

***Waiting for Normal***  
**by Leslie Connor**

I shouldn't have tried to wait up, it being a school night and all. But I wanted to hear about Mommers' meeting and, well, I just wanted to know she was home. The clock on the microwave read 11:45. Piccolo was busy running on her hamster wheel- it squeaked just a bit with every turn- and I liked having the sound inside the trailer with me. Outside, the street was quiet. The lights were low at the minimart.

In my bunk, I opened my writer's notebook and took a look at the "Sloppy Copy" of my school essay. Sloppy barely described it. My writing was okay. But I had things crossed out, eraser marks everywhere, and worst of all, I'd missed the left margin for most of the new lines- again. My work covered only the right half of the page and it was on a slant. Like a quilting square cut on a diagonal.

Why was it so hard? My teacher and I had gone through my entire writer's notebook and had highlighted ever left-hand margin in bright pink. When I wrote, I was supposed to come back and bump that pink edge with the first letter of every new line. It seemed like kindergarten stuff. But if I got my mind going on the words, I started to miss the margin. If I concentrated on the margin, I forgot what I was writing.

I sighed loudly, and Piccolo's wheel stopped. She was looking at me. "I can't do it, Pic," I said. I rolled onto my back and covered my face with the open notebook. "Grrrr... How do you get the Love of Learning?"

Helena and Marissa had been nice to me about all my school stuff. That was a relief. I never looked forward to explaining my learning problems to a new classroom full of kids.

"Is this part so you can make notes and corrections?" Marissa had asked. She'd patted the blank wedge of space in my notebook with her open hand.

I was tempted to say yes. I rolled my eyes. "No, I just have some kind of spatial relationship problems. That's what the special education teacher

told me. It happens in reading, too," I said. "Words sort of slide on the page." I swept my hand to one side.

Now I listened to a freight train go by on the tracks above and behind me and wondered for a moment what it was carrying and where it was going. That made me think of Mommers again. I wondered what she would be selling in her new business. Was it something the trains would bring? Would it go right by our trailer before it reached the store or the warehouse or whatever? And, the big question: Would it really work out?

I watched Piccolo disappear into her tissue nest for a nap. The trailer was quiet. Too quiet. I checked the time again. Five past twelve. I thought about my wish.

"Come back, Mommer," I whispered. I started to feel scared. But not from being alone- that never really bothered me much. It was the kind of scared you get from a memory. When something begins to feel like another time- a time when things didn't go right. A time we took some twists and turns. It was late; that was a part of it. Mommers had stayed out late like this before. Then she stayed later and later, and after that, she'd stopped coming home.