

See the People on the Other Side

By Jackie Shannon Hollis

This will be my ninth Fourth of July. My first one was before my first birthday, which isn't until the end of July. Dad says there will be lots of people in town for the Fourth, because it falls on the weekend and people don't have to work on Monday. Except for farmers, who always have something to do. Pete was thirteen when he had his last Fourth of July.

I'm going to wear my new blue shorts and white top with red stitches on Saturday, because it isn't as patriotic as my other outfit. On Sunday, which is the real Fourth of July and when the Portland cousins will be here, I'm going to wear my red shorts and the white star top that has sleeves Mom says are butterflies. I'll wear my hair in pigtails with blue bows, if Mom isn't too busy to help me with doing the part. If she is, then I'll just put my hair in one ponytail. I can do the bow myself. Mom has a lot to do because she gets involved with things.

I was in the parade when I was five. I rode in the decorated pony cart with the little red pony that died last year when it got caught in the cattle guard. Its hoof tore and it had to be shot. The cart I rode in had my name and the pony's name in red and blue glitter on a white paper signs that I made to put on it. Claire and Red, it said. My brother Pete helped me. That was Pete's last Fourth of July.

Pete and my oldest brother Greg were too big to ride in the cart, because they were thirteen and fifteen. Mom got them to walk on each side of the pony's head so it wouldn't rear up from being scared of all the people. I had to keep reminding them to stay ahead, so they wouldn't cover up the sign. Mom sewed a red western shirt for Pete and a blue one for Greg. My outfit was a white western shirt with a red vest, blue pants and red boots. I threw cinnamon candies on the street and kids ran and got them. Big

people did too. The parade goes all the way down Main Street, then it turns around and comes back up the street, to see the people on the other side.

It's fine to be in the parade, but watching is better because you can see all the things in it, the horses and floats and people, and because you can get the candy they throw on the street.

Last year our Portland cousins didn't come. I got a chocolate ice cream cone. I sat on the curb and ate it and waited for the parade and Dad went into the Round-Up Lounge for a beer. Dad said that way we both got to indulge in the morning. Normally Mom wouldn't let me have ice cream before lunch. Last year Dad missed the whole parade.

This year Greg is away working for college money at one of the big farms near Umatilla. He said he couldn't come home for the Fourth of July. Mom said that was funny, because the big farms get holidays.

I was sitting in the nook of the kitchen when Uncle Phil from Portland called Dad and asked if it would be all right to come up with his kids this year. I was being quiet when Dad told Uncle Phil they could come this year. Dad said things had settled down from the last time they were here and Mom was having a good summer and Greg was working up in Umatilla and wouldn't be home.

Two years ago my Uncle Phil came with my cousins, but they didn't check first to see if they should and it probably wasn't a good idea. That was the first summer after Pete was gone.

My cousin Macy, who was fourteen that summer, brought a boyfriend for the Fourth of July. He had brown wavy hair and played our piano. He was fifteen and his name was Keith. He teased me and said I was short. But that was because he was so tall. He picked me up and held me upside down but I had to make sure my shirt didn't fall over my head, because I don't wear a bra. My brother Pete would have said Keith was all right. But he'd have looked a long time, and with a little frown, at Keith's long hair and bell bottom jeans.

The last time the Portland cousins came, they rode the horses, but only in the corral. Dad said they shouldn't go out of the corral because people could get hurt if they didn't know what they're doing. That boyfriend of Macy's started to get on Lucky Bob

on the right side. I had to tell him it was the left he should get on. Then he got on and he kicked really hard and Lucky Bob bucked a little. Keith got off and his face was red. He said we sure lived in a small town and that he blinked when they drove through town and when he opened his eyes it was gone. Then my brother Greg shoved him down in the dirt.

After Dad made sure Keith wasn't hurt, he and Uncle Phil went up to the house with Greg. Mom was in town working at one of the booths she helped at so she missed the whole thing. Dad said I could take the cousins and Keith on a tour around the farm but not to go in the granaries or he'd beat my butt raw. I took them to the bunkhouse that sometimes a hired hand stays in but isn't very convenient because it has a shower but not a toilet. Then to the new shed that has the combine and tractor and wheat trucks in it. We went to the barn, to the corrals where our horses Lucky Bob and Rose were, to the empty pig sty, the chicken coop, and the brooder house.

Keith asked why everything was red and I said just the barn, the bunkhouse, the house, the chicken coop, and the brooder were red. Everything else is different colors or not a color, just brown or silver. The new granary is silver metal.

I took them by the old granary which is red too. Macy whispered to Keith that that was where it happened. She meant that's where Pete died. My other cousin Sarah is my age. She said to shut up Macy, just shut up.

Pete and Greg used to go in the old granary and jump in the grain when we still stored it there. I never did because they said I was too little to climb up the ladder and they didn't want to wait for me. They said it was dark in there and there might be mice. The old granary was wood and tall and a rectangle, like the red hotels in Monopoly. When they filled that granary, Dad and the hired hands and the boys would set up the auger and turn it on. The grain went up into the granary in that curly cue of metal, swirling and carrying it up and dumping it out through the little hole into the dark.

What happened to Pete was an accident.

On a night in the summer, after harvest and before the stored grain was hauled away, Greg and Pete went into the granary for diving. I waited outside for them. On the way up Greg said to Pete let's jump at the same time and see who lands first. They crawled through the little door at the top. Pete went to one side and Greg to the other and

then I couldn't see them. They yelled one, two, three at the same time. Then they both said Geronimo. Then for awhile I didn't hear anything. Then Greg called to Pete and Pete didn't answer. Greg called over and over. Pete didn't answer over and over.

Then Greg called to me. His voice was far away. Claire. Go get Dad. Can you hear me?

At first my feet were stuck to the ground. Then I whispered okay. I ran as fast as I could all the way from the granary across the big chicken yard, into the back yard, past the bunkhouse and storehouse, up on the porch and in the back door. The back door was still open and my voice got loud. Dad, Greg needs you, he needs you now and Pete needs you too. Dad must have known I was serious because he didn't ask why.

It took them a long time to get the boys out. We found out that Greg lived because he landed last. Pete didn't live because he landed first and got the biggest part of the air pocket that pulled him under and then fell in on itself when Greg landed. It took them a long time because they were worried that they could push more of the grain down on Greg and he would be caught worse than he was, which was up to the neck. I didn't see Pete when he came out because Dad made me go inside and Mom kept me there. Cars kept coming out to the house to help. The men went to the granary and the women came inside.

Dad brought Greg to the house. He was all pale from the dust and chaff. Even his hair was pale. Grandma Leah was there and she said Greg needed to wash up. Mom said he shouldn't wash in the bathroom because it only had a bathtub. She said should take a shower in the bunkhouse, to get really cleaned off. Grandma Leah started to take him but Greg said he wanted to be by himself. He went to the bunkhouse alone.

After a little while I went out to the bunkhouse and sat on the old hired hand cot that wasn't made up because the hired hand was done for the year.

Greg was in the shower for a long time. He turned the water on and off and on and off and on and off. One time he turned it off when I moved on the cot, and the cot made a squeak. Greg said, go away Claire, and I stayed on the cot and then he said, I mean it. Then I went back to the house.

The funeral was at the United Church of Christ. We all cried. The minister asked God to comfort us. Pete's friends carried Pete in the casket. They were Randy Robbins,

Mike Jones, Farley Walker, Bobby Cremholz, Clinton Garrison, and Jeff Wilson. Bobby Cremholz got white and shaky and his dad had to help him.

Pete was buried at the cemetery that's not for Catholics, that's across from the cemetery for Catholics. He got buried next to Grandpa Clarence who died five months after I was born and so he got to hold me. I don't remember that but Grandma Leah always tells me and shows me the picture. Grandma Leah said she was grateful that Pete was with Grandpa Clarence, and that she'd be there too sometime soon. But not too soon she told me.

The red granary had sawed out holes going up and in lots of places from where they tried to get Greg and Pete out. On my birthday, two weeks after Pete died, I was alone in the chicken yard. Some birds were flying in and out of the little dark holes in the granary. I figured I wasn't too little anymore to climb up. I got partway up to one of those little holes and poked my head in. It was dark and the air was wheat chaff and bird dust, and it was empty. Greg was there when I got back down to the ground. He jerked my arm and said, don't ever do that again. Then he picked me up in his arms and carried me to the house.

That last time the Portland cousins came, and they brought that boy Keith with them, was the Fourth of July after the one when I was in the parade and the summer after Pete died. Mom told Dad she wasn't ready for company but Dad said it would be good for people to have more people around.

After the Portland cousins and Keith looked at the red granary I was going to show them just the outside of the new silver granary. I told them that the new silver granary has two big, and not deep, bins for grain that Dad uses for feed for the chickens and for seeds, and that there's an open place between the bins that can be for storage. I told them we couldn't look inside because Dad said no. Keith undid the catch on that door even though I said we're not supposed to. He opened the door.

It was dark in there and then the sun came in and there was something shiny in there. I tried to shut the door. Keith pushed my hand away and put the door all the way open and said, what do we have here, and I said, another time, we're not supposed to be here. He had to climb up to get in because even though the door is low the floor is high

and there aren't any stairs. Keith went to the shiny things and said, slot machines, what the hell are you doing with slot machines here. I said, I don't know and we aren't supposed to be here, and told him he had to get out. He pulled a handle on one of the silver slot machines. No, I said, except it was loud and kind of crying and Macy said, Keith let's don't. Her voice was quiet and bossy and Keith looked at her and pushed his long hair back. Man, he said, I don't see why I can't just look at them for a while. He got out and Sarah pushed the door shut and we put the catch back on and I said I could show them the inside of the bunkhouse if they wanted.

They said they wanted to go to town and I remembered that the rodeo was going to start at one o'clock and the kids games were going to happen at three o'clock. Maybe I would just go to Grandma Leah's because my stomach hurt and maybe she would have the fried chicken ready.

Uncle Phil took us into town to Grandma Leah's. Dad stayed with Greg. Then the Portland cousins and Keith said they wanted to walk around town. They asked if I wanted to go but I said I'd stay and help Grandma Leah make the chicken, because it wasn't ready.

Before they went downtown, Keith winked at me and made silent words with his mouth that said, slot machines. Then he tried to tickle me, but it didn't feel funny.

Uncle Phil said he wanted to have a little lie down so he went to the twin-bed room where Pete and Greg used to sleep when we stayed at Grandma Leah's.

Grandma Leah and I made the fried chicken. This is how: cut the chicken in pieces that are thighs and drumsticks and wings and breasts and backs, then wash and pat the pieces dry, then put the chicken pieces in a paper sack with flour and salt and pepper and shake the paper sack to coat the chicken pieces, except you have to keep the sack closed or the flour will make too much dust. Then put the pieces in the fry pan with hot oil that you have to step back from because it pops out, then let the chicken pieces get golden brown and a little crispy on each side, then take it out and put it on a plate with paper towels, and then put it on a serving plate.

I got to eat a drumstick, to see that it was done. I asked Grandma Leah what slot machines were and she said they were for gambling. I asked were they bad and she said

she didn't know about bad but maybe not legal and the drumstick chicken in my stomach was also in my throat.

Mom came up to Grandma Leah's because she was between things and had a few minutes. She said she saw the Portland cousins walk by her booth downtown and saw Dad at the beer garden at the Elks. I asked where was Greg and Mom said Dad said he was at the farm. I touched the little drops on top of the lemon meringue pie that Grandma Leah made. She said it was weeping.

Mom had to go to her next thing, which was to help at the hootenanny. Grandma Leah said, you sure are busy and can't you just sit for a little while and have a bite to eat you're so thin. Mom said she needed to keep busy and she pulled me on her lap and put her face in my hair.

After Mom left I went for a lie down on the other twin bed that was the one that Pete slept on, across from Uncle Phil on the twin bed that was the one that Greg slept on. Uncle Phil was asleep with his mouth open and his hands folded together on his stomach. I fell asleep until it was dark and Grandma Leah came and said, honey do you want to get a bite to eat before the fireworks. She made a plate for me with another drumstick and sweet pickle potato salad and a special roll and butter. I ate it all and then a piece of lemon meringue pie which tasted fine, even if it was weepy.

The Portland cousins were in the front yard doing cartwheels and sparklers and waiting for the fireworks. Dad came up from the beer garden. He walked in slow steps that sometimes went crooked. He sat in a lawn chair and the first firework started. Dad said, c'mon Babe sit with me, and I sat crosswise in his lap. Mom drove up from finishing putting things away from the hootenanny. She sat on a blanket in the grass in front of us and the fireworks went off from down at the track and football field and Grandma Leah said with almost every firework, oh isn't that just lovely.

Then the sky, just below the fireworks and out toward our farm, got bright and then brighter. Then we the saw flames. Dad said, what the hell. He moved me off his lap. Then he said, oh shit, and ran to the car. Uncle Phil went with him and said, stay here, to the Portland cousins. Mom said, I'm coming too, but Dad and Uncle Phil already drove off. Mom got in her car and I said, I'm coming too, and got in her car before she drove off.

Five cars were already going up the road to our farm ahead of us. One of them was the sheriff's car. The dust made it hard to see the road but Mom knew the road like the back of her hand and she drove up it and right past our house and to the fire in the chicken yard.

Greg was in the chicken yard in front of the red granary. The red granary was burning. It was all flames going up fast to each of the little dark holes and shooting up higher and higher with sparks and snaps and a sound like wind. Dad and Uncle Phil and the sheriff and some other men from town got buckets from the barn and dipped the buckets in the watering trough. Then Greg said, Dad I already wet the ground and everything else, and he pointed at the long garden hose that was stretched out on the ground. He had to yell because the fire was loud and the men were shouting.

Then Greg came over to Mom and me. He went down to his knees. He had tears on his cheeks and he said, it was an accident, and Mom went down on her knees and said, I know but it still hurts.

Then Dad said to all the men to just let it burn and the men stood in a line with their arms folded and their heads tilted up. Greg and Mom stood up and Greg picked me up in his arms and the granary burned in front of us and, over Greg's shoulder, the last fireworks went off in town.

Before the sheriff left he walked around by the chicken house and the brooder and then to the silver granary. Then he went past that too and I had a sigh of relief.

On my birthday, after that Fourth of July and before the county fair and before the summer ended, Mom was making me a Cinderella cake. I went for a walk to see things around the farm so I wouldn't be loud in the house and make the cake fall. Lucky Bob and Rose were glad to see me because their ears went forward. They put their heads by the fence and ate the carrots from the refrigerator in broken off pieces so they could chew them and not get them stuck in their throats. I went and stood by where the red granary used to be and it was a dark burn square in the gold chicken yard. I went to the silver granary and undid the catch and opened the door and there was just an empty space, with nothing shiny. Then I went to the shop where Dad was putting oil in the combine. He

said, hey Birthday Girl. I climbed up on the combine ladder and sat on the walkway with my legs hanging down. I said, what happened to the slot machines.

Dad wiped his forehead with the oil rag and looked up at me and he had an oil smear on him. He said, I thought I told you not to go in the granaries. I said, I didn't go in the granaries but that Keith who was with the Portland cousins opened the door to the silver granary and he went in it on the Fourth of July even though I said no. Then I said that just a little while ago I opened the door to the silver granary again, but I didn't go in. Then I said again, what happened to the slot machines. Dad said he was just keeping them for awhile for the Elks and I said, aren't they not legal, and he said, only sometimes when the inspector is in town.

Then Dad went back to the oiling and I climbed up in the bin of the combine and got a handful of leftover wheat and chewed it until it was gum and chewed that until it melted away in my mouth.