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This poem was inspired by *Paperclips*, a documentary about how a group of children wanted to understand the loss of life during the Holocaust. Their project culminated in a museum built from a cattle car saved from destruction in a German rail yard. Rent this movie, watch it with a child. You will never be the same.

Cattle Car

Holly Hewlett

Please, don't just pass by. I was not always this ugly.
A kind word, a touch. Visit with me. This tragedy was not of my doing.
Do you hear the voices? I will hear them for all eternity.
Close your eyes. Let me tell you my story. I am a survivor too.

My planks were once fine and true, made from strong, beautiful trees in Europe.
My iron forged in fire, tempered in water. I, man made, am of the elementals of the universe.
As a child, I traveled Europe. Livestock, bags of grain, and bales of hay.
As a teenager, I did my job well. No lost cargo, a fine smooth ride.

One night, I was ripped from my line, bound with others, strangers.
Forced into duty for which I was not made.
Having a reputation for never losing cargo became my greatest disgrace.

Like the rope that hangs an innocent man, I was not, am not, and never will be evil.
I was used for evil means.
And when my usefulness was done, I was discarded like my cargo.
I prayed for the end of the line, for a place to hide my helpless shame.

In old age, they came again. Hoping to scare them, I set the voices free.
They were not afraid. They looked at me with knowing. They touched me.
They did not blame me, they forgave me.
They blessed my soul. They set me free.

"You are safe now." They said. "Come, we are taking you home."
"Tell your story as best you can. Do not be afraid to cry."
"Let them hear the voices that were silenced by hate and ignorance."
"Let them touch you, let them heal your pain."

Many came, the children of my cargo long ago. Stoically I stood in humiliation.
They embraced me, knowing as they were not, that I am not evil.
I tell their children, and their children's children.
So never again will a cattle car be used as part of a death train.