

George Perreault

NANCY TURNBOUGH: THE QUILTING BEE

photo by Barbara Michelman

Nancy Turnbough: The Quilting Bee

Then they got onto the subject of phones, Verna saying:
Our number way the heck back, when I was a little kid, it was
long short long. You remember how they had just started up
and how you had to listen careful, like it was a telegraph?

And naturally that got Dolores going again: Well, we were
out on the Criswell ranch in those days, and ours was
long long short, and us kids were never ever supposed to
pick it up – I recall that for darn sure – just let'r ring.

Then we got numbers, remember? Mine was 855, no... 35 –
835. Who'd have thought that? I can't remember the first boy
who kissed me, I swear I can't, but 835 ... the way my fingers
pulled up round the circle, released, the dial click-clicking back

and waiting, you had to wait like it was water in the irrigation ditch,
the early fields closed off, then finally opening into the right pasture.
And I bet you all remember party lines too, spying on others and
everyone always wondering if someone else was listening in –

all ears, you know – and how folks would talk in their own codes?
Well, of course, we did it too, stories layered under stories
like Bible studies, all hidden meanings and secret sins. That's
where I first heard Becky Hollingsworth was pregnant

and how everyone thought it was the Butler kid, but then one day
I heard her with another boy and he was the one that really done it.
Well, yes, she did marry into the Butlers – their ranch and the
Hollingsworth place together, that just made sense – and Becky

she made him a good wife and they did right well, real nice family.
I don't guess he ever knew the truth of it, and after all these years
what difference does it make? Bobby raised that boy up, they're
running a pretty stout herd, and that other feller – well, he's long gone.

And, no, I ain't saying he's dead, and I ain't saying he's not – just
you know how it goes around here. We each got our lives and we
live 'em out, and if we're lucky someone will care enough to keep
that damn Johnson grass from growing over our graves.

That's all I'm saying, except this is supposed be a quick nine-block
account of that Brackett girl's gonna pop any day now, but next week
I could use company maybe getting over Amarillo for some fat quarters
else I'll never get my jeweled stars done for the Bodark County Fair.

George Perreault has published three books of
poetry, most recently *All the Verbs for Knowing* at
Black Rock Press. He is currently at work on a new
collection, *Bodark County*.