

Before Fiberglass

Tools were never left outside,
never left
against an exterior wall,
propped up
along a fence or tree.
We heard
our father's voice
long before we saw
his swift stride coming
when he found
one tool left outside
drowning in cloudburst—
or stuck in scorching mid-day sun—
or on the ground, fallen,
a barn casualty.
We learned tools,
treasures held
in our good hands.

No wonder our father
ragged our hands in linseed
oil, that golden miracle
that breathed the grayed
wood of livestock and garden
tools alive—like longer days,
warmer temperatures
that bring the bud
from bark.
I never knew
until my own hands
showed me the vertical ridges
running amber—the pole-length of wood,
the hickory handle,
the shovel,
the post-hole digger,
the hoe,
the pick,
the pitch fork,
the rake,
the scyth,
the sledge,
the axe—a thing
of beauty.

—Susan Hodgins

“Looking Back” was written for the second featured program about preserving collections, part of the speaker series for “STUFF: What We Collect & Why,” scheduled Thursday, October 4, 2018, at the Third Street Gallery, Moscow.