

Feelings

As a small child, holidays were spent with my grandparents at their house in Darlington, in the far away north. In those days, when I was about six or seven, the north seemed like another country, which we reached by steam train from Kings Cross station. The train, I pretended, was a time capsule carrying people from their homes in the morning to quite some other place in time for tea. From the familiar South to a place in the future, Darlington.

At my grandparent's house, I slept on a narrow bed in the corner of my parent's room, squashed up against a glass-fronted bookcase. It was light when I went to bed and I felt bored. I listened to the chattering birds as I lay staring at the spines of the books. How did people know how to make books?

I read the titles over and over, books about worlds beyond my reach, science, how to make things, people's lives. . .

I longed to see inside them but the bed was pushed hard up against the bookcase. And gradually it became almost dark, and I would take one last wary glance over my shoulder towards the landing and the flight of stairs to the frightening attic, made by my carpenter grandfather, a place I would never dare enter.

One morning after breakfast I went into the garden to look for Granddad. It was like stepping into a small green room - hollyhocks, beds of thick rhubarb, an overhanging apple tree. In the centre, a shed, my clever grandfather's workshop where wood was transformed into furniture.

I loved the smells of tobacco, oil, wood shavings, and the rows of tools and tin boxes. But also I felt fearful, as though there was somewhere beyond the shed that I couldn't go because I didn't know where it was or how to get there. I looked at the saw and the chisel and thought, how will I ever learn to use them?

Granddad was sanding the edges of a long black cylinder.

'Later', he promised, 'I'll show you what it is.'

Just before I fell asleep that night, he whispered round the door, 'Come, quickly, and don't make a sound.'

I followed up the stairs, feeling no fear, and stepped into the dark roof space. An object was placed under the propped open window.

'A telescope', he said, 'finished today.' He showed me the moon and the moon's craters. And star light reaching our world from far away galaxies. From the past, he said.

At the end of that long summer, returning home on the train, I began to feel a melancholy. How quickly time seemed to pass; how fast the future hurtled towards me.

I leant towards the warm bulk of my Mother, and asked, 'How will I know how to grow up? How will I become an adult and know what to do?'

That moment is still vivid because it was the first time I found words to describe my feelings.

Gill Horitz