily back and forth and tell me stories. On this particular evening I asked Ol' Tom why he prayed before eating. I said we never did that at home. He was not surprised. He said there were two times that we should pray, each time we ate and gave our bodies nutrients and energy, and once in the evening before going to bed to give thanks for taking that strength and doing God's work.

"Oh," I said. "Show me."
His bedroom was dark and filled with little religious paraphernalia—statues, paintings, photos of the Jordan River. He showed me his technique, falling to his knees, elbows bent and sprawled on the top of his bed, eyes closed and hands joined.
"Oh," I said. "Does it hurt your knees?"
"Yes." He said.
"Oh." I said.

My religious training complete, I started to go outside and find Queenie, the dog.
"One thing boy," said this giant of a man, 6'4" tall, "something that your daddy never learned. When you pray, don't ask for things—toys, or games, or any reward—just ask for guidance. That will be enough."

Queenie had no religious convictions. After eating supper-scraps, she'd amble out to a hand water pump by the well outside the house. There was a weeping willow that offered plenty of shade, and the limestone base for the pump was always wet and cool. Queenie was fast asleep. I lay my head on her belly; she didn't move. I prayed for guidance. I prayed for guidance to get a bag of cat's eyes marbles without making my

dad mad for bugging him again.
No marbles. He got mad.

Back to dogs.
In my ten years living in the Bottoms, we didn't own a dog, although a few mutts would beg for a meal and stay a few days and move on. It was my mom's opinion that you could no more own a dog than you could expect that praying on your knees would get you anything more than arthritis and joint pain. She was/is a very practical woman. But she loved dogs. I know that she wanted to keep each stray that fell upon our back porch, but that she was always afraid of holding onto something she couldn't keep; a dog would just disappoint her and leave her sad and alone.

When I was seven, I was allowed to cross Town Street and go to the school-grounds to play. I was a very responsible little boy. There was this mutt there, running after kids at play, that had spots and a torn ear and its tail had been cut off. It was as ugly as a Jersey cow and, about as menacing. The boy in particular who the dog followed, wagging his tail, was the smallest, puniest excuse for an American boy as I had ever seen. But the dog didn't care; the dog loved little Peanut Brandier, who wore a white t-shirt that time that dust and missed washings had turned a light gray, and jeans that were so worn that there was more material missing than remaining. He was a poster boy for poor. The dog didn't give a damn.

The three of us quickly became friends; Peanut could do baby-drops from the monkey bars and was small enough to crawl inside a crack in the brick opening on the west side of the school building, and he was really, really good at shooting marbles. Both pockets of his jeans were swollen with marbles, won in battle with other seven-year-old boys. At lunchtime, Peanut followed me home; his dog a few steps behind. My mother could never deny a starving dog or a hungry boy and both were invited to share our sparse lunch of grilled cheese and tomato soup.

Back at the playgrounds, we played pirates and pretended that the school porch was a desert-island full of snakes and alligators and lions. The dog played all three parts. They followed me home again for supper. It was one of my favorite meals: sauerkraut and hotdogs cut into tiny slices, creamed potatoes mashed with a fork and splattered with butter and the potato broth poured over white bread. It was a carbohydrate nightmare, and it kept a boy full for 12 hours. Peanut consumed two plates full. So did the dog.

My mother couldn't decide which was the saddest refugee—the dog or the boy—but

somehow, they both landed in my bedroom for the night.
Cereal in the morning, the dog lapped up the leftover milk in my bowl but there was none leftover in Peanut's bowl. Another morning at the schoolyard, and this time we were out in the cowboy west and the school porch was a corral; the dog was a prized bull and we had to ride it.

The three of us walked home for lunch: peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches, leftover smashed potato pancakes fried in Crisco.
At suppertime, Peanut was grilled for answers about where he lived and what his mom and dad did for a living and whether they would be missing him? Peanut said his dad was an engineer on a train and was often gone weeks at a time and that his mom was a policewoman and worked nights. He was an only child, he said.

That night mom forced us to take a bath, and Peanut's underwear was thrown out, along with his t-shirt and jeans; my father burned them. In the future, Peanut would wear my hand-me-downs. The dog was naked. That night, Peanut peed the bed. I moved my gear off the bed and onto the floor. That is where I would sleep every night that summer. Mom bought a bed-matt and two additional sets of sheets.
Soon, he was family. Soon, my mother' affection for the dog grew to the point that she had bought it a collar and a small bed. It slept on the floor with me.

One afternoon, an unshaven man, with unkempt cloths and smoking a cigarette, came and literally picked Peanut up by the scruff of his neck, forced him into a car and off they sped, leaving the dog behind. I ran home with the dog in tow and mom said she knew what had happened, that the man had stopped by the house and asked where his son was; the man had just been released from jail.

When my dad got home, we drove over to Glenwood Avenue where Peanut supposedly lived. The house was vacant and boarded up. The neighbors said that no one had lived there for months, but that some guy had been there earlier and cleaned out a few things from the house and put them in a trailer with Florida license plates.

The dog was crying and wanted out of the car, scratching wildly at the car window.
It was hard going to sleep that night in my own bed and so I decided to lay down on the floor. I was comfortable there; so was the dog. I heard some mumbling from my mom's bedroom and tiptoed into the doorway. She was down on her knees, her elbows bent on the top of the bed and her hands placed together, eyes closed.

We never saw Peanut again, although we did get a postcard from Miami that read simply, “Hi mom.”

The next day, the dog ran away.