



- [Home Page](#)
- [Poetry I](#)
- [Poetry II](#)
- [Poetry III](#)
- [Fiction](#)
- [Creative Non-Fiction](#)
- [Meet the Contributors](#)
- [Submissions](#)

Creative Non-Fiction

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In Development

Yesterday, my cousin Craig called to tell me he had sold the family swimming pool. As a last hurrah, he was throwing a two-day party, inviting the entire family, as well as friends. When I heard the news, I was saddened, although I hadn't used the pool in the last decade. "Bring pictures of the pool," Craig said. "And your stories."

Yes, I thought, I have a story. I remembered when I was twelve years old, wedged between girlhood and adulthood, wanting to be a grown-up and make my own decisions. That ordinary autumn day in 1963 promised no temptations or expectations.

* * *

For weeks, I have been cooped up in the house after school and on weekends, held prisoner by the autumn winds of southern Illinois that trigger my hay fever. Today, however, a cool breeze has not only chased away the pollen but also the lingering dust cloud from the harvested cornfield that borders my back yard. Mom shoos me outside. "Go play."

I find the boys gearing up for a game of football in my cousins' yard next to the swimming pool, so I loaf on the sidelines and watch. I'm the odd man out, the only girl in my subdivision, and I'm pretty tired of always playing "boy" games with my brother Roger, my cousin Craig, and Joe Joe from down the street. All are younger than me, except for my cousin Darrell, who acts as if he is more than just a year older than me. He goes to church school and ignores the rest of us kids because he is a straight A student and so smart and we aren't. Today, he has emerged from his roomful of books and science projects to play football with the boys.

"Craig, you're on my team. We're the St. Louis Cardinals. Joe Joe and Roger, you're the Kansas City Chiefs," Darrell decides, and the boys nod. He points out the boundaries. "The goal line is the end of the pool fence and that tree. Get your defense ready," he orders Joe Joe and Roger. Darrell spins the football between his hands, tests his grip, and tosses the ball to himself before giving it to his brother. He whispers something to Craig that I suspect is his play instructions and then says, "Craig, you hike the ball to me."

The boys usually play ball in the weedy lot across the road from my house, but today they are playing in my cousins' yard where the grass is so long and silky that it softens a fall after a hard tackle. Roger's and my house doesn't have a nice yard, yet. We don't have grass or shrubs or a concrete driveway or sidewalk, which is the family joke because Dad and his two brothers own a concrete construction company. They knew so much about pouring concrete they built an Olympic-size swimming pool right smack between my cousins' house and ours.

My neighborhood – the fields, woods, and creeks – is in its childhood, biding its time until a population explosion warrants development. Occasionally, a new house blooms on a dewberry patch, but building is slow and only a dozen homes exist in the subdivision.

"I wish some girls lived around here," I think to myself. I pluck a blade of grass and tear it into tiny pieces while I watch the boys scramble after the football.