

## Daily Routines

Afternoons, I'd scoop the butter knife into mustard and spread it across three bologna and cheese sandwiches—add ketchup, lettuce, and pickles—then rip another slice of bologna in pieces to reward the dogs for tricks. I'd fill Dad's thermos with cold tea in the summer and hot tea in the winter and bag two handfuls of chips. Mom would watch, drinking coffee at the kitchen table while Dad laced his steel-toed boots. The thermos fit in the top of his black lunch bucket behind a latch that kept it from smashing the food. I'd finish the pack with an apple and wait for him to grab the bucket and scruff my hair on his way to the railroad yards. We hated that second shift.

Midnights, I'd stay up for him to return from work and his normal drinks before last call. I'd wrap myself in comforters in a dark bedroom and wait for the headlights to flash across the locked closet and for the dogs to start barking and wagging their tails. Me, wishing I had a tail to wag in excitement to let him know. I'd fake a thirsty whistle or a trip to the bathroom to meet him in the kitchen, his bucket held at his side. We'd jump and kiss his beer breath and he'd act mauled. Mom knew my little tricks, the dogs too. He'd let me watch television, until I'd fall asleep in the cradle of his armpit under that comforting breath. I'd awake in bed, warm, under comforters and wondering how I got there. I'd dream Dad tucked me in, but only Mom tucked.

Downstairs, sprawled the length of the couch, arm draped over his black-pitted eye sockets, he'd snore so loud he'd drown out morning cartoons. I'd tickle his armpit, then watch Yogi as if nothing happened. He'd stop but begin again before the commercial break. I'd tickle. He'd jerk. Again, and he'd snort. My dad was a comical bear after hibernation when he awoke, but still a bear and quite dangerous. A knuckle and ring backhanded the side of my head once and I learned to move, and other little tricks. I'd tickle until he'd stretch and growl before crawling upstairs to bed. Victorious, I'd crawl into the warm spot on the couch and eat Cap'n Crunch until the roof of my mouth was raw and my stomach ached.