**Poetry from Daily Life: When grandparents' toil tells our own tale**

By Nancy Bo Flood

*This week’s guest on “Poetry from Daily Life” is Nancy Bo Flood, who lives in the Navajo Nation in Colorado. A writer for 25 years, her favorite subjects include folktales, history, and the Navajo region. She says, “I believe that stories help heal our hearts and give us new eyes to see others and ourselves. I write to celebrate the courage of children as they cope with challenges — the first day of school, the loss of a parent, or perhaps displacement because of war, discrimination, or having different abilities. A well-told story can crack open our hearts and see beyond our own judgments or stereotypes. But best of all is having a child shyly say, ‘I am in this book.’” ~ David L. Harrison*

**Coal Dust, Peppers, and Tomatoes, an Immigrant’s Dream**

I come from coal dust

And hopes taken down, deep

Into the mine-shafts, far underground.

Dig hard, spend lean,

Save.

Leave,

Before the shaft fills and dreams drown.

Homestead rich black fields.

Truck-farm tall golden corn, fat plump tomatoes,

Finest sweet peppers, red, yellow, green.

Sell a bushel, save,

Save again.

Fingers hold earth.

Souls hold dreams.

Buy all the acres you plow.

Wed. Birth. Bury.

Plant again.

Corn grows from one yellow seed

Into an immigrant’s dream.

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My Czech grandfather lived in a small town near Prague. His mother died during childbirth. His father died only 12 years later. As a young orphan and all alone, my grandfather hitchhiked to a German port and bought passage on a ship sailing to New York City, Ellis Island. Somehow he made his way to Iowa where he worked on a relative’s farm, saving, until he could buy land of his own.

My Italian grandfather emigrated from northern Italy to Illinois. There he labored in the coal mines and as a hired farm hand until he too saved enough to purchase land suitable for growing sweet Italian peppers and tomatoes.

Black dust from his years of coal mining eventually killed my grandfather. Hard, relentless work of dairy farming sapped the strength of my Czech grandparents. As a kid I loved running wild and free on their farms with my cousins or tagging along with grandparents as their work of clearing rocks from corn fields or calling in the cows never ended. I wish I could ask, was it worth it — all their toil and hardships and yes, discrimination too, to fulfill their young dreams … for us?

*Books for young readers by Nancy Bo Flood have received numerous awards including the White Raven International Award for stories that encourage compassion and offer cultural understanding. Learn more about Nancy and her work at* [*nancyboflood.com/about/*](https://nancyboflood.com/about/)*.*