

Dane Netherton  
dane.netherton@gmail.com

about 500 words

### Atomic Punk

The train dragged a cherry-red, superheated steel wheel down the Sierra foothills, bringing a plume of sparks to the foggy gloom of the vast Roseville, California switching yards on that spring day approaching the end of the Vietnam War. A lit fuse on an early Independence Day.

One of billions of tiny, young, evanescent, stars found its mark, a bomb of some conventional-yet-scary type, or a huge, leaky, steel bottle of propane. The phrase "chain-reaction" misses the way explosions began to leap from train to train, track to track.

It took all morning to convince Mom to let us out. Reliving a Cuban Missile Crisis pregnancy. She didn't want to risk the end products of that Vandenberg A.F.B. bunker morning sickness.

A sun-bleached pre-teen I carted my skateboard to the top of the hill, went over the chain-link fence, and stood, stretching to better view the growing mushroom clouds.

Grandpa had said they were bombs to fill the bellies of B-52 Superfortresses, the kind that Slim Pickens flew in Dr. Strangelove. They wouldn't reach Mather or Beale to be transported to Vietnam or possibly Cambodia.

Not this time.

Years before, the Country Joe MacDonald song endlessly looped through my brain, and I made my parents promise that they wouldn't let me be "sent home in a box." Older now. I leaned back, hoping that if one of the explosions turned out to be atomic, I'd leave a lasting shadow on the grey concrete behind me.