

This is the first poem Great Falls cowboy poet Paul Zarzyski read at Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion" radio shindigs in Butte Saturday afternoon and evening. It is reprinted by the author's permission and is available on the 1998 recording "Words Growing Wild."

Why I like Butte, or How She Goin' Today, Just?

By Paul Zarzyski

From the Gogebic Iron Range—*shaking ground*, in Ojibwa—
across open range of the Plains Indian
turned cowboy, from Dad riding the cage for 8-
hour pick-and-shovel, double-jack-and-blast shifts
thirty-six levels below surface in the Montreal stopes,
to me winning more than his monthly wage
for 8-second buckin' horse rides
aboard Spitfire and Coors Light
in Butte, America, I know my true home is
where ethnic hearts of blue-collar folk
mine and smelt hot blood from veins
then pour it into their arteries
like molten ore. BUTTE, with its rambunctious
shamrock-curvy girls, who danced, until the last
Tony Lama'd dogs died,
with us rodeo rebels—jitterbugging from the Helsinki
on the lip of The Pit, through swing shift
breakfast at the M&M, to break of day
red beers at Maloney's. BUTTE, the one and only
arena I did not bite the dirt in—never
dusted, pile-driven, or drilled—where I prayed
Hail Marys long before the Mountaintop
Madonna, *Our Lady of the Rockies*, The Butte Guadalupe,
beamed down upon the buckin' chutes--
prayed the same Hail Mary
full of grace I pleaded as a child wanting
to be spared a lifetime in the mines. BUTTE,
with its phone book ringing with the familiar
ilk of *Ginty Fontecchio*, *Reino Peltomaki*, *Pupsy Savant*,
Ino Aho handles I grew up with
in Hurley, Wisconsin—Mick, Dago, Cousin-Jack,
Polack, Finn syncopated names
stout with thick sinewy consonants and loud
vowels musical to the tongue's lit-fuse-
to-powder touch. BUTTE, cold spot
of the nation every other February day
but hot come mid-March
when even Her beer blossoms green in the warmth
of corned beef and cabbage, pasty pie and riotous
laughter of Her people—O'Boyle, McTavish,
Zolinski, Aho, Maki, Antonoli—all for one,
one for all, on Saint Paddy's Day. BUTTE!
Raising hell and placing a Blarney stone beneath it. BUTTE!
Holier than hell and damn proud
of it. BUTTE! Hell to drive through
but oh, what heaven to spend the night in BUTTE.