
Pro Rege

Volume 22
Number 2 *Arts Issue*

Article 2

December 1993

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Recommended Citation

De Smith, Bob (1993) "Hangin' in There (For My Father)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 22:

No. 2, 3 - 4.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol22/iss2/2

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Hangin' in there (for my father)

by Robert J. De Smith

The story as he tells it
Is a comedy:

As he stepped from ladder,
To flat garage roof—
The push broom already tossed up,
Ready to clean fall debris—
The ladder went one way and
He another—
Without knowing how
He found himself hanging by one arm
From the sturdy gutter,
Some twelve feet from the ground,
Above the clutter including
Ladder, scrap wood, and
An ancient smith's
Forge from Grandpa's shop.

I hear the slick whistle
Of aluminum gutter against ladder,
The jarring rattle of ladder
Turning, tumbling, and settling.

Well, there he hung, and
Mother not ten feet
Away inside the travel trailer,
Vacuum cleaner drowning not just
The ladder's clash but an
Ardent "Honey?" or two.

Fortiprovidently,
It was his good shoulder he hung by,
Though this prevented his gaining a better
Grip—his other shoulder
Cannot be coaxed, even *in extremis*,
Above his head.

I can see him hanging,
And I can feel him figuring,
And I can sense him begin to swing,
Foot catching the wall under the eave
For one last push . . .
And I can see him sail out
In control—"Cagey" is
His word for it—landing and tumbling,
Just a gash on his shin
(Didn't quite clear that ladder)
To show for it.

But I also see
A shattered ankle,
A broken back,
A concussion,
Blood—all avoided,
But lurking.

And I wonder:
What's the limit on caginess?
When will his innate sense of problem-solving
Miss by that inch worth miles?
How long can he hang?
How long swing?
Can I catch him the next time?