

Big Ditch Playground Nobody Drowned In

By [Diane Webster](#) (March 2025)



Kids (George Bellows, 1906)

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As a pirate, I walk the plank
across the big ditch water
lazing down Tommy's pasture
in bulging fullness.
I brandish my stick sword
and climb the tree

into a crow's nest lookout
and search for rival buccaneers.

When dry, I play army man
skulking down its trench
for a better firing position
on the enemy neighbor boy
lobbing dirt clods as hand grenades
when I snipper him
barely able to see above
the ditch rim, barely seen
by the boy spitting bullets
with his wooden rifle.

Butterfly Nets

Swallowtail butterflies fly across the lawn;
fly across memories of living in Oregon.
Lots of Monarch butterflies –
on the big ditch bank near our house
milkweed grew, and Monarchs loved
landing on those where slowly
they folded and unfolded their wings
acting like Geishas playing coy.

During the summer we kids
would snatch our fathers' fishing nets,
run up to Tommy's house at the corner.
His yard bloomed lots of flowers,
bloomed lots of butterflies.
We'd run through aromas,
swing our nets at butterflies gliding.

Sometimes we'd catch one or two.
I'm sure we put them in a jar

with holes punched in the lid for air.
Mostly I think we were running around
catching air and maybe hitting each other
with the rims of our nets.
By accident of course.
We'd get tired and sit under Tommy's trees,
watch the butterflies and pet his dog, Tonya.
She was a boxer and wiggled all over.
We'd get thirsty and turn on the faucet outside,
but the water tasted like Sulphur
so we didn't do that too often
unless we were really thirsty.
We didn't want to go home;
it was only half a block or more.
We liked it at Tommy's.

Mothers Perpetuate

I was young. Mom had long hair.
We stood in the kitchen; I stared up at her.
I don't remember seeing Dad there,
but his voice was, "You made your mother cry."
I must have done something pretty bad,
but I don't remember what.
I don't remember feeling particularly bad
that I had made Mom cry.

One day Mom was painting the ceiling
with white paint. I sat on the couch;
she was standing on the ladder.
She made a joke that she'd spill
or toss the paint on me as I sat there.
I was probably reading a book
and I looked up,
"No, you're going to spill it on yourself."

Minutes later that's what happened.
She was a gooey ghost of white paint
spreading out across the floor.

Thanksgiving Day Mom had invited
her parents over for the afternoon meal.
Mom decided to cook pork chops.
We all loved pork chops
so we thought it was great.
We pulled the table out and put in the extra leaf
to make room for Grandma and Grandpa
to sit on the back side of the table.
The rest of us sat in our regular spots.
When Mom brought out the pork chops,
Grandma must have said something
about her not being able to eat pork chops
because she had just had gallbladder surgery.
Mom had forgotten. Mom deflated,
reverted to a little girl again being chastised
by her mother. Grandma said it was okay
and she ate it, but Mom felt bad.
I wonder if Mom knew how much she could
shrink me and my sister into little girls again
just the way her mom did that day.
I doubt it because we felt judged all the time.
I guess you pass on what you learn.

Garden Chores

We had a small garden area
on the other side of our driveway.
My sister and I helped level the dirt.
Dad tied a long wooden ladder to the car;
my sister and I sat on the ladder.
We made sure we kept our feet up

on the one rail in front of us,
sit on one of the rungs
and hang on to each rung beside us.
We were the weight on the ladder
so it would smooth out the garden.
Dad drove the car slowly as he towed
the ladder behind with us riding.
The dirt shoved up in front of us
and bulged over the ladder rail.
I pushed it out of the way with one hand
while holding on with the other.
Or the dirt piled up from the other rail
and came up through the rungs threatening
to push us off our skinny seats.
I pushed that away too.
When we got to the edge of the garden,
we'd lift the ladder and carry it back
to the starting point, and do it again.
Maybe three times before Mom or Dad
thought the garden was level enough.
We loved riding the ladder!
But we had to make sure our feet stayed
up on the ladder or we'd get run over.
That was the fear. Flattened into the dirt
like a seed being planted.
I doubt if we would have sprouted.

Fast Youth

Our next-door neighbor raised big white geese
that roamed over into our yard.
Grass always greener on the other side
of the fence don't you know.
I was outside, but I don't remember
how it started. One of those geese decided

I was in its territory and began to chase me.
Big wings spread wide. It's long neck
outstretched readying to clamp its beak on me.
I ran! I ran and darted through the weeds
until either the goose got tired or it realized,
"It can't catch me!" and stopped.
Mom and Dad were impressed that the goose
didn't catch me. I ran fast when I was young!

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Diane Webster's work has appeared in *El Portal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *New English Review*, *Verdad* and other literary magazines. She had a micro-chap published by *Origami Poetry Press* in 2022, 2023 and 2024. One of Diane's poems was nominated for Best of the Net in 2022. Diane retired in 2022 after 40 years in the newspaper industry.

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