

Prologue: Today is the birthday of my father, Grady Gaylord, and I again would like to share a story with my brothers and sisters and with his grandchildren and their children so that they can remember him and those that came after can know him. A perfect day is a rare thing and its promise of another gets you through the ordinary days whether you are a child or an adult. This was one of them.

The Buffalo Pool

As it was with every summer when school was out during the times of my dad's single parenthood, my older brother, younger brother, and I were Put on a train, or my dad would drive us to Lander Wyoming to stay with our grandparents. I am not sure which I preferred, the excitement of the train speeding along at an unimaginable speed with the scenery flying by like a Flock of birds and money in our pockets for the dining car, no one to admonish that cookies were not a substantial breakfast; or if I preferred driving in the big finned Cadillac where I would take my position in the back window (pre seatbelts) where I could lay down and stare up at the sky and daydream, amuse myself with the clouds, or watch the stars at night. The automobile being able to stop at the cherry stands that lined the streets of St George Utah or taking a quick dip in the All-American Canal in the heat of the day. Either way each summer we were transported by both, coming or going or going and coming.

The buffalo pool was a one-time experience, almost a right of passage in our family. That particular perfect day started with my grandmother's flapjacks, prepared in the kitchen of the two-story log cabin that my grandfather had built especially for my grandmother's five-foot 2-inch stature. Grandfather with his usual ruse to distract us and then pilfer our flapjacks from our plate, it was a game we played each summer knowing full well that grandmother would drop a spatula full of flapjacks in their place and then swat playfully at grandfather and pretend to scold him. My father would watch us and smile, I am sure of his own memories.

This perfect Wyoming summer morning my father announced that we were going swimming. Of course, my brothers and I wanted to know where, my father said it was a surprise and when we looked at my grandfather for information, he only

winked at us. We ran to our room, donned our swimsuits underneath our clothes and were instructed to wear our sturdy shoes. Grandmother packed the car with towels and lunch, which was always in a box tied with string. Years later I would wonder; where did she amass that endless supply of boxes.

We piled unceremoniously into the car, I in my favorite rear window. We drove along, my father and grandfather talking in undertones about adult matters. I watched the tops of treetops and telephone poles float by as we left Lander. We drove along the highway towards Fort Washakie. It was a place I enjoyed going, mesmerized by the Shoshone art and culture. My father would take us on warm summer nights to watch the Shoshone ceremonies and dances. The rugged beauty of the leather garbs mixed with the colorful beads and feathers, along with the singing in their native tongue of which I did not understand but felt as if the earth was speaking to me through their earnest voices and the beat of their drums.

Once out of Lander the highway hugged the meandering Wind River, its rapids creating a comforting melody and the Aspen trees that lined it, its chorus, their delicate leaves like whispering angels.

After a while we made a turn onto a dirt road that led us up to the high plains, the road followed a barbed wire fence with scrub brush and sage on both sides as far as the eye could see. The big Wyoming sky seemed ridiculously blue and endless I could not imagine a swimming pool or any body of water for that matter anywhere in the vicinity. After what seemed like miles of looking up at blue sky we finally pulled over.

My brothers and I crawled from the car groggy from the long drive and stood by the barbed wire fence which was the only barrier between us and a herd of buffalo. My father crossed over the fence, used his foot to push the two lower wires down and grabbed between the barbs with his hand and pulled up the remaining wires, my grandfather motioned us to pass through. With the trust a child has for a parent my brothers and I silently stepped through to the other side. Once we were all on the buffalo side of the fence my grandfather explained that we should be quiet, move slowly, and do not make any sudden moves as we did not want to spook or stampede the buffalo. I had watched Rawhide enough times

with my father to know that stampede was not a good thing and there was no Rowdy Yates nearby to save me if they should.

The buffalos stood as statues, their large brown sand dollar sized eyes looking at us with a mixture of wariness and curiosity just as we were looking at them. Their aroma wafted towards us in the slight breeze, the smell of snarled fur and earth as old as time. About halfway past the herd we had been deemed harmless by the buffalo, and they lowered their heads to continue grazing, although their eyes followed us along our way. Once we passed them my mind and eyes searched for the promised swimming hole. We walked for a bit, my grandfather up ahead. He finally came to a stop and declared "we are here" I saw nothing just a continuation of the terrain we had been traversing, but as we came closer, I could see there was a hole in the ground. My father and grandfather had big knowing smiles on their faces as we neared. What met my eyes was almost unbelievable. We had come to the edge of a dormant geyser, about five feet down was a pool of sparkling aqua tinted water, at almost noon the sun danced off the surface like crystals. The sandstone had rainbow-colored veins running through it from the minerals it contained. To me it looked like a place where angels or faeries swam. My brothers and I stripped down to our bathing suits and stood looking at each other wondering how we would get down to the pool as the sides reached straight down. My father lifted my older brother by the arm over the pool and dropped him in, then me, then my younger brother. I was expecting cold water, but the water was like warm bathwater. The pool was only ten feet in diameter, we swam around laughing, splashing, and sometimes just luxuriously floating. I felt like the earth was making me special, making me a part of it, imparting a special gift to those that swam there. Every once in a while, a shadow would cross overhead, I would look up and see my grandfather checking on us, his big cowboy hat an eclipse against the sun. After a time, the sun crossed over to the west and the sparkles left the water, we reached up to have our hands grasped and were lifted out of the beautiful magic liquid and back into reality.

We carried our clothes and walked back to the car, the buffalo not quite as suspicious as before but watchful. My father produced the box containing the lunch our grandmother had prepared. To this day I have not tasted a sandwich to compare. Grandmother made her own bread, the aroma that would emanate my sleep in the early hours of the morning and she would take the roast beef from

the previous night's dinner and turn it through her meat grinder with pickles, onions, and other savory ingredients. She would throw in her trilby cookies, an oatmeal sandwich cookie with delicious date filling. After swimming in the noon-day sun we were famished and ate eagerly. It was time to head home, I said a silent farewell to the buffalo and crawled up into my space in the back window. Tired from swimming and a full stomach I drifted off to sleep, my last memory of the day was watching the huge plume of dust behind us obscure the blue sky as we drove back down the dirt road, daydreaming that I was in a rocket ship heading into the unknown.

Epilogue: Soon after returning to San Diego, we started school, I going into the fifth grade. The teacher asked us what we had done that summer and when my turn came, I related my buffalo pool experience. I could hear a few remarks of disbelief from my classmates but disregarded them. At recess I payed hop scotch with a friend, it was my turn, my chain landed safely in square 3 and I hopped towards the number 10 so I could return to pick up my chain but standing on number 10 was the oversized boy that was the bully of our school. "you're a liar!" he smirked at me. I am not, I said quietly and continued to hop to my destination. The bully whose name I have forgotten shouted "you're a liar! You didn't see buffalo and swim in a," he stumbled on his words because he could not remember the word geyser "a pond" he finished. Yes, I did, I said quietly again. I was not intimidated by his size as I came from a family where six feet was an average size. Liar! liar! liar! He chanted. By this time, I had made it to number nine, and he was blocking my progress. "Liar! Liar!" he started again. I had reached my limit, my patience had been used up, I pulled back my tiny fist and before he even had a clue, I hit him squarely on the nose. He fell to the asphalt out cold. The teacher in charge of recess came over just as he was coming to and helped him to the nurse's office. Soon after, my teacher came over and took me to the principles office where I sat in front of his secretary until I was escorted in. It seemed odd to me that she kept smiling at me as I thought I was in big trouble and soon she led me into his office. The principal also did not seem upset, and I felt he almost laughed when he saw me, the slip of a girl that had knocked out the school bully. The principal explained to me that if I was having problems, I could tell a teacher or come to his office, blah blah blah. I had brothers, I knew boys and the only language that they understood. My dad picked me up from school, spoke

with the principal privately for a few minutes and then we walked out to the car together. My dad ruffled my hair and when I looked up at him, he was smiling broadly, and I could see in his eyes that I had never made him prouder.... another perfect day.