

## THE FARM

By Jennifer S., Glendale, AZ

From inside the quaint home of my grandparents, the serene landscape is crisscrossed into little pieces by a sheet of wire mesh. I push the aluminum screen door ajar and slip out onto the steps. Accompanying the sound of my flip flops smacking down on the brick steps, I can hear the rickety door clang and latch shut as I descend to the farmyard. Trekking across the earth, I find myself facing a fence constructed of pipe at which I contently sit atop the uppermost rung and hook my feet underneath the bottom one. Here, I let all the aspects of the country surround me.

Perched precariously, I grip the fence to keep my balance. It is rough with hardened rust and heat baked on grime. During the day, with the sun beating down upon the pipes, they become hot and I can feel its heat permeating my jean shorts. In the early morning air the heat creates a burning yet tingling sensation. Through rain, sleet, frost, and all the elements, this extension of fence has persisted. Now, it wears a ruddy red with a semblance of dried blood. This is where I survey the scene.

Above lays a soft baby blue sky. The horizon is graced with one lone, pure white cloud that floats, lingering, whipped and wispy. The sun is full force and causes me to squint against it. Sunrays continually strike the ground, casting shadows of equipment and buildings. There is a slight warm breeze fluttering through my hair. In it are bits of dust, swooped into the wind's currents. At my feet, the breeze swirls dead bits of flowers and hay on the beaten ground. These miniature whirlwinds race in circles, scratching fragments of hay across stones. The airborne dust tickles my nose and flying hay's sporadic path is stopped by the blockade of my body. In such a vast open space there is nothing for the wind to whisper past and it moves silently and continuously sweeping up more dust particles along the way.

Examining the base of this agricultural setting, blue-tinged grey stones has greeted me as I first strolled up the unpaved driveway. Each individual stone had been flattened into the sun baked light brown dirt. Years of old, tough trucks that clanked and rattled through have clearly taken their toll. The sea of stones then disperses into sparse grass that consists of a medley of light greens, dark greens, and pale yellows. Parched and prickly, the grass crunches and gives way under the slightest pressure. It sports an unkempt and uneven appearance, growing sporadically on either side of the makeshift driveway. But, the most common item found almost anywhere you happen to glance is hay. Hay's signature yellows are bright and easily perceived. With its smooth cylindrical shape it appears harmless. This is until it is unfortunately picked up and its sudden razor sharp and needle prick ends are a painful surprise. They will lay dormant, though, until a subtle breeze comes along to disturb them.

Enclosed by the ancient pipe fence rests the corral. The sight is a humbling expansion of dirt and mud, just dirt and mud. In all of its square feet, from fence to fence, there is the monochromatic dusty brown. Caked together in teeny mountain range-like formations, an occasional hoof print scars the land. When dry, it can be crushed between

The author's comments:

“ I was inspired to write this piece because whenever I visit "The Farm", I feel totally at ease. ”

the fingertips and is silken and fine. This is the home to generations of cattle, who rolled, rested, and birthed in this enclosure. Like a grandfather clock, a cow can be heard in a timely manner, letting out a low monotone bellow and, like a metronome, her tail snaps back and forth whipping flies away. All this is set to the steady beat of buzzing by pesky flies. Other occupants included pretty, yet sturdy, horses. The friendly beasts will trot up at the sight of my Papa, who always carries a special treat. Miraculously, it seems, three of the four sides are adjacent to fields upon fields of crops. There are towering stalks of corn, reminiscent of the movie *Signs*. Each stalk is crowded with leaves and ears of sweet yellow corn. Sometimes there isn't corn but alfalfa. Alfalfa is a recognizable crop with its dirty green coloring and pungent odor. Nevertheless, each and every field is occupied, producing the sustenance that animals, and their owners alike, live on.

Wafting in my direction is the perpetual essence of manure. On this farm, or any other farm I have been acquainted with, this smell is inescapable. Once foul and intolerable, this scent now merely acts as a reminder. Whenever I catch a whiff, it reminds me that I am in California and that is not an unpleasant thought at all. A much more tantalizing aroma that can be smelled in the evenings is my Papa's barbecued chicken wings. Mouthwatering and perfectly seasoned with pepper and salt, it is a fragrance that drives the stomach wild. The spitting and splattering as it roasts on the barbeque can be heard as far away as the barn.

An antique structure with an intimidating presence that demands respect, the farm's barn is an iconic structure on the property. Steeple roofed and constructed from dark brown, almost black, wood, the framework of eroding timber has persevered through the years. If I were to lay my hand upon one of its four walls I would meet striated wood, bare of paint and splintered amply. It sits almost ominously out in the sunshine. Inside, encased in a dank darkness, is a graveyard of retired odds and ends. Mysterious objects are unrecognizable through dust and cobwebs.

On the outside, back into daylight, time passes almost in slow motion. Sitting in repose, I find myself surrounded by the most peaceful things in the world. Out there in the middle of the country, everything is done at a different pace, as if there wasn't ever an end to the day. All my worries are put on hold and I don't have a care in the world. For a little while, I can put bothersome issues to rest and just let my mind stop. I don't think, instead my mind draws a blank but a peaceful thoughtlessness. There, for a moment, all is where it should be in the world.