

## WORDLE TAKES ME BACK TO CHILDHOOD – MARYLIN NEASE – TEXAS

I play Wordle daily in two Wordle groups, one made of six cousins, and one of two teachers. I like that Wordle gives me a daily opportunity to challenge my brain and stay in touch with family and friends.

One night, I had placed four out of five correct letters in their correct spaces. I needed one more correct letter. I had also used up five of my six chances to solve the puzzle. I had one last opportunity—and more than one word to try.

I made my choice.

Instead of Wordle rewarding me with a *Phew!* for solving on my last try, Wordle displayed the correct answer, informing me I had used my six tries and my winning streak was over. I had guessed wrong.

Ironically, the right answer had been one of the first to come to my mind in a long list of possibilities.

Although I didn't win, the answer *baler* carried me back to a night in my childhood, to a story that I'd heard my sister Frances retell last summer.

Her tale was about a time when Daddy was baling hay after dark. Normally in our home, we were all in bed by nine or so, but that night Daddy was working late.

I don't recall why. Maybe he wanted to beat a bad weather forecast. Maybe he had hay haulers arriving the next day to load the bales and transport them into our hayloft. Maybe the percent of moisture in the windrows of raked alfalfa was perfect for baling and capturing maximum nutrients. I don't know.

Back then, probably the late 1950s or early 1960s, Daddy's grey-and-red Ford tractor and his baler were smaller than today's equipment. Smaller balers made smaller, rectangular bales.

On this summer night, my sisters and I needed a breeze, so we had our bedroom windows wide open. We four girls shared one bedroom with two sets of bunkbeds. Linda and Frances had the upper beds; Luna and I had the lower ones. Heads on our pillows, we heard the steady *putt, putt, putt* of Daddy's tractor engine, and those softer sounds were almost swallowed by his baler's louder *ka-chuk, ka-chuk, ka-chuk*. Daddy drove around the field again and again, turning the windrows of raked alfalfa into bales of hay. From our beds, we couldn't see the light cast by his tractor's headlight, nor could we see the moon and stars as he worked, but we trusted light would guide him as he drove in circles to convert his alfalfa crop into bales of hay. The humid breeze carried the newly baled alfalfa's sweet, grassy smell to us while we waited to fall asleep.

If you ever see me with Frances, ask her to tell you about that time when Daddy baled hay late at night and the sound of his baler became our lullaby. She's great at telling her story, complete with the hay baler's sound effects--that rhythmic *ka-chuk, ka-chuk, ka-chuk!*