

MY FATHER'S GARAGE

by Brian Bell

Shingle-sided, away from the house,
exposed rafters, stained, cracked concrete,
dim unshielded bulbs in porcelain fixtures,
fetid with grease, moistened dust,
gasoline, cut-grass, rusty metal.

Above the workbench a small window
split into two adjacent panes,
a view of our grey shingle-sided house,
mom inside cleaning, cooking dinner,
her youngest boy outside being good.

A shoe box of roofing nails.
Squat, thick-headed aluminum
shanks too short to do anything but affix shingles,
used without success to erect a tree house
consisting of scavenged wood scraps.

A pogo stick.
Sturdy burgundy steel body with rubber grip handles,
the bottom tube warm from motion,
a persistent ache in my ass,
from trying to jump from the stairs,
onto a plastic tarp left at its bottom.

My bicycle.
black banana seat on an orange frame,
chrome fenders, ape hanger handlebars.
Alone, I would pedal the crushed-coal trails
Between a fallow rail track and polluted creek,
ocher water erupting from the mines below,
exploring abandoned coke ovens, mountains of slag,
graffitied abutments of crumbling bridges.

Few mangled matchbox cars.
Remnants of demolition derby,
high velocity crashes,
cars doused with Rust-Oleum, set aflame.

A narrow spring-latched blaze-orange ammunition box.
Inside, creased, wrinkled pages torn from dirty magazines,
discovered by my friend working at the market.
Some he gave to me, the rest he stowed next to the creek in a paint can,
sadly washed away when its sulphur waters
flooded the bank that summer.

A deflated basketball.

Logo and skin pounded smooth
on the sloping ramp to the garage and the gravel alley,
purposely tossed over the head-high hedges
into old Mary's strawberry patch.
A race among friends to retrieve it.

Here with the garage doors shut,
I carried a pretty blonde neighbor girl,
circling the dark interior violently,
until finally she dropped
from my arms to the pavement, crying.