

Maureen Roberts

SLOW DOWN FREIGHT TRAIN



In summer the days are long and the body stretches out like it's a plant trying to reach the sun. Everybody looks taller in summer some wider too, and the streets begin to come alive. There's a different buzz to a summer street. Happiness and hope singing itself in the air like a be bop, skitter-skatter jazz shy melody.

The girls start wearing colours like cotton candy pink, fresh corn yellow, mint green, peachy peach, and baby powder blue. I wear red like a beacon to challenge the sun. It aint' no winter colour really, even if the girls look good in it then too. No, red is for those long elastic summer days when you can sit in the yard, or hang out with the guys at the barber's and feel like you might... just might... touch the sky. Achieve some wild, secret dream. Do the thing that's not done that's closest to your heart.

In the late evenings it's kinda nice to sit by the little pond. The one that no one knows is there 'cos it's kinda hidden now with all the buildings that grew up around it. You can smell *Away* from there. I mean those far *Away* places your imagination drifts into when you're watching TV. or listening to good jazz, or a soulful Bessie. You can look into that dark-skinned-sky and see cities far away. Catch a melody on a breeze.

Summer, that's when my heart's pumping and I'm ready to go. A person shouldn't really

stay put when the air is warm and smelling like flowers. Even if it's only the flowers sitting outside on the sidewalk of some convenience store.

I can stretch my neck, close my eyes and see corn fields swaying, melons ripening, firm and plump: fruits ready for picking. I mean those squishy-squashy summer fruits; that come in pastel or bright, '*pick-a-colour-and-chew*' shades.

Perhaps it's the trains, who know what's on those thunder-clanking trucks. Mainly you just smell the dark smoke, thick and greasy like rich gravy. You can taste it too, sticky- slick on your tongue mixed with that burning metal, iron grinding on iron taste. It floats into your throat, sticking to your gullet waiting for cold, ice cold, swift flowing beer to clean it out. The way you pour Drano down clogged pipes.

Maybe one day I'm gonna slow down one of those old trains. Stand in front of the engine with my elongated summer arms stretched wide, stretched wide and red in my favourite red shirt. Then I'm gonna jump on that train, sit on top of a pile of something good going to some market somewhere and deliver myself.

Perhaps it's just that crazy wind that's not blowing, that's putting thoughts into my head. What do I care, I can sit here and wait for those trains, wait for the right train before I get up and go.