

A Look into the Past

by Angie Benitez-Garcia

I slowly leaned out my chair and opened the window of the apartment, letting a small gust of cool wind inside. An unopened book sat in my lap as my eyes continued to drift to the outside world. The sounds of birds chirping and young people laughing brought me to think about my childhood and how different the city had become.

When I was younger, the sky wasn't as blue as a sapphire stone, nor were the clouds as white as a sheep's wool. Instead, the land was wrapped around in a dense, suffocating, ashen smog. The rain was gray, and the clouds were barely visible. I would walk two miles to school with a mask around my face on emergency days, my eyes stinging with irritation as tears slid down my face. Now, when I go for a walk in these old bones, the atmosphere is crisp and inviting, my lungs feeling new every time.

I remember the reason for the change. A small government factory of wind turbines had recently opened up across our neighborhood shortly after the mines began running out of coal. Due to the high demand for labor provided by the turbine factory, many members of the community were able to get jobs as engineers, technicians, and constructors. That same week, my father came back home and bought me my first ever pair of new pink shoes.

It was not only the air that became better when we changed our fuel source. The factories that used to dump piles of waste coal near the rivers had finally stopped, allowing the water to be drinkable a few years after. It no longer was acidic and full of metals and because of this, the fish returned. That day, I had never seen such beautiful shimmers brought by the scales that reflected sunlight. We were able to run into the stream carelessly, splashing water at one another as our laughs got louder.

The most important change was the one within my family. My cousin Jun would have constant asthma attacks. His coughs and wheezes would echo across the apartment, a noise akin to the fearful gasps of ghosts. After the wind turbines replaced the coal mines, he had fewer attacks. Imagine all of our content when my granddaughter's family was the first one in which no one had respiratory diseases or cardiac issues brought on by the constant use of carbon-based fuel. Thanks to our renewable energy, our small village that was dependent on mining had grown into a large sustainable city with active, happy, and healthy citizens.

I was quickly pulled back to the present by a sudden flap of red wings. A cardinal flew onto the windowsill before stopping at the bowl of sunflower seeds I had left. I started to open the book up and flipped through the yellowed pages of *Silent Spring*, glad that the world had changed for the better.