

# On Seeing Part of a Cast Iron Stove, Rusting Behind a Shed

*Dixie Partridge*

We didn't know they were hard times,  
even though that winter they had to borrow our hoard:  
seven dollars from me and five from my sister.  
Our days were the usual homemade loaves,  
peaches we'd bottled, our own half-beef in the locker,  
the rest to needy relatives and to pay  
for freezing and wrapping.

Mother waxed the linoleum with Simonize every Friday.  
To shine it, we slid across at high speeds  
on old flannel shirts. My face scalded  
with embarrassment that we were characters  
in the Drama-in-Real-Life she wrote and asked me  
to proofread. She was sending it to *Readers Digest*,  
and I, a sixth grader, tried to talk her out of that.

*I have to do something*, she said, *for money*.

It *was* a long winter. The woodshed grew hollow  
before signs of thaw. By March,  
Dad was pitching scant throws of hay  
onto snow for hungry cattle.

That was the year he got down his old skis,  
their wood grain worn and unpolished.  
Pulled behind the runners of his hayrick on Saturday,  
we fell off again and again before we reached the stack,  
waited for him to pitch the bed full.

He was silent through each wait  
for us to catch up, our snowpants and dark coats  
frosted thick from the snow where we fell,  
our fingers stiff and slow to retie rope  
where ski straps had worn thin.

Drying out near the woodbox, we grinned and shivered  
while Mother carefully fed the cast iron stove.  
Dad's platform chair rocked,  
rocked, in the silence.