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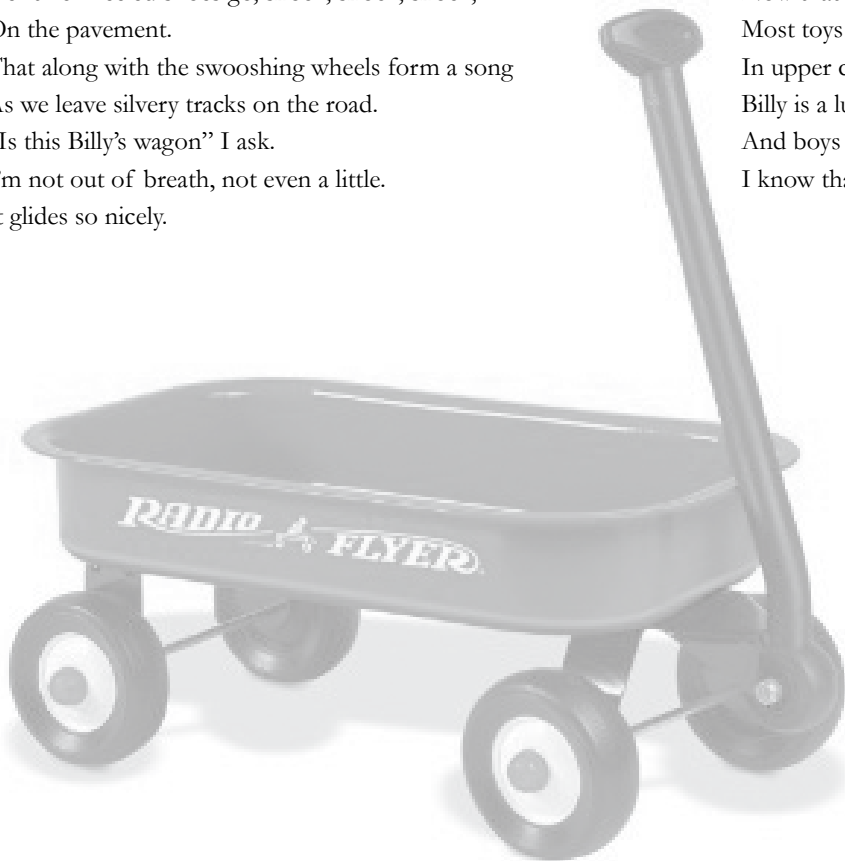
Radio Flyer

BY HELEN CONDON

[Author's Note: *When I was eight years old, in 1948, I crept downstairs in the middle of the night Christmas day to find Santa had left me a doll carriage. I tried to take it apart, thinking I could make it into a wagon and my parents wouldn't know the difference.*]

I offer to pull the wagon for Mrs. Borst
As I am short and the handle is a little low
For an adult.
It has been raining and the road is wet
So wet that the wide wheels throw water towards me
Just missing my legs.
The wagon is such a deep red, so thick with paint
That the Radio Flyer Company
Must have dipped the body into the paint
Instead of painting it with a brush.
The handle is black.
It fits my fingers perfectly as I grip it.
Now, this is more than a just a toy.
This is a tool.
A tool that can carry rocks and dirt and plants.
Mrs. Borst smiles as she walks beside me.
Her thick heeled shoes go, snock, snock, snock,
On the pavement.
That along with the swooshing wheels form a song
As we leave silvery tracks on the road.
"Is this Billy's wagon" I ask.
I'm not out of breath, not even a little.
It glides so nicely.

I could run with it and still talk polite.
"Yes, dear, it is. He pulls the baby around in it."
Oh now, isn't that just the ticket.
A little blanket in the bottom covering the grooves,
And with its rounded sides for good gripping.
The baby would get cut on any sharp edges
If you tipped over.
I figured I'd even take a brown one if Santa brought it.
Even though brown is my worst color.
When it comes to drawing pictures I
even color tree trunks green.
In fact, if I wasn't such a sensible girl, I
would throw out every brown crayon
In the box.
The white letters printed on the both sides of the wagon
Are in script.
Now that's proof that this is a serious piece of equipment.
Most toys have printed letters
In upper case.
Billy is a lucky boy, I know that.
And boys get wagons and girls get doll carriages.
I know that too.



Growing up in Connecticut in the '40s, Helen remembers playing ball on the village green and wanting a wagon instead of a doll carriage for Christmas. Following the death of her husband of 33 years, she went back to school and received her graduate degree in Creative Non-Fiction from University of North Carolina at Wilmington. She teaches rug braiding and memoir writing and lives in Parishville, New York, near her three children. Photo by Todd Condon.



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