

Sketchy Memory of a Childhood Friend by Nancy Archibald

In second grade, Autumn and I wrote notes to each other across the aisle in school.

Autumn had blond hair with a pixie cut.

Autumn lived a mile away, across the field. I took the longer route because their cows were scary.

In grade four, I noticed Autumn's cruel side. She liked to gang up on me by making the other girls dislike me. It felt like Autumn stabbed me in the heart. Maybe I didn't call her my best friend like she demanded.

Autumn liked to be the pitcher in our softball games. We let her because she was good.

One day, when riding the bus, she turned around and made deep scratches in my hands with her fingernails.

Autumn and I rode horses. We played in the hayloft and outside. Her father was strict. I was scared of their white German Shepard named King, especially after our dog had bitten me.

At my house, Autumn asked my older sister to tell us about the birds and the bees. We sat on the bed, eating popcorn one kernel at a time.

In grade six her true colours showed when she didn't get her way. Mr. Thornton was her match. She defied him. He wanted us to mark each other's work, and she rebelled. They fought. Mr. Thornton punished the entire class.

"Because of Autumn, you can't go outside skating for Phys Ed," he said.

Autumn whined and stormed about the room.

Mr. Thornton went to prison for inappropriately touching girls in our class.

Autumn moved to Red Deer in grade seven.

When we were sixteen, Autumn took me to meet her boyfriend, Danny. He was a rough, older guy who had tattoos and worked on motorcycles. We went into his house and somehow ended up in a dark upstairs bedroom. I sat there, not knowing what to do. Nothing eventful happened, but it made me leery of Autumn. I didn't want to get in trouble.

When she was in high school, I heard she took drugs. She went to jail and contracted Hepatitis A from the needles she was using.

Autumn came to my wedding dance but could only talk to her for a short time, and then she left.

I heard she married a man who owned a Harley Motorcycle dealership in Edmonton.

She developed cancer of the lung and had a lobe removed in the USA.

At a motorcycle show in Edmonton, I noticed Autumn with long hair, skinny leather jeans, and a sleek leather jacket. She was organizing a fashion show.

We chatted briefly. She was busy with the show.

"We will get together sometime," she said.

After Autumn's husband died, she moved to Penhold, 30 miles away. I was told she was buying some horses.

Someday, I will look her up. I will make sure I am aware of what I can be drawn into and hold onto my heart.