

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

A childhood encounter with death

Gone Horse

“Is this the house with the horse?” Tizi says. Fifty yards ahead, on the right. For years it stood under a maple tree, a life-size horse skeleton, what I’ve since learned was a Deborah Butterfield horse. Whenever we walked past the house, we paused a minute. There was a haunting grandeur about it.

I tell her the horse is gone.

“No.”

“Didn’t you notice, last time we walked by?” Its bones were driftwood gray, its skeletal head lowered slightly, as if bent toward its last bite of grass.

“Maybe they took it down,” she says. “For the winter.”

“Maybe they sold the house and took the horse with them.” I tried to picture the people who lived in the house, outside on the lawn, in November, taking the horse apart and carrying its bones, one by one, inside the garage or to the basement to be stored. That part I could almost envision. But that would require putting the horse back together, the bones spread out on the lawn, a sheet of paper, the assembly instructions, fluttering in the breeze. Where to begin? First the spine ...

“It’s definitely gone,” she says. “If I bought the house, I would have wanted it. I would have demanded the horse.”

“Put a horse clause in the purchase agreement. It had to stay.”

When I was a kid, one summer across the old bridge in town there was an accident. A car, a truck pulling a trailer with a horse inside. The horse was killed. Word got out. We rode bikes across the bridge and down into a little side road where they had somehow moved the horse. When we pulled to a stop next to it, a man was crouched next to it. The horse was covered with a blanket. But you could see some of its huge brown mass.

“You kids get out of here,” the man said. “How would you like someone looking at you when you were dead?”