



## **A History of Belle Meade's Children's Bridge**

Did you know that the two bridges on Belle Meade Boulevard each have their own story? The Children's Bridge was dedicated in 1995 in memory of William F. Miller, jr. The dedication ceremony was quite a to-do! The Police Color Guard were in full regalia, and Nashville Pipes and Drums played several selections. The mayor of Belle Meade at the time, T. Scott Fillebrown, spoke and the Rev. Dr. W. Robert Abstein gave an invocation. Vice Mayor Bruce Crabtree, jr., told the history of the Children's Bridge and Joe Ledbetter, Tim Caulkins and Mary Hall Pirtle also spoke. Afterwards a reception was held at the home of Mrs. Jack C. Massey.

During the dedication ceremony, Boston artist Nancy Schön unveiled her sculpture of racoons playing in two magic horseshoes, called *Follow the Leader*. Ms. Schön wanted to incorporate icons of Tennessee and Belle Meade itself and knew immediately that she wanted racoons to be the focus, as they evoke images of Davy Crocket and his coonskin cap, and Senator Estes Kefauver, who was also known to wear one. She had no idea that they were honored as the state animal of Tennessee in 1971 until beginning her research. A Belle Meade resident suggested using stone walls, as they feature so prominently in the history of our City, and she wanted to include a reference to horses, as they were also integral to Belle Meade.

Beginning with this imagery of racoons, stone walls and horses, Ms. Schön ended up writing a children's story about a family of racoons who played in Belle Meade and discovered a pair of magic horseshoes. This story became the basis for her sculpture, and the final result is what you see at the Children's Bridge today. It is the goal of Ms. Schön to evoke a sense of childlike playfulness and joy in all that pass by her sculpture.

## **The Legend of the Racoons and the Magic Horseshoes**

**by Nancy Schön**

As long ago as anyone can remember, generations of racoon families have made their dens in the two magic horseshoe walls made of stone at the Children's Bridge across Belle Meade Boulevard. Rodney Racoon lived there with his two brothers, Randy and Ricky, and his two sisters, Ruthie and Rosie. Rex, the huge legendary horse who had

left his shoes on the bridge forever ago, was King of the Land and all-powerful. He insisted that every racoon that ever lived on his bridge must have a name beginning with the same first letter as his.

The racoons were delighted with the horseshoe walls because they were near water — and everyone knows that racoons are joyful when they are near water! The Children's Bridge spanned a fascinating creek, where there was no lack of luscious tadpoles, crayfish, salamanders, snakes and frogs — all the goodies a racoon could ever want to meet and eat! They could even search for turtle eggs in the mud, washing them as is their custom in the cool, clear water before eating them. There was also an abundance of grasshoppers, crickets, insects, grubs, and best of all bumblebees!

Racoons think bumblebees are the very, very best. Because of their heavy fur, the racoons never get stung so they can freely partake of these tasty morsels. However, the most wonderful treat (next to corn, honey and blueberries) was the inexhaustible supply of acorns found near the ancient oak trees in the area.

Belle Meade was the perfect place for an intelligent, curious racoon family. It was beautiful in the spring with its old arching dogwoods and gnarled wisteria. Even the bleak winter landscape was colorful, as the many varieties of holly produced strikingly bright red and orange berries.

It was a quiet residential city with no commercial activity allowed. The streets were not congested and the beautiful homes were surrounded by large parklands. The kits tirelessly played Follow the Leader amongst the nooks and crannies of the magic horseshoes, and then they could squeeze into the small spaces between the stones to enter their home to rest and cuddle together, as was their wont.

The only drawback for the racoons was that Belle Meade was such a well-ordered city! It was hard for them to find garbage cans since they were collected twice a week, and the dead trees that racoons like to make their dens in were removed by the Beautification Commission in a wink!

Everyone liked to come to the magic horseshoes to play with the racoons or to visit with their neighbor, or just to sit and dream. Legend has it that if you come to the Children's Bridge, you will have good luck. That's why so many people love to come to the Children's Bridge! Wouldn't you?

*--by Laura Katheirne Wood, Society of Ceres Chair*