

## Days Before Time

Up to their porch we'd run  
toward hugs smelling of yeast breads  
and sweet pipe tobacco.  
Candies hid in their pockets: *guess which?*  
Well-loved toys and tattered books  
spilled from boxes in the corners.

They'd tease, tell stories, play games.  
We helped bake cookies and cakes  
and climbed the trees out back.  
When we had to leave, clutching goodies,  
they'd stand at their door and wave  
as we waved back.

They'd always be there—  
Sundays, holidays, any time at all,  
ready to laugh, ready to share,  
always smiling and hugging, always saying  
I love you and waving as we drove off  
in those days before time came to town.

**Darrell Petska**  
**Middleton, Wisconsin**

## About “Days Before Time”: A Plainsongs Award Poem

In Darrell Petska’s “Days Before Time,” the reader is treated to objects, smells, and tastes that trigger pleasant memories of visiting Grandma and Grandpa’s house. Characters in the poem are revealed by the joys that greet the visitors.

As the poem first greets the reader, the grandparents are “hugs smelling of yeast breads / and sweet pipe tobacco.” There are “toys and tattered books / spilled from boxes.” Universal appeal of a poem has no secret rule or ploy; it is simply sincerity, and there is a plethora of depth from Petska.

“Days Before Time” reaches both children and grandparents through restrained grace. And Petska produces three stanzas of genuine emotion and tribute. Sensory images and objects carry the weight of character: “They’d tease, tell stories, play games. / We helped bake cookies and cakes.” A loving tribute flows from the poem, and when they “had to leave... / they’d stand at their door and wave /as we waved back.”

The emotional pivot in the poem comes in the third stanza: “They’d always be there—”; there is a list: “Sundays, holidays”; “ready to laugh”; “always saying / I love you.” Then the devastating final line of the poem: “in those days before time came to town.” There is no need to explain how time changes all the characters in Petska’s wonderful poem; its understatement carries with it the sincere depth of its weight and loss.

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