FROM THE MARGINS

Essays of Wood, Wind & Weather

5470-KIZE

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Homer Kizer

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AS AN ARTIST CELEBRATED TONIGHT

I could've claimed the nametag
that would've let me enter free
but I paid my way
into the opening
a Native Arts gallery show

I listened to the flute
ate the chips & tortillas
watched longtime patrons
after reading my name
passby my work
with hardly a glance

in my tattered jacket
mended jeans
I mingled with a judge
& his other
who might have recognized me
in different circumstances

I spoke with other artists
all from somewhere else
each as polite as if I were
a customer

it wasn't till older Nez Perce
filtered away from the flute
that anyone noticed
my little piece of work

they looked at it all around
asked each other
what kind of wood
& I had to say, apple

they took my phone number—
I might be asked
to demonstrate
Native techniques
on the reservation

so all in all, it was
a pleasurable evening
even though those
who invited me
never knew I came

PREFACE

During the summer of 1991, on the stoop of a Fairbanks gift shop, I adzed lengths of birch into bowls shaped like halibut, all the while being recorded daily on videotape. Chips flew as I told what I knew of a Native culture that fascinated these newly arrived tourists. For many of them, seeing me carve was as close as they would come to encountering a culture and a way of life missing from middle America. They wondered if I were part of that culture: my roots on both sides include Native Americans, but they also include Dutch and English Dissenters.

Carving in the Formline tradition of the Northwest Coast is, for me, a means of staying connected to the Coast, to fishing, to those things I did for several decades while being buffeted by wind and tides. It provides enough income that I can survive the poverty of being adjunct, English department faculty. It is a visual form of story telling, and that is what I really am, a storyteller, a vocation that transcends time, that binds cultures and clans with the curious. I am part of a rural culture that has no Faulkner, no Frost. The closest any writer has come to validating this culture is Ken Kesey in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, and he never understood the mindset of coastal loggers. The death of JoeBen would not have happened: before the tide raised a foot there would not have been one block left of that tree large enough to split for firewood. Nor would any self-respecting logger put a baby bottle nipple over a rifle muzzle when poaching a deer. A logger who glances at the lean of a four hundred year old fir, then uses skiptooth chain to cut faster isn't worried about making a little noise. What Kesey described—using a baby bottle nipple to silence a .22 rifle—was what we as third and fourth graders talked about on the school bus. And by the

time we were in fifth grade, we all had learned that the nipple's flange interfered with our sight picture while the nipple silenced nothing.

The rural culture that flourished for a season along the North Pacific coast included loggers and fishermen, sawdust savages, stump ranchers, brush pickers. It was and its remnants remain politically incorrect. But it, like the aboriginal cultures of the Peoples who developed Formline art, has been transformed by time, by tourists and carpetbaggers; by Californians who brought with them reverence for a static natural world; by young Coloradans, the children of Capitalists who, unlike their parents, were not too busy pursuing their own aspirations to notice what had happened to rivers and lakes, woods and wetlands.

I saw clearcutting evolve from producing hillsides covered with a checkerboard pattern of logged and unlogged blocks to producing naked ridgelines for as far as a person can see as if trees were an enemy against which total war had been waged. Something happened: after being in Alaska for thirteen years, I returned to the central Oregon coast, returned to where I graduated from high school, worked, opened a gunshop, and started a family. The older clearcuts where I had hunted deer were covered with dense stands of young, healthy firs twenty, thirty, fifty feet tall. But the panoramic vistas of the Coast Range which I had taken for granted were gone. Ridges looked like the backbones of starving hounds. If there would have been a Humane Society to call, I would have been tempted. However, the earliest photos taken of the Coast Range show bare ridges in many of these same vistas. The timber I had become accustomed to seeing wasn't ancient. The earliest photos date back to the 1870s; the timber that had been logged while I was gone was 120 years old. Its history is that of Anglo-Europeans.

After somewhat recovering from the shock of seeing the denuded ridges, I looked for the businesses I would be naming in a novel. Many of the ones I had planned to use had changed names, and a Newport radio station was saluting *So-&-So* as the business leader of the month. *So-&-So*, a Newport resident for five years, was

identified as a longtime resident of the coastal community. I then realized why, too often, it is impossible to return home. Nothing is static, not even when no change is discernible let alone when a mountain range has been clearcut.

Even the text of these stories will change as readers bring to them different experiences, different cultures, different realities. Hopefully, these stories will translate across these differences. Hopefully, they will entertain readers who would not otherwise know that for a little while in the middle of the 20th Century I taught daughters to hunt, fish, explore a natural world in which they have responsibility and dominion, in which their roots will forever link them to the complex web of life that ebbs and flows daily.

One evening during the summer of 1989, Kristel, my middle daughter, came to me madder than I had previously seen her. To earn money for her first car, she worked in the deli section of the Carr's grocery store in Fairbanks. She squeezed the fresh orange juice, and she sliced thin the smoked cheeses and the spiced meats, and she waited on customers. And one female tourist, in a loud voice, had, when paying for her purchases, asked Kristel if the store accepted American money. The question was asked as an honest inquiry. The woman genuinely wanted to know if she could use her American money in Alaska.

Even though Kristel was about to begin her Sophomore year of college, Kris didn't know how to answer the woman. She wanted to say that Alaska was part of America, that everyone knows it's a state, but such an obvious statement of fact stuck in her throat. All she could do was stare.

When the tourist received no answer, she asked her question again, raising her voice yet louder as if the perceived language barrier could be bridged by increasing the volume of sound she produced.

I have tried to tell these stories in as quiet a voice as possible.

* * *

INTRODUCTION

> What counts finally in a work are not novel and interesting things . . . but the absolutely authentic. I think there *is* a spirit of place.
>
> John Haines

Twelve hours beyond the end of the Sterling Highway and seven years after coming to Alaska, I coaxed a bumper-dragging stationwagon down the loading ramp of the ferry *Tustamena*, past the 200-year-old Baranof House and up Kodiak's Mill Bay hill, where blocks of "Aleutian homes"—small, weathered houses on lots even too small for them (many with a green Camaro or black TransAm filling their backyards)—yielded to a baseball diamond with a gravel outfield at the blinking red light, then Kodiak's only traffic signal.

The stationwagon's bumper scraped hard the pavement every time a rear tire dropped into a pothole, which was often.

Skiffs and seines were parked and piled in front of a string of businesses that skirted the road. Beginning with a day care, continuing past the radio station, an electronics store, a plumbing supply, a lumber yard doing business in the street, and stretching to the screen of limby spruce timber shielding an overgrown cemetery from peering eyes, these businesses appeared as conk knots on a log, parasitic life dependant upon the road, each, except for the radio station, a shade of brown as if they sought to avoid detection, as if they sucked they sustenance from the road and not the ebb and flow of fishermen bouncing along it in rusting pickups.

Across from the cemetery was the new Public Safety building. My wife, then a drivers' license examiner, had, two days earlier,

been sent from Anchorage to open the new Department of Motor Vehicle's field office. I was bringing over fifteen years' accumulation of kitchenware, clothing, household notions and nicknacks—our daughters would join us when the eldest, Kathy, returned from summer camp. I also had with me a manual typewriter and the start of a novel.

We rented a place sight unseen: it was the only residence any of our contacts in Kodiak knew available. After checking with my wife, who'd been staying in the Star Motel at state expense, I searched for the address of the apartment which would be our home for the next year and a half. I didn't have a city map (don't know that one is available even now), nor did I know where I was going. But it seems that everyone knew of *Erdman's ghetto*, a collection of older trailer houses huddled around two navy surplus buildings that had been converted into small duplex apartments twenty years earlier. We had rented the largest of the apartments, a two bedroom affair, the second bedroom only two feet wider than a set of bunk beds.

At the time, I hadn't read the essays of Alaskan poet John Haines. I didn't know of his observations about how a writer's physical landscape becomes his or her mental landscape. In fact, I had just begun to feel the need to express myself in prose.

But on a table in the corner of a bedroom only slighter larger than a standard double bed, I worked on a story set in the Dutch Harbor I had left a year earlier. I had, while fishing crab in Captain's Bay, read Ken Follet's novel *Triple*. I didn't find his sea-chase scene believable; I thought I could tell a better story. So I wrestled nouns and adjectives into sometimes unforgiving winter storms, where seas smoked and people washed up on beaches as if they were kelp rafts.

When I found that Dutch Harbor and then Kodiak had become characters in my writing, I realized I was doing something different than had been done by Victorian writers; something different than what Hemmingway, Fitzgerald, Joyce had done; something a little different than even what the Russian writers I most enjoyed had

done and were doing. I began to look more closely at the sea, at the coast, at native weeds and tweety birds. Kodiak became a living entity, as distinct from other locations as Mr. Erdman was from me—his wife never referred to him by any name other than Mr. Erdman.

Weeds and birds acquired names. Even the rocks seemed to groan as if they, too, had a form of life awaiting recognition. And the sea rose and fell like the chest of a snoring giant, a Cyclops too large to ever notice my comings or goings.

It wasn't until I left Kodiak to take a graduate degree in Creative Writing at University of Alaska Fairbanks that I became familiar with contemporary writers who also use their Western landscape as a cause of action, not merely as background. I was, until then unknowingly, part of a community of writers whose attachment to "land" form an evolving subgenre.

But universities are seedbeds for idealism. I entered at midlife after my idealism had been tempered by the realities of earning a living, of dealing with customers and bureaucratic regulations, of realizing all bi-polar schema are intellectually dishonest. Melville understood this dishonesty when he has a Right whale's head hoisted in the *Pequod's* portside rigging and a Sperm whale's head lifted by its starboard side rigging. Melville has his narrator in direct address identify the Right whale as Locke and the Sperm whale as Kant, then say that both heads should be turned loose to let the ship float and sail right. For Melville in *Moby-Dick*, the *Pequod* was his bridge between philosophical poles.

Essayists and poets who push this emerging subgenre of land and landscapes tend to cluster like house finches on a bird feeder around a single environmental pole, that of near total protectionism. The literature of the far pole seems limited to corporate profit and loss statements, which collectively create a singularity devoid of wisdom or beauty.

There is, however, a bridge between the too-often misplaced idealism of poet essayists and the, for lack of a more appropriate word, greed of corporate developers—and it is along this bridge

where most rural landowners, loggers and fishermen and other blue collar workers live. It is on this bridge where I lived when I entered a graduate writing program without an undergraduate degree. I missed that nurturing of my idealism afforded by undergraduate humanity courses. Instead, I encountered the pollution of a pulpmill at its production: I shoveled pulp into drains, washed spilled salt into drains, washed down buildings and tanks with hot water to rid them of their accumulated salt deposits before a civil jury was allowed to see them during a trial about airborne pollution. Yes, I have done those things which poet essayists so elegantly oppose. Vanity is deceptive, but I believe I understand better why those things that harmed Yaquina Bay's ecosystem were done and the mindset of the individuals responsible than do youthful environmentalists. And I strongly disagree with those writers who question whether humankind is of nature or even has a place in an eternal nature.

That bridge between environmental poles arches high. Its center rises to touch a spiritual idealism triune in definition but dual in application and singular as for accountability—I am my brother's keeper, especially when it comes to the environment. I have no right to metaphorically rape, loot and plunder the natural world as done by robber barons, past and present. But by the very definition of who I am, I have a right to use the natural world and the responsibility to make sure that right is continued. I have, because I possess that ability, dominion over portions of land and landscape. It is my responsibility as part of that bridge connecting environmental poles to pass on to grandchildren, as their inheritance, a living landscape at least as healthy as I received it, and to pass on the legacy of living in that landscape. I wouldn't do any less with my backyard vegetable garden. Every gardener knows he or she cannot take without giving back generously.

The connections, for me, between internal and external landscapes are natural narrative extensions of love for place even though I often feel like a sojourner in a particular location. *Place* is, then, for me Outdoors. It is rural, usually with mosquitoes and

flies. Hunting, fishing, education serve as leitmotifs. And I remain intrigued with the Biblical personification that the whole universe groans as if in childbirth; for when I listen to the sounds of deep space captured by the Arecibo Observatory, I hear what sounds like groaning. Could shepherds millennia ago have heard what now requires a radio/radar observatory to hear? Could the personification have literal meaning? I have, in the quiet of Arctic nights, heard the crackle of northern lights, a sound lost even in Anchorage. And if, within a stand, growing Douglas firs communicate one to another as to which ester to release to ward off an insect attack, a form of botanical intelligence or awareness unimagined by 19th-Century lumbermen, how much do we really know about land and landscapes and our place in both?

Alaskan poet and essayist John Haines, wrestling with D. H. Lawrence's "spirit of place," asserts that literature must be absolutely authentic, that there is a spirit of place which separates travel writing from the voice of long time residence. I have lived not far from John, a man the age of my Uncle Jerry, and in John's essays and poems, I see his Interior Alaska though now changed as the landscape I encountered. When I experienced day after day of seventy and seventy-five below temperatures, I knew Jack London hadn't experienced the cold he describes in "To Build A Fire." And whether John realizes it, he lives on that bridge between the environmental poles. The authenticity he expects in a work is a description of that portion of the bridge on which the writer stands (I would find it extremely difficult to write about the natural world while living in a San Francisco apartment). The authenticity he expects is a validation of his experiences. That is why travel writers are unable to capture the spirit of Interior Alaska.

I am part of an expanding number of writers who attempt to bridge the millennia-old rift in Western literature between nature and nurture by using rural backdrops as a cause of action in their stories, mingling landscape with culture, creating a new literary subgenre, derived, probably, from the nature writing of the past and a feeling that we are finally secure on this land, that we won't

be thrown back into the Atlantic by wolves, weather, or war. Until we felt culturally secure on this continent, we couldn't criticize ourselves for waging total war against aboriginal inhabitants or natural resources. We can now, and do.

Because I don't know any other way, I weave place and experience into narrative fabric, each piece forming part of the patchwork quilt under which the American frontier tosses and turns, feigning sleep. I hope for John's sake that my weavings ring with authenticity gleaned from both long rural residence and astute observations.

I have worked as a logger, a commercial fisherman. I have built muzzleloading rifles. I had a chainsaw-outboard dealership. For a while, I supported myself writing hunting and fishing articles. I now carve in the Northwest Coast tradition and have wood sculptures in better Alaskan galleries. But I am foremost the voice of my conscience.

* * *

american falls—

before hard wheat, fences or furrows
rye-grass and camas swales flowered
beneath the feet of Bannock
horses, once free . . .

FROGNESS

"What else can you do with frogs that've been dead since 1972?" Asked my twelve-year-old nephew when he learned of an attempt to stop dissection of frogs in the Bend, Oregon, school district. His response to the animal rights group's suit leaps the larger issue of why were the frogs initially preserved, and lands on the practical observation that dead frogs have few uses. Dissection seems the most logical. But I wonder if students have to dissect frogs to understand them. I remember my high school biology class. With scalpel and pins, I opened a frog drowned in formaldehyde. Bright pink organs in the textbook transparencies were tiny balls of gray mush in the frog. Although I got an *A* for the section, I don't recall anything I learned, other than not to slip a dead frog into a girl's hand when she wears pointed shoes; my shins hurt for a week. I learned more about frogs the spring I was eleven.

We lived in Boring, Oregon, then, and Sputnik dominated current events that school year. Months after the satellite's launch, old men still sat on the elevated porch of the country store, waiting for the beep-beeps every hour and a half. They wondered aloud about whether the town ought to build a Civil Defense shelter.

I hung around with Mark Buxton, the storekeeper's son, played softball on a church-league team for a church I never attended, and spent every evening after practice along the shore of the local millpond. A small creek ran from the pond, through the south edge of town and down a still-wild canyon to Deep Creek. I knew every foot of the creek and of the bank around the pond as well as I knew the basepath from home to first. I hit .800 that spring; I thought that someday I'd be another Hank Aaron.

Man-made, the pond was blue-black from tannic acid. Sunken logs covered much of its bottom. Stumps of the firs originally growing in the draw hadn't been removed. With still-evident springboard notches, the rotting stumps stuck up like snags, one every twenty-five yards or so. Sapling firs, some fifteen feet tall, grew from the snags, their roots destroying the trunks giving them life. Slabs of watersoaked bark, stained black, lay in the shallows and on the bank closest to where the pond continued to be used as a log dump. The sawmill was located at the west end. When a bandsaw had replaced the double circular saw headrig, the mill began to dry-deck its logs; so only an occasional truck still rolled its load into the bruised water.

The upper or east end of the pond supported a recovering aquatic ecosystem. To me, that meant catchable numbers of bullfrogs, springer frogs, tadpoles, a large population of bullhead catfish and a few native cutthroat trout with vivid red slashes under their gills. The acidity of the water seemed to enhance the cutthroats' coloring. Their spots were, if possible, darker black than those of the fish in the creek. The frogs were certainly darker colored.

Using a flyrod I paid four dollars for at the neighborhood second-hand store, I caught my first trout in the pond, and I tortured scores of waterdogs [Oregon newts] that grabbed my crude nymphs. But I went to the millpond every evening mostly to check on the frogs, or rather, to check the masses of frog eggs clinging to the limbs and bark of the warming shallows, then to check the teeming tadpoles' development of legs and lungs. Just before Sputnik's launch, I read an article about splitting frog eggs so that the frogs developed six legs. The article intrigued me. I could hardly wait until I had the chance to split an egg.

* * *

Dad died in January. Heart attack. So as the oldest of five children, I had greater freedom and responsibility thrust upon me than most eleven-year-olds. The pond was the haven where I escaped being

grown up, yet not. While Mom tried to put her life together and provide the necessities with too little money, I waded in the shallows, filling pickle jars with frog eggs. I sat on the muddy bank, my fishing pole propped on a forked alder branch, and watched catfish follow caddis nymphs to the surface as trout do. I didn't know then what they were doing; I only knew that I couldn't catch anything when they were dimpling the surface all across the pond.

Although disgusted by copulating waterdogs, I wondered what it'd be like to touch a girl. I picked bouquets of blue camas blossoms and wild iris where they grew between forgotten lumber stacks, but I was ashamed to be seen carrying flowers home. Always, though, I caught frogs. Now, mostly bullfrogs instead of the smaller springers. Only my reason shifted for why I caught them. I no longer caught them for fun though that was why I did. I caught them to eat, but we didn't eat them. We gave their legs to a neighbor lady.

I carried home a sloshing jar half full of frog eggs sometime in late January or early February—western Oregon winters are mild and gray so the month doesn't mean much. The eggs were half of the first mass I located that spring. I wasn't sure of the species, but thought the eggs were springers'. I didn't want bullfrog eggs. Their tadpoles take two years to develop, and I couldn't wait that long for a six-legged frog. And I was very scientific. By leaving half of the mass in the pond, I had a check on how mine were developing.

The kitchen drainboard served as my lab table. I waited to split my first egg until Mom wasn't home.

Frog eggs aren't the easiest things to handle. They're slippery; yet, they stick to everything. But using a teaspoon, I separated one egg from the mass, laid it on the cutting board, and carefully pulled a long, red hair, my sister's, I imagine, into its nucleus.

I didn't know how far I should cut into the nucleus. I barely pulled the hair into the first egg. The second egg I cut in two and had to throw away. And I had either cut or nicked a couple dozen nuclei before I heard Mom pull into the driveway.

Satisfied that I had enough to hatch a six-legged frog, I set the gallon jar with the altered eggs on the kitchen window sill while I hastily cleaned up the drainboard. But moms always know when sons have been up to something. Mine made me dump the frog eggs still sitting on the drainboard. She probably would've made me dump the others if she'd noticed them on the windowsill.

I smuggled the gallon jar out of the kitchen. Not daring to take it to my room, I hid the jar in a corner of the barn, really a single-story shed where the previous owners of the house kept their horses. Still, it was the center of neighborhood activity. Mark Buxton and I played catch across the manure pile. My brother and I played war there, throwing rotten apples and walnuts covered with manure at each other. Everyone dug worms under the edge of the manure pile. And I used manure to keep the eggs in the gallon jar warm.

With the eggs in the barn, most of the boys in my class knew about my experiment. The eggs didn't look different than before. Black dots in balls of clear jelly. Except for Mark, the other boys lost interest in them long before they hatched. But he and I checked the eggs daily, often several times a day. We lugged water from the pond after ball practice, and we were disappointed when the eggs in the shallows developed tails. Nothing seemed to be happening in the jar. Even Mark's interest waned when little legs appeared on the tadpoles in the pond.

Finally, a tail appeared on one egg in the jar. Not just one tail, but two. Using Mom's soup ladle, I transferred the soon-to-be-tadpole to a quart jar of its own. I was elated. I had done it. I'd altered nature.

But only the one egg developed. The others rotted.

Do we have to kill frogs to understand frogness? Or do we kill frogs to understand ourselves?

The tadpole developed much more slowly than its unaltered siblings. Whereas the tadpoles in the pond swam around preying on organisms too small for me to see, my tadpole had trouble swimming with two tails. In the pond, the tadpoles rapidly developed hindlegs, then stumps of frontlegs. Mine grew very little,

though its two tails lengthened. I felt strangely attached to the tadpole, and checked it several times every morning and many more times each evening. I changed its water daily, tried to find insect larvae to feed it, but never felt I was doing enough. Not only did I want a six-legged frog, I wanted this tadpole to make it, to prove a scientific experiment, to prove that I could do what the other boys didn't believe possible.

Although I was in fifth grade, I was the biggest kid in grade school, taller than any of the eighth-graders, taller than all of the teachers. I used a 38-ounce bat, too big for even me according to the coaches: I hit a lot of balls to right field because I wasn't getting around fast enough. But I wouldn't give the bat up. I closed my stance, and hit a lot more balls to right field. And I closed out the world that said *you can't do this, can't do that*. After all, I hit .800 that spring, more than double Hank Aaron's average. And my tadpole was growing. Slow, yes. Deformed, yes. But it was growing.

The Royal Ann cherry tree next to the barn bloomed. The neighbor's bees worked its blossoms. Mom expected to have a good crop of cherries, but a late freeze wiped out the fruit buds. And killed my tadpole. I was careless. I hadn't packed manure around the jar; I thought the danger of frost was over.

If we kill frogs, will we understand ourselves?

We moved from Boring that summer. I haven't seen the pond for more than 30 years, but I still remember its tranquility. Frogs croaking. The occasional splash of the bass I couldn't catch. The buzz of dragonflies, damsel flies. Hatches of mayflies and caddis flies. I also remember a girl pitcher who struck me out three times in one game. I couldn't get around on her fast ball.

* * *

SMITH, LOGGER, FISHERMAN, WRITER

Since the narratives of Homer, life in Western literature has been portrayed as a journey, the metaphor being that the passage of life equals distance traveled. Often the journey is a voyage, a motif present even in a story like *Moby-Dick*; Thoreau quietly floated the Merrimack. The downstream river trip can signify that a person can't go back in time, that an adult can't recapture his or her youth, that no fountain-of-youth exists. But Homer's *Odyssey* tells of a figurative upstream journey like a salmon's migration to its spawning gravel, the gravel of its birth, where it will breed and die.

A voyage into the unknown is living life itself, the unknown representing tomorrow, holding, perhaps, danger and excitement but most often the mundane. Literary heroes dared sail 20,000 leagues under the sea, or to the center of the earth, or more realistically, to trek over the Great Silk Road or mush dogs to the South Pole. A few of us humans have even walked on the moon. For more of us, though, a drift or fishing trip down Alaska's Kenai River is enough venturing into the unknown. We want to know most of what tomorrow will bring. We are not really looking for excitement, only for interesting things, those things that John Haines concedes to travel writers. The thrill-seeker is considered abnormal. We would like to have control of our lives. In literary shorthand, we want heaven when we die; we want to believe an idealized destination awaits us at the end of this voyage called life. Then the obstacles we encounter won't matter. The distance of our voyage doesn't matter. Only arriving matters. We can leave all of

our problems in that metaphorical river we travel as if those problems were old tires or tin cans, oil slicks or biotoxins.

But it takes no courage to continue living shackled to the trash that the heavenbound person will leave behind at death (although nearly every religion believes humanity's ultimate destination is heaven, the focus of ancient Hebrew prophets was making the deserts here on earth bloom). It takes courage to clean up that left-behind trash, to pickup those pieces of our character that hang like plastic grocery bags on submerged tree branches . . . I once sailed out of Kodiak, heading for Whale Pass and Raspberry Strait. We were outbound for a week of longlining halibut. My wife was putting away boat groceries, and after rounding Buoy Four, I looked behind us to see if a following vessel had made the turn or whether its skipper was heading directly across Marmot Bay. And there behind us, one every one hundred yards or so, were floating the cardboard boxes in which we had packed our groceries aboard, each bobbing like a buoy. They were like the crumbs of Hansel & Gretel.

All of us leave a trail, but not all of us leave distinguishable footprints.

Courage is required to take that first step into an uncharted tomorrow, one in which our character is our only marker. It is there, at that first step, where most journeys end, or rather, fail to begin. Once a person is well on his or her way into the unknown, coping, adapting, learning, stretching oneself to do what wasn't before possible takes over. The momentum of the journey doesn't let a person think about not continuing. Explorer, pioneer, pilgrim—few have seen themselves as courageous. Survival is what the journey is about until the unknown becomes the familiar. Courage is about getting started.

I am familiar with the reluctancy to begin a voyage. I have felt that reluctancy, have felt hesitation, even fear. When I first went to sea, I knew very little; plus, I experience rather severe motion sickness. All the while I lived along the Oregon Coast, I fished freshwater. I didn't go to sea (I don't even like sitting in a passenger

car; subtle movements make me vomit). I probably hadn't been across the bar at Newport, Oregon, ten hours total before I, after selling my Kenai chainsaw/outboard dealership, bought a 29-foot Bartender sitting on barrels in Homer, Alaska. I hadn't been to sea in Cook Inlet, let alone out of the Inlet. Acquaintances thought I was crazy, but I knew I wasn't. I was merely pushing hard against foolishness. But I was also facing some tough decisions: I had begun to dislike myself. Having a sales/service dealership had magnified character defects that I thought I had cleaned up. I needed to get away, at least for a while, from the temptation to tell customers that a piston or a CD module or whatever had been ordered when I had forgotten to order it. The telling of the little lie had become too easy, and it isn't the big hunks of trash like old car bodies that kills a river. It's the little things like oil droplets that smother life. One droplet here and there doesn't kill, but one droplet becomes another and another until there's an oil sheen, then a slick, and finally the river catches fire, a definition of life in hell or in Gary, Indiana.

What I didn't know about the sea was so great that I believed I could sail to Kodiak, and possibly into the Aleutians. But I did know enough to be scared: in a very real sense, I was afraid of the unknown. I had heard stories of how rough the weather was in the Barren Islands, on Shelikof Strait, at Sand Point, King Cove, Dutch Harbor. I knew mileage-wise how far away Kodiak was. I bought charts of the archipelago. But for the three years I had been selling outboards to Cook Inlet fisherman, admittedly, to mostly setnetters, I was told many, many horror stories about Shelikof Strait. So when these Inlet fishermen learned that I had bought a boat their advice was that I should stay in Cook Inlet, and fish out of Homer or Seldovia, perhaps Kenai or Kasilof. But at Kodiak, I was told by an equal number of fishermen about how terrible the weather was and the tides were in Cook Inlet. As far as Kodiak fishermen were concerned the only place that began to compare in roughness with Cook Inlet was fishing at False Pass. But when I sailed south to King Cove, I spent a Sabbath afternoon with a fisherman who

regularly fished False Pass, and he told me the worse seas he had ever seen were on Shelikof Strait, that no place was as bad as there.

Every fisherman I spoke to in 1979 said somewhere else was worse than where he fished.

Before I sold my shop at Kenai, I read journals of the Russian-American Company. While I was told by experienced fishermen that a forty foot boat was needed for fishing out of Kodiak or Chignik and a ninety footer was necessary for the Bering Sea, I knew that Baranof had traveled by *bidar* (a large *bidarka* or kayak) along both sides of the Alaska Peninsula. I knew how poorly constructed were the vessels in which Russian-American Company officials sailed from Ohotsk to Kodiak. Their vessels were of a riverboat design and were lashed together.

When I was in high school, George Calkins, designer of Bartenders, had his shop on D-River—I passed his shop twice every school day. I knew what local fishermen said about how exceptionally seaworthy were all of Calkins' designs. The father of a classmate, Keith Miles, built trailers for Bartenders (Bartenders were featured on Oregon fishing shows). I grew up wanting a Bartender; I lusted for one every day I was in high school and for some years afterwards. And the vessel I purchased was a 29-foot Bartender so, perhaps, I was less concerned about the vessel's length than were the fishermen telling me to stay in Cook Inlet . . . after I acquired the Bartender, I called George Calkins and talked to him; I called partially to reassure myself and partially to know what to expect from the underpowered hull (the design called for twice as much horsepower as I could possibly produce from the 3-51 Jimmie that was in the boat when I bought it). I should also add that George Calkins was most gracious when I called and even sent gratis a copy of plans for the 29-footer so I could return it to design specifications.

I had a vessel of good design, an engine with a reputation for durability. I was the weak link, but I knew that as I sailed out of Homer's small boat harbor for the first time. I might have stayed in Kachemak Bay, but I needed to get away from familiar faces,

familiar circumstances, and old habits. Years later, I became acquainted with a museum curator who was an alcoholic. She wanted to quit drinking, truly. But she didn't want to leave friends, who, whenever they saw her, stuck a beer in her hand. I have heard it said that it takes more courage to stay and face a problem than to run. I'm sure it does. But I can't think of a better way of letting a problem kill you, either.

When I sailed from Homer, I had been in business for myself for twelve years. I had a fair idea of what it took to make a business successful. So as I sailed for Kodiak, I knew I had entered the "fishing" business. My product would be dressed fish, and my goal was to deliver as much product as possible with the resources I had available. That meant I had to go to where the fish were, not that there weren't halibut in Cook Inlet. But I had to go to where I could catch fish, while knowing that I needed a certain degree of seclusion to practice a new craft. Even by 1979, Lower Cook Inlet was heavily fished. Gear was laid atop gear. It was a big mess out there and one with which I would have to deal while seasick. Around the Kodiak archipelago were many secluded bays not heavily fished and with relatively calm water (actually fishing most of the bays of Afognak Island was like fishing in lakes). Plus, I believed the fishing would be better around Kodiak.

When I sailed out of Homer's small boat harbor for the first time, my intention was to make a shake-down cruise to see if everything worked the way it was supposed to. I planned to sail as far as Seldovia, then loop back to Homer. But halibut season was open, had been open for a week. We had just experienced a week of calm weather, a week with seas under three-feet, not that common on the North Pacific. I had no real reason to return to Homer. I had fuel and groceries on board. I knew the weather wouldn't hold many more days, and I knew it would be harder to sail away from Homer a second time. I knew from the hesitancy I felt about the double unknown of sailing to Kodiak and laying longline gear that I could be convinced to fish Lower Cook Inlet. I could be talked out of doing what I thought was best.

The metaphor of life as a journey works because the easiest choice is to not make a choice, to not take a first step into the unknown, to play it safe by staying in the familiar situation, to hunker down and drift, letting time take you where it will. It takes courage to start; it takes common sense to actually travel that unknown course, for life is no planned tourist trip to 5-Star hotels, Medieval castles and cathedrals, with tour guides and rigid schedules. Rather, life is more like sailing an everchanging sea to where others have gone before, but where every voyage is different. It is like my sailing to Kodiak. I knew where I was going. I even knew how to get there. I just didn't know what the weather would be; I didn't know whether I would have engine problems; I didn't know if I would have enough money. I only knew that there would be problems I would have to solve, and that I would see spectacular scenery while catching fish. I never entertained the idea that I would regret setting out for Kodiak, then later the Aleutians. Perhaps I wasn't that insightful. Or perhaps the same spirit is in me as was in my forefathers who sailed into the unknown on the *Mayflower*, or left Amsterdam for what would be New Amsterdam seventeen years later. Or perhaps I was merely following in the footsteps of my forefathers who poached whales in Alaskan waters from under the guns of the Tzarist navy.

I didn't turn around and go back to Homer. Rather, I plotted a course for the west side of Kodiak—I wanted room for navigational error. If I missed the archipelago on the east side, the next landfall would be Hawaii. I was less afraid of Shelikof Strait than I was of me miscalculating the course.

The weather changed by the time I reached the Barrens as I suspected it might. But I was far enough south that I missed most of the roughness where seas pile up entering Cook Inlet. My biggest problem was I lost visual landmarks. I was being pulled south by a falling tide in Shelikof Strait, but I had less than fifty feet of visibility above me and about two hundred yards horizontally. I didn't know where I was. I didn't know how fast I was traveling. I had no radar.

I had nothing to gauge where I was other than that the current felt like I was in a river.

I left Homer a few hours before dark. Daybreak found me south of the Barrens—I assume those islands were the Barrens and not the Chugachs. Regardless, by midafternoon I was beginning to worry about the decisions I had made. No land was visible, and my internal clock said I should have already arrived somewhere. I changed course, shading a few degrees off of the heading I had held since before midnight.

When the tide changed again so did the weather. A breeze followed the tide north, blowing out much of the fog.

A decent rifle shot off my port bow was a headland I hadn't known was there, and it took a few minutes with the chart before I concluded I was approaching Steep Cape. Nothing else on the west side of Afognak Island was anywhere near two thousand feet high, and time-traveled shouldn't have put me farther south than Afognak.

I felt a little better about where I was as I hooked around the cape and entered Raspberry Strait. I ran as far as Iron Creek before dropping anchor and getting some much needed sleep.

When I rounded Steep Cape, I didn't just feel a little better. I felt an immense sense of relief even though I ended up in the middle of a kelp bed that took an hour getting out. Dozens of sea otters looked at me like they had never seen a boat before, and perhaps they never had seen a boat in that kelp bed before. At any rate, I spent an hour with otters ten, twelve feet from me. They dove, resurfaced with a crab, and held it in hand-like paws. They surfaced with a rock and a clam, laid the rock on their chest and beat the clam against it. They seemed to wave as if they knew me. And even though I was tired, I was impressed. I wouldn't have turned back for anything.

I didn't have enough fuel to turn back—

The builder of the Bartender hadn't installed any fuel gauges. I had no idea how much fuel I had consumed or how much I had left. I knew the little Jimmie shouldn't burn much more than two

gallons per hour. I had taken aboard sixty gallons when I fueled at Homer before leaving. My best estimate was that I had twenty gallons left. I didn't know how long it would take to reach Kodiak from Raspberry Strait, but I knew I didn't have any money. I had to arrive in town with fish.

The halibut opening actually closed the evening of the day I arrived in Raspberry, but my gear wasn't ready to fish, nor was I when I arrived. I had no idea where to lay gear, nor had I ever laid gear. I was as green as a fisherman could be. . . . Stretching the opening by a couple of hours, I got three skates baited, down and picked after getting an hour of sleep. I caught three fish weighing, in total, nearly two hundred pounds.

I sold those three fish to Pacific Pearl Seafoods for $2.07 per pound. Of course they didn't pay me in dollars. Rather, I entered the world of cannery purchase orders (POs). But the fuel dock would take a PO, as would Krafts grocery; so tied to the transit float in Kodiak I waited out the closure. I had high hopes and nothing else to do.

My daughters had stayed with a fisherman at Ninilchik while I sailed to Kodiak. They now flew out to the island and joined their mother and me aboard the Bartender which we named the *Guppy* (out of water, the boat looked like a pregnant guppy thanks to its design modifications). The previous owner had called it the *Brave Susan*, but I didn't need a boat with the initials B.S.

We fished around Afognak Island during June and for the first half of July before the poundage quota for Pacific-caught halibut was met. The Bering Sea remained open, and I was again faced with the decision of whether I would stay where I was or continue farther west. I knew the Bartender was far too small to weather the storms of the mighty Bering Sea or so everyone I talked to told me. But I had no real connection to Kodiak. We were living aboard the boat while tied to the transit float in the small boat harbor. We were literal sojourners. And I didn't have the ability to fish anything else but cod, which was then an iffy market at Kodiak. Canneries

would only fool with cod when they weren't processing more valuable fish.

To digress for a moment: I encountered a phenomenon this summer of 1979 that I should have previously realized. Some of the first generation Norwegian skippers have a reputation within the fleet for bravery, for fishing weather that keeps every other vessel in port. In the *Guppy*, I couldn't get the marine weather forecasts: I had neither an AM radio, nor a particularly useful CB. As a result I never knew what the weather was supposed to be. I had to quickly learn to forecast my own weather, and most of the time I just didn't pay any attention to the weather. So I would find myself fishing with these highliners whose reputations for bravery were truly impressive when most everyone else stayed in port. Of course, I wasn't as far off-shore as were those highliners.

What I realized was that the highliners didn't necessarily believe the weather forecasts. "Ve go out & see what it's like." And they would leave port and sail out to their fishing grounds. Once they were there, they would say something like, "Now that ve here, ve fish awhile." First thing they knew they had a full hold and an extra day of fishing over all of the boats that had stayed in port. They weren't braver than other skippers; they just didn't believe everything they were told. And I was out on those days because I didn't receive the forecasts that said to stay in port. I probably would have stayed in port if I had received those forecasts.

When halibut closed in the Pacific, I knew I had to keep fishing; I had to head for Dutch Harbor. Economics dictated that I head west. But I felt tremendous apprehension about sailing so far out with so small a boat when I had been told I couldn't make it out there. I felt this apprehension until a fisherman in a chance conversation mentioned that another small boat had gone out to Unalaska two years earlier, that perhaps I should talk to the skipper of that boat to find out what I was up against. Good idea. I located that boat—it was a pile of floating junk. It was so unseaworthy

that I wouldn't have taken it out of the harbor. And I realized then, while I was staring at that boat, that I could make it. Sailing into the Aleutians became less a matter of courage than of again applying common sense to overcoming every obstacle I would encounter.

For this summer and the following year, my life was an actual voyage. The metaphor had lost its metaphoricalness. In quiet bays dressing halibut without another vessel in sight, or for that matter, not another human being other than a family member in sight, a healing of character can occur if it is allowed. But I was still on an outbound voyage. I hadn't yet turned around to challenge, say, your belief in escaping to heaven. I was content to keep going, to continue sailing towards tomorrow.

But the metaphor of voyage-as-life extends beyond tides and tidetables. My voyage begins with an early memory and lasts into the future. And as with that ancient Greek whose name I inherited from my dad, my voyage doesn't conclude in the Aleutians. Like salmon that migrate north, then return to the river of their nativity to spawn, the mature journey home, upstream against currents of politically correctness and bi-polar philosophies and one-eyed Cyclops, has only begun. Mom traced her lineage back to the preacher who preached the funeral for Mary, Queen of Scots. Perhaps I, too, will journey that far back towards my birth. Perhaps I, too, will preach.

* * *

"QUIET BIRD"

After our oldest daughter, Katherine, was born, my wife took birth control pills. I wanted more children, but then, I wasn't the one bearing them, nor even the one changing diapers. My say in the matter was limited. That, however, didn't stop me from pressing for more, didn't stop me from creating opportunities to argue why having two children was better than rearing one alone, didn't stop me from recruiting help to convince her to have another.

I don't know if my arguments for two rather than one were valid (I thought so at the time). What I do know is that after a year my wife didn't renew her prescription for her birth control pills. And nearly another year and a half later, I drove her to Corvallis on a very foggy night to deliver Kristel a minute or two after we arrived.

I was working graveyard in Georgia Pacific's pulpmill at Toledo. My wife called me and said there wasn't any hurry, but that her water had broken. I left work immediately, drove the fifteen miles home, and found that her pains were five minutes apart. We were forty-five miles from Corvallis. Her pains were one after another for the last ten miles, and both of us feared that I would have to deliver Kris.

A nurse with a wheelchair was waiting for my wife at the hospital's emergency entrance. I let her out, parked the car, signed the admitting papers, and was shown Kristel. Just that quick. I thought that, perhaps, our timing wasn't quite as good as it could have been.

But the worst part about our timing was that Kristel was born two days before deer season opened.

I was to bring my wife home from the hospital on opening day—

I hadn't missed an opening day of deer season since I started hunting when thirteen. I wasn't planning to miss this one either.

Kathy, now almost two and a half years old, was solely my responsibility while her mother was in the hospital. I wanted to pawn her off on her grandparents so I could hunt, but I didn't have the courage to ask them to babysit her for what seemed, even to me, like such an inconsequential reason. So I didn't really have a choice in the matter: if I wanted to go hunting, I would have to take her with me.

Taking a two and a half year old hunting limits where a fellow can go and for how long he can be gone. I was lucky; I was renting a hundred-forty-acre place that butted against timberlands. During the summer, I routinely saw deer in my driveway. And a week earlier, I saw three bucks in the lower orchard I shared with a neighbor.

So before dawn on opening day, I bundled Kathy in enough clothes that she could hardly move, stressed how important it was for her to be quiet (she was a chatterbox), and with her on my shoulders and my rifle in hand, I set out for that lower apple orchard, about a half mile from the house.

The morning was foggy and very quiet. And just as I approached the orchard in the predawn grayness, I saw two deer jump my barbwire fence as they fled toward forty acres of blackberries and skunk cabbage.

I couldn't tell whether the deer were bucks or does, but I knew where they were headed. Quickly picking a pocketful of apples to give Kathy something to do with her mouth besides talk, I hurried to get ahead of them.

The deer made a mistake when they fled across the field. They would have to double back to reach the safety of the timbered swamp where they most likely lived yearround. So I picked out a stand beside a clump of blackberries, and I set Kathy beside

me. Giving her an apple, I again stressed how important it was for her to be absolutely quiet. She seemed to understand. She sensed that she was doing something special, and she wanted to please me.

The rising sun burnt off the fog. Visibility increased to a hundred yards or so, and I could hear the deer working their way through a screen of alders that would funnel them into the opening I watched. I expected them to step into that opening at any moment.

The sun warmed the blackberry cane behind us. As it did, birds began to sing. One of those birds was a wren not more than three feet from Kathy, who scowled at the bird.

As the sun rose yet higher, the grass and berry cane steamed. More birds were singing, and the deer were at the edge of the opening.

Then I heard a whispered, "Quiet Bird."

Immediately, I reached over and touched Kathy's leg. I shook my head no, and placed my finger across my lips.

She seemed to understand. She nodded, and returned to her partially eaten apple.

The wren again started to sing.

Probably seeing my movement, the deer had stepped back into the screen of alders.

Then softly, but louder than before, I heard, "Quiet Bird."

This time angry although saying nothing, I placed my left hand over her mouth as I held my right index finger vertically across my lips. She nodded that she understood.

The wren continued to sing as did siskins that flittered about the alders. I no longer heard the deer although I knew they hadn't gone anywhere. They, like myself, were listening.

"QUIET BIRD!"

I heard the thump, thump, thump of fleeing deer. I turned to Kathy and said harshly, "You were supposed to be quiet."

My voice was probably sharper than it should have been: I was then twenty-three years old, and I didn't yet have the patience

that comes with maturity, nor the stoic self-control a person should have before accepting the responsibility of being a parent. For some reason parenthood is usually bestowed upon those least fit for it.

Kathy didn't seem to understand what she had done wrong although she seemed disappointed in herself for having done something she shouldn't have. I didn't know then and I still don't know how to command birds not to sing. So I picked her up and told her I'd take her hunting tomorrow: "Maybe we'll get a deer then."

Her disappointment disappeared as she rode on my shoulders back to the house. And for the next dozen years she insisted on coming along whenever I picked up a gun.

* * *

BEAR TRAIL BLACKTAILS

In the cloudy blackness where sea and sky merge, the surge tumbles dark stones, rolling them up the beach, then down; they clink like ice in a thousand glasses. Our white canvas wall tent glows like the mantle of the Coleman lantern inside it, an oasis of light cast against spruce trunks. Like lightening bugs, sparks fly from the chimney, circle, and go black. Wood smoke is caught by the spruce boughs, bent down, and sent along the beach. Our tent is twenty-five yards from the bear trail that parallels the shore. The smoke, like a kid on an errand, meanders along the bear trail, stopping here, bumping into a tree there.

I left the tent so Kathy, my fourteen-year-old daughter, can get ready for the morning's hunt. It's the middle of November, and we're camped along the shore of Izhut Bay, Afognak Island. We're here for Sitka blacktail although I'd take an elk if I see one. Kathy has never killed a deer, but thinks she can. She's the same age I was when I killed my first buck.

The scream of a merganser pierces the huddle of spruce timber surrounding our tent; it swings from our meatpole, then echoes away, its edge dulled.

Hanging moss, moldy needles underfoot, kelp on the beach—the blackness smells of decay and smoke and frying potatoes.

After breakfast, Kathy follows me as the southern sky lightens. Shadows appear, lean over the trail as if they were bears, then fall away, being nothing. Trails cross and crisscross, and I sense more than hear Kathy's breathing a step behind me. The rubber soles of her boots make no noise.

Leaving the beach behind, we begin to climb. The bear trail we follow, two feet wide and worn several inches deep, parallels an unnamed creek—

Movement!

A martin scurrying between spruce trunks: I lower my rifle, its safety again *ON*. The martin sees us, pauses, brown head raised, exposing its orange belly. No farther away than I can spit, the martin, its black eyes shiny as Apache Tears, is glad, I think, that we aren't bears.

When Kathy steps beside me, her rifle not having left her shoulder, the martin dives behind a tree. Seeing only its tail, she asks, in a whisper, "Squirrel?"

The thin rays of the early sun slide through the entwined boughs overhead; they stand shaft-silent beside scaly trunks as the ripple of the creek flows through the ravine. Kathy and I resume climbing, pushing through the filtered sunlight as if it were moss. The spruce grow smaller, bushier, and more scattered. Openings of crumbled fern and bent grass and hoarfrost lie on the southern ends of hogbacks reaching to the second ridge above the beach. I scan the edges to each opening, hoping to see an elk, half-expecting to see a deer.

The bear trail we've been following dips into the ravine and crosses the creek. When I jump the creek, I hear my jeans tear. Kathy looks the other way while I examine the damage. The inseam let go from crotch to left cuff. Already my bare thigh is covered with goosebumps. I should've worn my black woolies.

The inseam, I know, will continue to tear. My thigh will become chafed from salmonberry thorns. I will needlessly subject myself to hypothermia if I don't return to camp. But we've climbed too near timberline to turn back now. Although still early, there isn't enough daylight (the sun barely rises above the southern horizon in November) to return to camp, then climb again to timberline. And I know that Kathy, waiting a step away, expecting me, I suspect, to head for camp, won't hunt on alone. I would have at fourteen, but then, I would've shot the martin when her age.

If Kathy's pants tore, I'd send her back to camp and tell her to spend the day cutting wood. She would go, knowing that was the right decision. But I don't want to do what I know I should. And except for the cold gurgle of the creek, the hillside is silent; no one argues against continuing on.

Heavy frost coats old, beaver-chewed willows. Shredded bark hangs, like icicles, on elk-rubbed alders. We'll have to climb through several patches of devil's club and salmonberry cane, frosted white. The salmonberries won't be too bad: their thorns are short and easily rub off after a freeze. Devil's club stickers, though, are like poisoned barbs on barbwire. I'd avoid them if my jeans weren't torn, but with the inseam gone, they'll have to be skirted.

Looking for blood, a raven as large as an eagle sails overhead.

A short hunt on the rim ahead would almost be like turning around now—I wish Kathy would argue for turning back. She won't. So motioning towards a brush-filled break in the rimrock that pokes above timberline, I start off, favoring the leg with the ripped inseam.

We skirt a beaver pond, ice-covered and five acres in size.

The inseam tears down the other side. Goosebumps harden, but the salmonberry thorns, like ripper blades behind bulldozers, rake them raw. Still, we climb on. We pass over frozen springs, sculptures of flowing ice. Scrub alders give way to moss and lichens and patches of muskeg a few yards square, each ringed with dwarf willows.

On top, ground-hugging blueberries stretch for a half mile or more—and a small buck pops up like a silhouette target on a combat course. Kathy whispers that she doesn't think she can hit him. Only his head and neck show a hundred fifty yards away. I think she can, but I also understand her reluctance to shoot. At her age, though, I would've shot at the buck, even though my first rifle was a late-war, .303 Enfield, the gun that may have been responsible for the British losing their empire. Its two-groove barrel was notoriously inaccurate, making any kill over seventy-five yards an accident.

The shot is not a particularly difficult one for my .25-06. Killing our meat isn't quite like buying it from Safeway: it isn't that impersonal once I pull the trigger.

Hurrying towards where the buck lies, my jeans flap like a skirt. My legs are numb enough I can ignore how raw they are.

While I dress the buck, Kathy glasses the surrounding rims, and sees the sun reflecting from the rack of a big buck three hundred yards away. The buck is bedded, watching us. One leap forward into the ravine and we'll never see him again. He's chosen his bed well. I doubt we can get closer without spooking him. So I sit down, rest my singleshot over my knees, tell Kathy to "watch where I hit," and fire.

A puff of dust and splayed rock appears just below the buck. On his feet, he ducks behind some dwarf willows that hide the lower half of his chest.

"How much low was I?"

"I don't know. I blinked."

Guessing I was less than a foot low, I hold on top of his back, his antlers still flashing in the sun. But just as I tighten my finger, I push the Ruger's forearm up as if I'm afraid of hitting the willows; so I'm way high when the rifle fires. I hurriedly reload, and again push high.

The buck has had enough. Apparently more impressed with my shooting than I am, he disappears behind the willows.

"Stay high, Kathy, but circle towards him. Don't lose sight of those willows. I'm going across."

I scramble down into the ravine between us and the buck. And when I'm almost to the bottom, Kathy yells, "I see him. He's on top of the rock."

"Shoot him!"

The aggravation in my voice shouldn't be there. She's at least two hundred fifty yards from the buck; she just saw me miss three times. It's just that, at fourteen—

Kathy delays shooting for so long that when she finally does, her shot takes me by surprise. I wait for a second shot. When none comes, I holler, "Get him?"

"I think so."

"Can you see him?"

"No."

"Stay where you are." I climb a break in the rock on the far side, feeling mixed pride at her having shot and fear that she didn't hit him. When I reach where the buck was bedded, I see her. She directs me to a spot on top of a flat, rock outcropping twenty-five yards farther away.

I find blood, not much and not bright red like lung shots leave, but enough to trail. I wave for her cross the ravine.

Tiny, frost-nipped blueberry leaves are the same color red as the blood. Trailing the buck becomes a matter of finding a droplet, then searching in a widening semi-circle until another drop is located. The first seventy-five yards takes us twenty minutes, and I notice that the sun has already begun its downward arc.

Twice Kathy finds blood when I can't. Twice, the buck crawls through scrub alders where he should've bedded. We're pushing him. And after crawling through the second alder patch, I point to a grassy opening: "Let's give him a chance to stiffen."

Still carrying my binoculars, Kathy begins glassing the bushy spruce below us. The insides of my thighs are numb. I hear the frosty grass crunch, but don't feel the cold. And while looking to see if I'm still bleeding, I notice a lot of blood below us, just over the edge of the hill.

"I see a deer, with horns," Kathy says.

"Where?"

"He just laid down, underneath a spruce down there." She points to a hundred or more trees beginning eighty yards from where we sit.

Nothing stirs as I glass beneath each tree. Kathy saw her buck, but I don't see him. I ask for better directions, get confused about which tree is which, and see nothing in the quietness below. That is, I see nothing until I look directly into eyes looking at me from

far into the timber. The buck is bedded under a spruce with branches draped to the ground.

"Do you want me to finish him?"

She nods yes. I can tell from the excitement in her eyes that as far as she's concerned, the buck is already hers.

I shoot, once.

* * *

DOGWOODS

Usually, I don't acknowledge being a native Hoosier. When asked where I'm from, I say I graduated from high school on the Oregon Coast, then say that I moved North following the 1973 Gas Shortage. I suspect confessing to being from Indiana is as difficult for me as admitting to having some Native American blood flowing through otherwise "blue" veins was for both Mom and Dad. Being born in Indiana doesn't fit my self-image, doesn't fit what people now know about me, but is factual.

If birthplace really mattered, I would say that my birth in Indiana was an accident. After all, Dad moved west in 1938. He was drafted while he worked for Tualatin Valley Coop, south of Portland. He married Mom in California after the War (she was from Michigan, but had lived in the Bay area for the duration of the War), and they set up house in Bel Air, where Dad worked in a bakery. I grew up hearing that Mom's first pancakes were so tough that after nine months of the chickens pecking on them, those pancakes were still where they were thrown in the backyard there at Bel Air, a fact that might account of the lack of chickens in the community now.

But Grandpa wanted Dad to come back to Indiana and farm. A neighboring place was available to rent. So in mid-year 1946, Dad and Mom returned to Indiana where I was born a few months later.

Four years of farming left Dad and Mom in a financial hole and had Dad wanting to return to Oregon. But they didn't leave Indiana until February 1956. I was nine years old, in third grade, and I looked like I was corn fed.

What I remember most about Indiana is the corn. Field after field, mile after mile, one township after another—corn stalks,

some taller than others, were all that blocked my westward view of Grandpa's farm, of his neighbors, of Petroleum and west of Petroleum, the school where I would attend first and second grades. Grandpa and Amish farmers around Berns saved their seed: they grew an open pollinated variety of corn which had stalks that seemed nine feet tall, but Dad was an early DeKalb hybrid seed grower and salesman. His ears reached from his curled fingertips to the inside of his elbow, a foot or more in length. They won blue ribbons at the Bluffton street fair while Grandpa's field corn ears were the size of the sweetcorn ears I grew in Idaho, a state noted for its potatoes. Dad's stalks were as tall as he was, but not much taller.

Memories are unreliable, but they are all we have to make sense of today. Oh, there might be photos. But I have inherited photos of relatives I don't remember or know even though their names are written on the backs of the pictures. Without memories, photos have little meaning . . . I have no photos of Dad with the Francis brothers; yet they were why Dad moved to Oregon in '38. They, Dad, and Dan Gentis ran around together in high school. Dad graduated in '32. I assume they graduated in the same class.

Dan Gentis had the farm just up the road from where I was born. Years after Dad died, I drove back to Indiana to see relatives, and I stopped by Dan Gentis's farm. His oldest son had just committed suicide. In a way, I think Dan was glad to see me. He started telling me stories about what he and Dad had done, about outhouses they had tipped over on Halloween, about putting a Model T on top of the schoolhouse roof. Most of the stories I had heard, especially the one about their school bus driver stealing his own chickens—it seems this particular bus driver would take some of the older boys out and steal a farmer's chickens every Halloween. The chickens would be sold, and the driver and the boys would have a party with their ill-gotten gains. Well, this one Halloween, Dad and Dan and others got the driver confused as to where he was, and they had him wait with their getaway car while they stole his chickens.

I first heard that story from Mom, who retold it after Dad died. I didn't really believe it: how could the driver not know they were near his farm? But hearing that same story from Dan Gentis, told with the enthusiasm of him having been a participant in one of the best practical jokes ever pulled in that pre-Depression era of northern Indiana, I believed it. The richness of Dan's telling of the incident gave him credibility and the story credulity.

Dan's stories about what he and Dad had done lifted, at least for a little while, a gloom that sat like an uninvited guest to his kitchen table. His wife wasn't there; she was with their grandchildren as her daughter-in-law struggled with the unexpectedness of suicide. And I remembered that Dan, who had not gone to war, had fathered a girl born about the same time as I was, this after fathering eight sons. The girl died the day she was born from bleeding at the navel. Dan and his wife had one more child, a ninth son. So he had dealt with personal tragedy before. What I don't believe he understood was why would his son, then thirty-six, take his own life. Dan didn't seem to understand not being able to cope with personal problems.

I don't know if my visit to Dan was providential, or strictly a matter of coincidence. What I do know is that Kathy, my oldest, was then sixteen months old. Losing her would have been very difficult for me. So I had sympathy for Dan's loss—he knew Mom had committed suicide—but I had no way to express my sympathy except by listening to his stories. And for him on that day, stories were a way of remembering happier times, of turning back the clock to hard but innocent years.

Dan, like Dad, was an early grower of hybrid corn. He pointed to a corn crib: "I can't get one acre's harvest in where I used to put three acres' just a few years ago." And he told me about how much more corn his fields now yielded than when he and Dad were boys. "No comparison."

"What happened to Grandpa's farm?"

"It's all in fields now. The fellow who bought it leveled it, took out those two little patches of woods, and is farming all of it now. Can't afford not to."

"House and barn?"

"All gone. All in fields."

"Grandma's dogwoods?" Those dogwoods were Dad's favorite trees.

"History."

I didn't know where to find words to express what I felt. The era of the small farm had passed. Dan didn't farm like Grandpa had: Dan bought his eggs and milk. He didn't raise pigs, chickens, cattle. He farmed two crops only. Corn and soybeans. He parked his machinery in the fall and went to Florida, where he had another house, for the winter. He played golf and fished for bass when Grandpa would have been chipping ice off stock watering tanks.

In Dan I saw the type of farmer Dad most likely would have been—a modern, efficient, industrious businessman buying and selling on the futures market, with a stock portfolio and a winter residence somewhere warm—if Grandpa hadn't given Dad a two-ton Ford truck for his high school graduation present. That truck had rekindled an inherited wanderlust which had lain fallow for two generations. While Dan was acquiring his first few acres, Dad was hauling hay and grain from Indiana into the South where he backhauled eight-foot-logs loaded crosswise. Dad liked trucking. Each trip was fuel for the fire that had caused ancestors to leave Bavaria, then Holland, then New Amsterdam, then Pennsylvania and Virginia, then Ohio as if wanderlust were a tangible thing. Dad would drive truck throughout the War, then would drive truck to work his way out from under his farming debt. And even though he didn't return to Oregon until '56, by the fall of '57 Dad was already talking about moving to Alaska. He died before he could.

Dan went with Dad on some of his hauls in the South, and on one of these trips they played deaf for a waitress, who was

thoroughly embarrassed when she realized they heard her thoughts.

Dan was farming a hundred sixty acres of his own and another rented six-forty when Dad returned to Indiana after the War. Perhaps the reason Dad went into debt farming was that he was trying to catch up, to make up for those years of scratching his wanderlust and years spent defeating an enemy who would have prevented any of us from wandering.

* * *

OL' KODIAK

Fifty miles of twisting gravel road, two miles of mud, a mile of perforated steel landing mats with protruding ends that threaten tailpipes—Bill's ranch lies beyond power lines. Glenn and I hear only wind rustled beach grass and the throbbing of Bill's electrical generator when we step from the car. The generator, with its single cylinder and large flywheel, seems to beat as rapidly as my heart does. Glenn's eager to saddle his horse, but I'm still apprehensive. I haven't been riding since I was pitched from a greenbroke stud twenty years ago. I was sixteen then, and I landed head-first on a slab of shale, shattering the four-inch-thick piece of stone.

Wearing a sweat-stained Stetson and leather chaps, Bill is also anxious to get going. He introduces Charlie, his wrangler for this hunt, then ropes a pinto and a bay gelding. Charlie walks up to the largest horse in the corral, Ol' Kodiak, my mount. He drops his loop over the gelding's head and leads him out of the corral.

"You'll get along with him fine, Homer. All of the kids ride him."

Bill's words don't inspire much confidence, especially not as I ineptly saddle the seventeen-year-old horse. Kodiak watches me and, I believe, senses my nervousness. I'm to ride him because of my size: three hundred pounds. Kodiak appears to be a cross between draft and riding stock. His shoulder comes to my chin and is over Charlie's head. So after stirrups are lengthened and the cinch strap tightened and retightened, and retightened again, I mount, fully expecting the saddle to slip or him to buck or something to happen that will leave me lying on the ground.

Nothing does although all of my weight in one stirrup nearly pulls the saddle from his back.

Bill keeps glancing at the hidden sun as he hastily lashes panniers to the saddle of the packhorse he'll lead. When Glenn and Charlie have trouble locating a certain packsaddle, Bill says: "Forget it. We have to get along if we're to catch the tide low around the Point." But we don't get along. We spend nearly an hour checking this and that before the four of us head across hay meadows, past a herd of buffalo, and down onto the beach. We'll hunt the Sacramento River basin, half way between Cape Chiniak and Narrow Cape.

Bill and Charlie, each leading a pack horse, slouch in their saddles. Glenn rides stiff and upright, the way he was taught by a riding academy. I lag behind, so far behind that Charlie in his back-and-white mackinaw appears as a hump on his pinto.

Long shadows lie across the beach by the time we reach Lone Point, a rock monolith jutting seaward. We're late, almost too late. Bill spurs his horse, Charlie kicks his pinto in its ribs, and the two of them, between breakers and dragging reluctant packhorses, gallop into and through the surf. But the way is too far, the tide too high. And a breaker crashes into them before they reach the far beach.

The packhorse Bill leads spooks, bolts, wrenches its halter rope from Bill's hand, and splashes through the surf and up the beach two hundred yards before it slows. Charlie's horse rears as the breaker pins them against the rock a second time. Bill forces his horse back through the retreating surf to lend a hand. And the two of them have barely managed to calm the packhorse Charlie had been leading when the next breaker crashes over them, drenching horses, riders and gear again.

When the sea withdraws, Bill and Charlie, with the pack horse between them, wildly ride for the far beach as Glenn's horse charges through the surf right behind them. I'm now the only one south of the Point, and Kodiak isn't about to get his feet wet. I can't say that I blame him any.

I glance at the Point to see if there's a way around the rock as Bill beckons. Charlie rides down the beach after the other horse. Glenn holds the bridle of the horse Charlie has been leading.

My gaze returns to the Point and I study the rock, but see no way around. So I nudge Kodiak's ribs with my heels. He pays no attention to me; he seems to be counting the breakers. I kick him hard. He takes one step, then plants his feet and seems to become as unmoveable as the Point. I kick him again, but he only turns his head and glares. He stands so still I catch myself wondering if I've released the parking brake.

Bill again rides into the surf. A curl engulfs him, then seems to retreat smiling. Salt water runs from his Stetson as he urges his horse through the icy brine, its hooves splashing spray high up the rock point.

When he reaches me, he says, "If Kodiak's balky, take a switch to him," then from the high tide line he cuts an alder sapling as thick as my thumb and a yard long. Hollering, "Hang on," he strikes Kodiak across the ears. Kodiak leaps forward, and timing the breakers perfectly, high-steps through the surf and around the Point, easily leaving Bill behind, engulfed by another breaker that nearly flattens him and his horse.

The sun, that light spot in the clouds, disappears behind the mountains to the southwest as the four of us assess the damage caused by the surf. Bill and Charlie are wet from hat to boot. Except for my sleeping bag stowed in a plastic garbage sack, everything in the packs is soaked. Glenn is wet from his waist down. Salt water drips from his rifle. But I'm dry. Other than a few wet spots on my shirtsleeves, I'm as dry as when we left the ranch.

The temperature falls rapidly. Wet and with four miles to go, the others push on quickly. But Kodiak doesn't hurry. He ignores my kicks so within minutes, we fall far behind. He's as stoic as any dude ranch horse I ever imagined. Only Bill's ranch is a working cattle ranch, perhaps the largest on Kodiak Island, with, in addition to his private holdings, more than twenty-five thousand acres leased from the Native Association.

Bill, Glenn, and Charlie leave the beach to circle a bluff against which the surf crashes. They're out of sight before I reach where they climbed the bank. I find the trail—or rather, Kodiak knows the trail they've taken. With his head down as if asleep, he winds through brown sedges, circles a lake and begins climbing a timbered ridge, following what looks like a bear trail. I recall every misgiving I've ever felt towards horses, felt about wandering around bear country in the dark, felt about stragglers. I'm not sure we're on the right trail. And Kodiak seems to have only one speed, slow.

The timber becomes thicker, the night darker. The trail disappears. And for a thousand reasons, all valid, I'm ready to turn back when Bill hollers from the blackness: "Don't let him go that way. Make him jump the creek. Come this way."

I neither see nor hear a creek, nor see Bill nor which way "this way" is. But Kodiak turns and threads his way into a spruce thicket. Both stirrups hook saplings, repeatedly. I kick my feet free of the stirrups—and with my feet still out of the stirrups, Kodiak stops, gathers his feet beneath him. But rather than jumping, he slips and slides down a low dirt embankment, then sloshes through a stagnant pool that looks more like a mud-bottomed spring fronted by a narrow strip of swamp than a stream. I hang on, barely.

Bill joins me and directs me towards a parting in the timber that leads to the bluff overlooking the beach. The clouds are breaking up. The moon has risen, its cold light reflecting from the frothy tops of the breakers far below the trail Kodiak now follows. As if suspended between the moon and the sea, the trail looks like a path through the heavens over which Norse gods could've ridden to battle with frost giants. The temperature is near zero, the grass stiff with frost. Bill shivers. And we still have a mile to go.

The trail leaves the bluff and twists downhill, towards the Sacramento River, which I hear. The ripple of flowing water blends with the rustling of spruce boughs as wind sneaks ashore in little gusts. The surf booms, then falls back, dragging tumbling stones

with it. Saddle leather squeaks. One of the horses ahead of me neighs. And I don't have time to brace before Kodiak, virtually standing on his nose, descends a steep embankment—

The saddlehorn isn't where it belongs! I'm all for walking, and would walk if I could dismount gracefully.

Before I can dismount, we reach the tidewater lagoon, which is tiny when compared to the many lagoons in which I've hidden from storms while fishing commercially between here and Dutch Harbor, seven hundred miles to the southwest. Glenn, Charlie and the two pack horses are ahead of me; Bill is behind. Charlie forces his horse into the river, crossing on a gravel bar near the head of the lagoon. Glenn follows Charlie across. Bill crosses a dozen yards above us. But again, Kodiak isn't particularly interested in getting his feet wet. He refuses to enter the water. I glance towards the beach, hear a salmon splash through riffles, and I watch the glowing surf while Kodiak grabs a mouthful of crisp grass. The white foam appears alive in the moonlight, swimming up and over, around and down, racing across the beach. Fractured skim ice, like mirror platelets, lie along the high tide line. Wind whistles upriver. Kodiak chomps another mouthful of grass. But his feeding and my watching the surf aren't getting us across the river. Reluctantly, I break off an alder switch.

But I don't have to use the switch: as soon as Kodiak hears the branch snap, he splashes across the gravel bar, then immediately drops back into the same plodding gait he's walked since leaving the ranch. He follows the river upstream a hundred yards to a stand of large Sitka spruce, stops. Charlie steps from the blackness to take his reins. We've arrived at camp.

* * *

Morning comes with the ringing of my alarm clock. Last night, I left Bill and Charlie standing with their backs to the fire, staring at their wet sleeping bags. They're now sitting next to the fire, staring at their wet sleeping bags.

I climb out of my tent, and I am not surprised when, after breakfast, Charlie announces that he intends to hang around camp and catch the sleep he lost stoking the fire last night. A year from now, he'll skipper the new five-million-dollar State Trooper patrol boat, and he'll only remember the buck I will shoot later today. I'll have to remind him of how cold he was, of how he cooked without light, of how he worried about bears killing the hobbled horses.

Three horses are saddled. When the sky begins to lighten, Bill, Glenn and I set off for Slope Peak. Bill leads, and like yesterday, Kodiak trails far behind. I kick him in the ribs until my heels hurt. He responds, grudgingly, catches up with Glenn's horse, then drops back into his plodding gait.

We circle a saltwater marsh and begin climbing the eastern face of the Peak. The hillside looks like a solid tangle of scrub alders. The horses, especially Kodiak, shy away from the alders, each the diameter of my arm, each bent like a bow ready to snap back hard enough to unhorse a rider . . . Kodiak ducks his head, and an alder neatly tumbles me from the saddle though my feet don't leave the stirrups.

Kodiak stops, turns his head, and stares in apparent disgust as I hang upside-down. I twist my left foot free and fall to the ground. Bill asks if I'm okay.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

After I remount, the three of us continue climbing the peak. Only now, I let Kodiak fall as far behind the others as he wants.

The alders thin above eight hundred feet elevation. And ahead of us, absorbing the warmth of the early morning sun, a large buck and a half dozen does stand on a grassy slope, bare of trees. He's fidgety. He's already seen us, and I suspect, recognizes Bill.

"Take Glenn and the horses and circle to the right," I point to a draw. "I'll haze them your way."

"Keep Kodiak with you. No sense in climbing that hill yourself."

"I'd rather not." I don't want to tell Bill how glad I am to be off Kodiak.

"We'll see you in a while, then." Bill turns towards the beach and swings downhill before he and Glenn begin working around to the right, uphill and closer to the deer. I wait until they're fifty yards away before I begin climbing. But the deer, not liking what they see, angle up the slope and over the top of the ridge.

A ravine and many clumps of alders separate me from the buck that had been sunning himself. As I approach the lip of the ravine, a second large buck runs straight away from me. I break his neck with one shot from my .25-06. I don't think he ever saw me. He certainly never heard the shot.

An icy, wildly tumbling creek flows through the ravine. I scramble down the alder-covered slope, wade the creek, locate and dress the buck, then wait for Bill and Glenn to show. I know they heard my shot: they were still within three hundred yards of me when I fired. But the ravine is between us so more than twenty minutes pass before I hear the horses push through the alders near where the buck lies.

After brief congratulations, we lash the buck crosswise over Kodiak's saddle. Bill and Glenn continue towards the top of Slope Peak. I try to lead Kodiak downhill, but he peevishly plants his feet and refuses to budge. He doesn't like the buck lashed across his saddle; he doesn't like the smell of blood. But I've had enough of him. I take hold of his bridle, and putting my weight behind my hold, I pull his head downhill. He follows. He isn't much heavier than a waterlogged skiff, if as heavy. And I've wrestled many plank skiffs across gravel beaches.

The buck protrudes a couple feet to Kodiak's starboard side and nearly as far to port. I carefully pick our way through the alders as we approach the creek in the ravine. But despite the care I take, the buck's antlers hook distant branches, twist around, and jab Kodiak's flanks. He kicks as he tries to spin away from the sharp tines. I pull the buck's head away from Kodiak's flanks, but he bangs its rump into more alders. Wild-eyed, he kicks again and again, twists both left and right, snagging alders on both sides. I hold onto his bridle, my hand caught, and it's all I can do to calm him down.

Kodiak glares at me while I retie the buck's head, hopefully so its antlers won't again gouge his flanks. He knows I got him into this alder tangle, and he seems to be questioning his willingness to follow me, not that he has followed me all that willingly to this point. He isn't sure which of us ought to lead, but I am sure. I grab a hold of his bridle and urge him downhill. He follows, but only as far as the creek.

Knowing he doesn't like to get his feet wet, I drop back a step when we reach the creek, get my shoulder behind my grip on his bridle, and before he can plant his feet, I have him in the water, splashing up and down the stream. But I am unable to get him to jump up the abrupt knee-high bank on the far side. I tug on his reins where the alders are far enough apart that they won't catch either the buck's head or rump. But Kodiak is unwilling to jump out of the icy water.

The creek is as wide as the horse is long. It's lined by overhanging alders, with few gaps between the entangled trunks. Fifteen feet high and ranging in diameter from a couple inches to six inches, the alders grow so tightly together that they form a matted felt of twigs and cones, bark and deadwood. A woody Stetson jammed low on the brow of the Peak. Finding holes in the alders large enough for a horse to pass through is difficult. I see only one spot, where I am, so I jump into the swift water and again grab a hold of Kodiak's bridle.

He tosses his head. I lose my balance, and he turns parallel to the creek.

Bare, gray-splotched alder branches reach for and catch the buck's antlers. Kodiak snaps his head back and forth, but can't break my hold though he tosses me around. It's become a contest of strength. Pull as hard as I can on his bridle, I can't budge him. He isn't going to jump the bank, and as far as he's concerned, I'm not going to make him.

The stream's swiftness piles water to my knees, fills my boots and numbs my feet. Its rocky bed is slippery. And both Kodiak and I flounder around when, with him in tow, I grudgingly plunge

first downstream, then upstream in search of a better spot to get him out of the water.

I find no better place than my first choice, my only choice, but I'm not strong enough to hoist him up the bank. I can certainly pack a seventy-horse outboard across this creek, but not this horse which behaves as a self-willed child. Reluctantly, I cut a switch from a nearby alder. The last thing I really want to do is hit Kodiak. I know I got him into this mess; I just need his cooperation to get both of us out of it. Nevertheless, I feel like a stranger being asked to discipline someone else's child.

He watches, knowing what's coming; and as I draw back my arm, he leaps the bank with ease.

The alders aren't as far apart as I thought. Both the buck's rump and antlers catch branches. Kodiak stops and waits for me to untangle him. I do. But with his next step, he's again entangled in viny alders. He stops. Again I free him. He takes another step. Antlers catch another alder. And I'm ready to shoot trees.

Although the alders thin a little as I coax Kodiak up the side of the ravine, from the look in his eyes I know that he blames me for getting him into this mess. But I'm too busy pushing alders aside to look him in the eye often. At least I am until we reach the spot from where I shot. Now, it's downhill all the way to camp, but downhill through lots of alders.

Kodiak isn't going to follow me farther. He again plants his feet, and no amount of urging will prompt him to take another step.

Ready for a break anyway, I lie on frosty ferns while he grazes on the grass he can reach without moving his feet. I see the stand of spruce in which we're camped, and the mile of alders between here and there. It'd be easier for me to pack the buck down to the beach than to fight Kodiak through the entwined clumps of wrist-thick alder, but I'd still have to get the horse back to camp. And after last night, I don't want to ride downhill.

Okay, I'm ready to go; he isn't. I pluck a stalk of grass and swing it at his ears as if it were a switch. He flinches, takes one step, then realizes he isn't hurt. Again, he plants his feet.

Again, I switch him with the stalk of grass.

He takes another step, then refuses to budge. His eyes show nearly the same terror as when he'd been hung-up in the creek. He's afraid of the switch, but not of me. And he's determined not to follow me.

"All right, Kodiak, you lead if you think you can do it so much better. But you're packing that deer through the brush."

He moves only his eyes as I loosely loop his reins around his neck. A lethargic mosquito buzzes about his eyes. A half-white hare sits very still in a nearby clump of alders. But Kodiak looks only at me. His eyes betray his suspicions; so I flop onto the crunchy grass and lean back under the cold noonday sun. He lowers his head, takes a step, and grabs a mouthful of brown grass. A truce.

The chill of the frozen ground passes through my shirt and jeans. "Come on, Kodiak, time to go." I rise, but don't take hold of his reins. Instead, I slowly begin to retrace our trail up the Peak.

Kodiak snatches another mouthful of grass, then starts towards the south face of the slope rather than its east side. Not certain he knows where he's going, I hurry to him and grab his reins. But as I stop him, I look down the south face and see avenues of grass between the clumps of alders. Releasing his reins, I follow him as he zigs and zags, pausing frequently to graze.

Despite Kodiak's pauses, we descend the slope in less time than we took climbing it, and we never come closer than twenty feet to an alder. I don't know why Bill didn't take this way up the slope to begin with. Perhaps I do know why: at the bottom of the hill is the half-mile-wide salt marsh we skirted before full daylight. Skim ice hangs like cobwebs from the sedges. Sagging sheets of ice lay draped across beaver canals. The tide is out. Still, from a few inches to a couple of feet of water covers the muck.

Apparently realizing I'll follow him to camp, Kodiak ignores the standing water and heads directly across, crossing the marsh easily. His shod feet, rising straight up as if prancing, move forward, step straight down through the muck to the clay beneath, then rise again. But my feet are angled and seem like rubber-booted

anchors, bent on holding me still. I step into but not through the muck which sucks at my boots. Each step is like pulling a giant wine bottle's cork without a screw. I'd turn back if the part of the marsh ahead of me didn't look like easier going than the part behind. I know that isn't the case, though. And I wonder if Kodiak's thought process is sophisticated enough to seek revenge for me entangling him in the alders.

At camp, I collapse next to the fire and barely have strength enough to hold the cup of coffee Charlie offers. Kodiak, standing next to the meat pole, seems none the worse for being tangled up in the creek. I let him wait. After a second cup of coffee, Charlie and I, needing Kodiak's help, hang the buck.

* * *

THAT NIGHT BETWEEN:

That First Night With No Lantern

A few curled leaves still cling to the alders lining the Sacramento River. Bleached salmon vertebrae, ribs and gill plates lie scattered between mounds of bear dung. Charlie unsaddles my horse. For a little fellow, he's tough. Fearless. That breaker slammed him against the Point; yet, he does his no pay job as if nothing happened. There's only one part of me that isn't stiff, and all of me is sore. I haven't hurt this much since I set chokers. Charlie would make a logger, the highest compliment I give anyone.

We're seven miles from Bill's ranch at Narrow Cape; rode the last three miles in the dark. My mind plops from image to image with the rhythm of shod footsteps. I neither want to eat, nor pitch camp. Bill has kindled a fire. He steams, or at least his Levi jacket does. The red light cast from the fire curls around him, pulls at his chaps, stands on his boots. He needs a shave. Needed one yesterday.

Since I'm the only one the surf didn't drench, I feel I should make myself useful so while Charlie hobbles the horses, I, with hobbling steps, blindly gather firewood.

Glenn, a minister who didn't set out to be one, spreads his, Bill's and Charlie's sleeping bags, wringing what water he can from them. He appears younger than his thirty years. I've never seen him when he wasn't serious about what he's doing—his seriousness seems unaffected by the drenching he took. And he's tall enough he can reach across the Visqueen that Bill stretches over the frame of a leanto used on previous hunts. He holds the sheet plastic taut while Bill weights down the edges with saddles and driftwood

logs. He says nothing, doesn't engage in the bantering, and seems unable to set aside his vocation. Perhaps he shouldn't set it aside. Too many do.

The more I walk the more I can. After coffee, I feel almost normal, as long as I don't move. I feel good enough to dig my tent out of the wet panniers and pitch it. "Bill, where's your lantern?"

"Don't have one. It's one of those things I've been aiming to buy but never found the money for."

"You should have said something. I've got a couple." I locate my tent by feel.

"Yeah, well, I don't like the hiss of the darn things. They go against nature."

"How about a flashlight?"

"Batteries were about dead. Didn't bring it."

Flames leap high, play across his weathered face and push against the darkness. Steam rises from his stained Stetson. Bill turns his back to the fire. And I wonder about the curious blend of day and night, night and day in which I live most of the year. I take my tent, find a sandy spot bared by spring runoffs, and pitch it just beyond the ring of light cast by the fire.

Away from the crackle of the fire, I hear the breeze rustle spruce boughs. Horses neigh. Charlie coughs. On Slope Peak, a fox barks. A second fox answers. Across the valley, a third fox barks at the first two. The river gurgles as it wraps itself around a fallen tree. The retreating surf rolls stones over stones. Bill chops wood: the ring of his axe seems small compared to the quiet roar of the surf. And an owl silently glides low overhead, passing almost directly over the fire. The breeze suddenly backs up and changes directions. It mingles the freshness of salt air with the thickness of pitchy wood smoke. I smell horse lather on my jeans, and I wonder if spy satellites high overhead can see our fire. Probably.

Glenn's space-age tent could have been designed by an engineer of Chinese finger puzzles. In the blackness to the other side of the fire, he struggles to assemble sections of metal hoops, each connected by an elastic cord and each requiring insertion through the tent.

There's nothing Bill, Charlie, or I can do to help. None of us have seen a tent like Glenn's although he assures us that it's a standard backpacker design.

It wasn't that long ago I wouldn't have brought a tent, nor used Visqueen to make a leanto. I slept under the stars, if it wasn't raining. I wasn't a sissy. I camped with only my axe and rifle as I imagined Mountain Men would have. Although I didn't wear fringed hunting shirts or buckskins, I built muzzleloading rifles for a living, killed both bear and deer with cap and ball, and could split a rifle ball on an axe offhand at ten paces. Nearly every shot. I often wondered if I'd been born into the wrong century; wondered about fate and destiny. As a teenager, all I wanted to do was build rifles. Only recently have I learned of an Austrian 17th-Century gunmaker named Georg Keyser, a relative (Keyser is the earlier spelling of Kizer). I've known for years about an A. Kizer, a 19th-Century Indiana gunmaker, a relative. Was my yearning to build rifles biological, or cultural? All of the heroes of my youth were cowboys who slept with their rifles beside them.

Bill and Charlie—their sleeping bags wet—discuss spending the night sitting up, stoking the fire. I know about sitting up nights. When I camped with only my axe and rifle, I spent nights with the chill waking me every few minutes, where I'd drowsily stir the coals while listening to wolves howl, coyotes yip, a bear splashing in the creek, the crackle of my fire. I'd rearrange burning lengths of wood; would want morning to come, but only so I could go to sleep. Yes, I've sat up shivering all night, watching flames make war against one another. But I'm older now. My heroes no longer sleep on the ground.

"How wet are the saddle blankets?" I ask Bill.

"Soaked, sweat mostly. That was a good idea of yours, putting your bag in a garbage sack." Squatting beside the fire, stirring it, he sends sparks into the spruce boughs. "We'll get something to eat and everything will look better. Fire's ready."

The steaks he brought are still frozen. It's cold, even next to the fire. I'm glad I'm not wet.

The shoulders of Bill's jacket sport mottled wet/dry patches. I can't tell if Charlie's black-and-white mackinaw is still wet; I imagine it is. I don't wear a jacket, preferring instead only a second shirt over my black wool longjohns. Glenn wears a pile-lined, military surplus parka. I suspect he's warm despite being wet; he hasn't returned to the fire.

Charlie spreads the coals. Swirling whiffs of pitchy smoke chase him from one side of the fire to the other, but somehow, he manages to balance two frying pans across a couple of charred spruce limbs. He dices potatoes and onions in one while he waits for grease to heat in the other. Unable to see into either, he nevertheless turns the potatoes, and flops a floured steak into the other when the sizzling grease "sounds" right. The coals are bright orange. The handles of the frying pans are short, too short. Despite the leather glove he wears, he burns his hand each time he moves a pan; yet, he rejects offers of help.

A pitch seam pops, peppers the steaks and potatoes with glowing embers and feathery ash.

The smell of the frying meat fills the night, but the steaks hide in shadows. Even when holding the tipped pans to the side of the fire, Charlie can't see them. Still, he hollers to Glenn that his dinner is ready as he shovels a spatula full of potatoes onto a tin plate, then slaps a crispy steak across the top of them. Saying, "Just like home," he hands the now-hot plate to Glenn.

"This other steak isn't done yet, Homer, so you can have it however you want it."

Bill says, "Charlie doesn't need a gas range and electric lights. Just give him a good bed of coals and he can cook anything." He kicks the coals with his pointed boot toe.

"Are you and Charlie gonna be warm enough tonight?"

"It won't be like home."

Glenn disappears into the blackness beyond the dome of light cast by the mound of coals. When he reappears, the grease on his plate has hardened. He holds his plate over the coals before he finishes the last of his potatoes.

Charlie dishes me up, and I withdraw to the edge of the spruce timber as Charlie dices more potatoes and spoons more grease into the frying pans. I hear a fourth fox bark. The night is crisp, has cleared, and reminds me of Oregon's high desert but with the surf I grew up with.

The chilled grease makes the potatoes inedible. I return to the fire where Bill, sitting on a log, says, "The last time we were here, a bear smelled the horses and came into camp to about where you are before jumping in the river."

"That's reassuring, that he jumped in the river. You lose many cows to bears this year?"

"Thirty. Ranching here ain't like it was in Flor'da. You ain't always having to give shots, except at bears." Bill tells about killing this bear and that bear, about someone who used to hunt Brownies with dogs, about Norm Sutliffe and Joe Zetner shooting bears from Norm's airplane, about how the buffalo don't stand and let the bears kill them like cattle do. Charlie dishes up Bill and himself, asks the time. Bill holds his wrist near the fire: "Eight o'clock." It's been dark for hours.

Declaring their wet bags dry, Bill places a horse blanket beneath both his and Charlie's sleeping bags while Glenn inserts his bag into his curious appearing tent: his tent looks like a cocoon, swollen at its head end. When the fire dies down for the umpteenth time, I leave them standing with their backs to the embers, staring three directions into the darkness.

I step past my tent and return to the edge of the grove. Moonlight washes the saltwater marsh. Frosty sedges sparkle. The tide has turned. Somewhere between when I hunted Oregon's Hart Mountain with a muzzleloader and now, a change has occurred.

I have followed the elliptical paths of mountain men more closely than I intended. If Bridger or Carson were transported forward in time, they too would hunt tomorrow with a scope-sighted .25-06.

When I rise in the morning, it's still very dark. Bill and Charlie are awake; they have been for most of the night. Glenn

snores in the darkness beyond the fire that has been kept burning.

Bill sets the coffeepot to boil while Charlie heats grease in the frying pans. When the grease melts, Charlie wipes the pans clean with a paper towel, then squeezes already mixed pancake batter from a plastic syrup bottle into the hot pans. Bridger and Carson would only have asked for a lantern.

* * *

PUBLIC ENEMY #1

I kill trees, last year an alder and two birch, all three about a foot in diameter. Young, healthy specimens in prime condition. Butchered each as I would a steer. Cut all three of them into pieces. Steaked them up, so to speak. And they fed me all of this year.

Yes, I kill trees. Sneak up on them, catch them when they're sleeping, murder them where they stand. It's pleasant work and someone has to do it. Alone in quiet forests, mists and dew and solitude, with maybe a squirrel or a doe watching from across the canyon—I love the smell of fresh cut pine in the morning.

Believe me when I say I like to kill trees. I am public enemy #1 to treehuggers trying to stop clearcutting of what they call oldgrowth timber. I am that logger who shoots back, not with bullets. They need martyrs, and I don't intend to help them make any. But with art, with words. And if my aim isn't perfect, it is certainly good enough to create confusion.

Therein lies the lie. Without oldgrowth and regrowth, I die; for cutting trees, working wood is what I do, and what I have done since I left Willamette University at the end of my freshman year. I had worked wood before: three years of high school shop taught me the rudiments of controlling woodgrain and powertools. Dad was a parttime carpenter who could identify standing hardwoods by their bark. I spent my preteen years in sawmill towns, where whole towns smelled of fresh cut fir, and I truly like the smell of fresh sawn wood. Each species has its distinct scent: apple wood smells like its fruit (i.e., a Gravenstein log like a Gravenstein apple, a Northern Spy log like a Northern Spy apple) while fresh cut myrtlewood smells like the wet forest floor of the Oregon Coast, and pine smells of resin and work and mountain meadows. And

growing up, we heated with wood, even cooked with wood for a few years. I still heat with wood, still cook occasionally with wood. So directly and indirectly killing trees has fed me, has kept me warm and dry, has kept me clothed, has helped me rear and educate three daughters. Wood has and continues to entertain me with its beauty, resilience, durability. And wood is the medium I now sculpt into figured bowls carved in the traditions of this continent's aboriginal inhabitants, bowls that sell for far more than I can afford, bowls that are possessed in states and nations and continents far from the stump of the tree I fell to secure the blocks from which I carved them.

The lie is that I don't care about what happens to so-called oldgrowth forests. That would be like a farmer not caring about his or her fields, and don't say the analogy is flawed because of the private versus public property issue. Chief Seattle had it right: we own nothing. We are of the land, are dust or mud. Our responsibility is to care for this land. But in caring for it, we can also use it. Although an overhead canopy of boughs might suggest a living cathedral, overhead beams and rafters do a better job of repelling rain. Although shaft-straight trunks reaching for heaven stand in Northwest forests as mystics in mediation, these trees are dying as if they, too, are old men crippled by arthritis. Although all of these aged monuments will die, we are who will determine the value of their lives. Are these monuments worth only their weight as rotten wood and decay? or do they possess greater value? They will fall so there is room for another generation, already sprouted but starving in the shade of cathedral-like canopies.

The cycle of tree growth and regrowth doubles as perhaps the best metaphor for human lineage, for my lineage; for every pine cone, every fir cone, every alder cone scatters seeds that need land on which to take root and grow. Our histories are family trees. A totem pole is a literal family tree. And I carve in the totemic tradition of the Northwest Coast.

But one thing isn't another thing. Metaphors only suggest likeness. So for that idealistic generation isolated from the land

that has lost its way—my peers—I am here to help: I'm here to carve a metatext about the territorial imperative, manifest destiny, and the westward expansion of America into sawdust size bytes. I'm here to translate timber talk into the lath and trim and fretwork of political speech, endowed to even us loggers by our founding fathers.

Although I grew to adulthood among the tall firs of the Oregon Coast, I was born on a farm in northern Indiana. One of two very early snippets of memory is of a tornado, March 1948. A purple-green sky and me at a window, someone behind me. I was sixteen months old. The snippet is like glimpsing a still photograph. It doesn't seem even a second long.

When I was older, I was told *the someone* behind me that day was Grandpa Howland, Mom's dad.

That tornado blew down Grandpa Kizer's barn and neighbors' barns on both sides of us—Grandpa Kizer and Dan Blocker, one of those neighbors, were in Dan's barn when his livestock started acting funny. Both of them stepped outside to see what was wrong just as the tornado took the barn apart.

Dad's barn was in a direct line between Grandpa Kizer's and Dan Blocker's, but behind our barn was a five-acre wood lot. That twister lifted to clear those trees. It took only a few shingles from our barn roof before setting down again right in front of Blocker's barn. Those trees saved hogs and calves and let Dad farm for another couple of years.

We left that farm when I was four, and though I don't remember much about the wood lot, I remember Dad showing me how to identify hickory trees by their bark. I remember him using a buzz saw driven by the tractor's power takeoff to cut downed limbs for kitchen stove wood. Neither Dad nor Grandpa Kizer cut any of the trees in their woodlots. Yet when I returned to Indiana to visit relatives in 1969, the day after men first walked on the moon, that lot was gone as were all of Grandpa Kizer's farm buildings. And both of Grandpa's wood lots. The space age had reached Indiana, that age of open spaces when corn stalks stretch

almost without break across Wells County, none tall enough to lift a tornado.

One reminder of the farm stayed with me while I grew up: Grandpa Howland made a magnetized tack hammer, carving its handle from an osage orange board he salvaged when the old chicken house was torn down. I heard the story of him making the hammer, head and handle (he was a tool & die maker for Ford), as often as I heard that he was a direct descendent of John Howland of *Mayflower* fame, that he was born Christmas day 1878, that he was the youngest of seven children, that he had helped push Canadian Pacific's railroad tracks across the continent, that he had herded sheep near Wallowa Lake, and had homesteaded on the north shore of Lake Tahoe in 1903. He didn't think much of Lake Tahoe—"the country isn't fit for sheep"—and after proving up, he sold his homestead for thirty cents per acre, giggled all the way to the bank, and returned to Michigan where, at age thirty-five, he married, fathered three daughters of which Mom was the youngest, then spent the second half of his life employed as a machinist. Yes, I heard this Howland liturgy until it became so much a part of me I couldn't forget it if I wanted.

Grandpa Howland died a few months after that tornado of March 11th, but his presence remained so strong that I had to see those places named. In the pines above Wallowa Lake, I almost killed a forked horn when I was thirteen. I'm continually haunted by George Hamilton's rendition of "Canadian Pacific." And in 1973, I stayed a week in a resort close to Grandpa Howland's Tahoe homestead, where he thought there were too many trees for the claim to ever have any value either as farm or pasture lands. Too many trees and too much snow. I suspect he would be surprised by how much the area had built up. Instead of the sugar pines and bunch grass he knew, summer homes and ski chalets grew on the hillsides, distorted structures that from high overhead might look like alien species of hallucinogenic mushrooms, none particularly pleasing, certainly none as pleasing as the appearance of tall pines and long pine cones or of a doe bounding stiff-legged past pine

trunks three feet or more in diameter. Oh, there were still pines and deer in the basin, but their presence seemed accidental, as if they were out of their range and had only come down to the lake for water.

That Howland liturgy, recited so often by Mom, fueled an urge in me to push farther north and west, from Oregon to British Columbia, Alaska, and on into the Aleutians, where I learned that Howlands preceded me to these wind-swept islands by a century and a half.

I suppose none of us can help being the product of ourselves: I can't say that I ever felt bad about killing a tree or a deer, about standing a studded wall or eating a steak. Trees, like deer, like people, don't live forever. As they age, they become less able to repel parasites or resist infections. Grandpa Howland died from pneumonia. But one generation is replaced by another, each generation casting its seeds a little farther afield.

If the whaling Howlands had dropped anchor at Dutch Harbor in 1825, they would have thought Unalaska Island was treeless. Russian Orthodox priests, however, planted a couple dozen spruce seedlings near Margaret's Bay in the 19th-Century. They have since grown into squat, gnarly trees, which in turn have scattered cones from Summer Bay to Broad Bay. Now, thousands of seedlings—perhaps tens of thousands—grow nearly undetected in the lush grass. I will probably, in my lifetime, see a few stands of stubby spruce, more bushlike than treelike, choke out patches of grass.

Russians virtually denuded the northern end of Kodiak Island, as well as all of Near and Woody Islands, logging everything they could for building ships. They farmed or cut hay in the logged off areas, and they complained of soggy vegetables and of their inability to grow wheat. Early photos exist of these same fields still being worked by their descendants. But following the Katai eruption of 1912, the fields were lost to a foot of volcanic ash. Since then, encroaching spruce trees have reclaimed the fields, and most of their former range. They are presently pushing south to Ugak Bay and westward past Port Lions. Visitors to Kodiak now don't realize

that the island was nearly logged bare, nor that the spruce have extended their range just as the descendants of John Howland have extended theirs, thereby creating that metatext which Feminist critics loathe.

John Wiles of Toledo, Oregon told me to look more closely at early photos of the ridgetops above Lincoln County's Yaquina River. The ridges weren't timbered. In fact, when Anglo-Europeans crossed the Coast Range in the 1870s and 1880s, Georgia-Pacific's South Track, the logging district between Yaquina River and Alsea River, wasn't covered with old-growth timber, but by ferns and young firs. The district had been denuded by fire only a few years earlier. And early homesteaders burned ridgetops yearly. The high-value timber that Georgia-Pacific took from South Track in the 1960s was less than a hundred years old.

In July 1991, I was invited to visit Ohio by a museum curator for one of the historical societies. I was also asked to bring my chainsaw. The historical society had a few trees they wanted me to fell, and they offered to pay me for felling them—I would have cut them for nothing. The trees were osage orange, and they were threatening electrical lines. ODOT (Ohio Department of Transportation) had threatened to fine the historical society if they weren't cut down.

Osage orange hedges once lined this portion of the old carriage road between Erie, Pennsylvania, and Cleveland, Ohio. They kept milk cows in the fields and slave catchers on the road, but as winegrapes replaced cows and slave catchers took up being oil field roustabouts, the hedges were uprooted, except in places where the terrain was too rough to be put into vineyards. I oversimplify, I know. For all sorts of reasons the hedges were cut, with occasional trunks left for fence posts.

Suckers grew from around the remaining trunks, becoming trees, the largest of which I saw was nearly three feet in diameter. Most, though, had been cut back twenty years earlier. So the regrowth that surrounded the power lines was a few inches in diameter to a little less than a foot.

While removing the osage orange suckers, I cut a few short planks from an older stump. I was awed by the bright yellow color of the fresh cuts. For the first time, I understood why Mom thought the osage orange handle Grandpa Howland made was beautiful. I'm certain it was impressively beautiful when new.

But what impressed me about my visit to Ohio was the amount of regrowth that had occurred in woodlots and on neglected farmlands which as late as 1969 were still in cultivation. The historical society's property was the home of Robert Harper, one of the Western Reserve's early settlers. Built in 1815, the house sports a dining room that has been featured in several architectural magazines, and a large, cherry dining room table made from a tree on the property. The tree was milled and the table made probably during Andrew Jackson's presidency. The curator assured me that no cherry trees still existed in that area of Ohio large enough to replicate the table today. But the curator was also under the mistaken impression that the table was constructed of solid wood.

When I examined the table, I saw that its surface was sliced veneer, the grain carefully matched. I had already hiked around the property, and I'd seen cherry trees two, two-and-a-half feet in diameter and nearly sixty feet high. I believe from the best cherry tree I saw I could reproduce the table. The tree was large enough. The challenge would be whether my skills are adequate. The table is a very fine piece of work.

As a kid, I can't say I was particularly impressed by being descended from John Howland. Nor was I impressed by that magnetized tack hammer with its osage orange handle being handmade. As proud as Mom was of her Howland lineage, she seemed equally ashamed of the Native American blood also flowing through her veins. And I didn't know then how difficult making a magnetized hammerhead could be, nor how bright yellow osage orange wood is when first worked. But I grew like one of those osage oranges, hard, tough, a sucker threatening power lines. Only I grew from a stump planted across this continent.

As well as cutting trees, I also plant trees. I gather shallow rooted seedlings that wouldn't otherwise make it through summer droughts, and I transplant them to my garden where they grow for a season or two among the raspberries and strawberries, watered by my sprinklers, protected as much as are my tomatoes and carrots. I graft hundreds of scions to stoolbed rootstock. I start orchards, and I have replanted logged hillsides. And I am as continually surprised by how much regrowth of trees I see wherever I travel as I am by who is descended from John Howland.

So yes, I kill trees, turn them into sculptures displayed by better art galleries; turn then into gunstocks, lumber, fence posts; sell them as logs. And no, I feel no guilt about what I do. Trees will grow back—I have no fear of regrowth as have those who label me Public Enemy #1.

* * *

AFTER THE FACT

Humpies shine like tinsel as they splash up the riffles and into the first shallow pool of Pasagshak Creek, already full of pink salmon. The new arrivals push a wave like a bore tide in front of them. There doesn't seem to be water enough in the pool for another fish. Yet the school arriving on the flood tide finds room somewhere.

I've come, like the bear around the bend, for the salmon. Actually, I've come to teach my youngest daughter, Kori, how to cast a fly to salmon. There's not, now, much I can teach Kristel, who has come along, I suspect, to remind me of the mistakes I made instructing her.

My wife taught Kathy, our oldest daughter, how to fly cast. I was too busy in the shop at the time, and I'll admit, I lacked the patience then to teach what seems natural. Although Kathy now ties better flies than I do (hers have won blue ribbons; mine only catch fish), she prefers bait to fishing her own creations, which I, of course, blame on her early training. I have since shouldered my fatherly responsibility to teach our younger daughters the fine art of presenting a fly in an acceptable manner. And I'm anxious to avoid the jargon of the craft.

From Kristel, I learned that *to mend* obviously means to sew, that a *hand twist* has something to do with a Cat's Cradle, that *stripping* is how paint's removed from old furniture, that a *roll cast* has no meaning ("Make up your mind, Dad, what you want me to do"), that *wind knots* aren't really wind knots at all ("How can you tie a knot in the wind? Be serious, Dad"), but simple half-hitches and figure-eights. So I'll forego mentioning terms to Kori. If she learns to make a cast that doesn't resemble a

mule team driver snapping his bullwhip, I'll be satisfied. Kris, though, has come along in case Kori needs help understanding Anglish.

Seventy yards upstream from the bay (the sow and her cub are a half mile above us), the creek, shin deep and two steps wide for me, is over Kori's knee boots. Since she is banned from wearing her sisters' hip waders—she filled Kathy's with sand last week—I bend down so she can climb onto my back. And humpies bump into my legs when I step into the creek. Two dozen or more push past me, and push a wave of fish into the next pool.

Humpies (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*) don't have the mystique of Atlantic salmon, but they are nearly perfect beginner fish. Averaging three to four pounds, they are determined fighters, stronger than resident rainbows. But their runs are short and their leaps telegraphed in advance. They aren't easily spooked, nor are they leader shy. Displaying no preference for patterns, they'll hit green flies until the flies fall apart. And most years more humpies return to spawn on Kodiak than there is gravel for redds.

Having rigged her rod in camp, Kristel begins fishing in the second pool before I'm across the creek; and as I suspected, she isn't along to help teach or to be taught, but here to catch and release as many salmon as possible.

Humpies have two traits that help insure their future runs. Upon first wiggling out of their natal gravel, their fry head immediately to sea. They aren't dependent upon nutrient-rich streams so any flowing water will support a run.

Secondly, humpies, sometimes even before they return and always within a few days after, deteriorate rapidly. Their bellies turn white and their backs green. Their flesh softens. Only bears, eagles and cheechakos then prey upon them although I have seen such fish on ice in a supermarket meat case in Pocatello, Idaho, and again in Paducah, Kentucky.

Watching Kristel, I wince each time she snaps her backcasts. I've given up saying anything to her. If I suggest she wait a moment longer for her line to lay out, she, with righteous indignation, will

tell me that she wouldn't snap her casts if I'd buy her a graphite rod, that she only snaps her casts now because her rod is too short and fibreglas. I don't know what fibreglas has to do with letting her line straighten behind her; I still fish a glass rod when I want to throw a soft loop.

The rod I've brought for Kori is a nine weight, nine foot long boron composite—I would've brought a lighter rod for her if I had one I disliked more. Kori has already broken five spinning rods in two years. In nearly three decades of salmon and steelhead fishing, I've broken one. Perhaps rods aren't as well built as they used to be. Regardless, she will use this boron composite for which I paid too much to leave in the closet forever.

She nudges me. I look up to see Kristel's rod doubled. A watermarked humpy splashes in front of her.

"Need help?" I yell to Kris.

Kori answers for her sister: "Naa, she just got a moldy humpy on."

Kristel's arm twists around the grip of her rod as she reels backwards, and I sense the graying of another hair. She holds her rod with her right hand while she reaches under and around it to crank the righthanded reel with her left hand as she fights the humped-back male.

"Kris," I holler, "switch hands."

"You're supposed to hold your rod in your right hand if you're righthanded, and I'm righthanded."

"Switch hands!"

"I can't. Holding him hurts my left arm."

I continue stringing the boron composite, all the while wondering how to argue with logic like hers. I landed my first salmon on a flyrod when twelve, Kristel's age. It was a 19-pound chinook, and my reel hadn't been reversible. I developed the habit of casting righthanded, then switching hands to play fish. I see now I'll have to reverse my reels and unlearn an old habit, or buy Kristel her own reels and lines. Maybe I can give her my old lines.

Kori has, already this morning, spent two hours casting spinners to silvers still spooked from Sunday's crowd. She caught 37 sculpins on a green Pixie, six more on a Mepps. So my promise of "real action" was enough to get her to try flyfishing for the first time.

I clench a green yarn bug to her leader, then flip the heavy fly twenty feet forward into the pool.

Before the fly drifts a foot, it stops. I set the hook. And the humpy shoots upstream as if it were a steam torpedo.

Handing the rod to Kori, I stand back.

Kori, puzzled by how to apply drag on the single action fly reel, loses control of the humpy which now thrashes the surface near where Kristel fights a different male (actually, her third male). I reach over and show her where to place her finger, and her fish turns suddenly and runs back into the pool. She reels as fast as she can, recovers the slack line, then plants her feet, bows her back, and doubles the stiff boron rod. She's just "putting a little pressure on" the fish she tells me. I see how she's broken five poles. Perhaps letting her use the boron is a mistake.

"Don't horse him so."

"But Dad, he'll take my line."

"He won't take all of it."

"He might."

I scowl, and she eases the strain on the rod. This humpy won't break her fifteen-pound tippet. If the fly pulls out, it probably won't drift far before she hooks another. So I leave unsaid further instructions. She'll learn more in the next five minutes than I can teach her in hours. And in four or five minutes, she *steers* the humpy into the shallows where I unhook him.

The next cast is hers, and she's only begun *tensioning* her line (mending, in the jargon of fishermen) when a big, dark male smashes her bug. The big male, splashing, thrashing, churns the pool into a frenzy. Dozens of humpies mill in the tailout while dozens more flee upstream, pushing a wall of water ahead of them.

Instead of running, the big male remains in the pool, snapping his head back and forth, trying to shake the bug, visible in his

hooked snout. And it quickly becomes a question of who has a hold of whom.

Again Kori doubles the boron rod as she arches her back and sets her jaw.

"Not so much pressure. Let him run a bit." I speak too late. The hook pulls free, snaps back, hitting Kori, leaving a raised welt on her chest. "That's a good way to loose an eye. Now take it easy on the next one."

"But Dad—"

"No *buts*. I want you to take it easy."

She does. She takes it so easy that I begin wondering if the little hen will spawn before Kori beaches her.

Meanwhile, Kristel has lost her yarn bug. She misjudged the length of her cast, and her bug landed in the knee-high grass across the creek. She tried pulling it free, but she was only using a six-pound tippet, frayed and needing changed anyway. "And I don't want to spook the pool, Dad," she says, explaining why she didn't wade across to get it.

I give her another fly, one I tied last night. But she returns in a minute, complaining that "this one doesn't look alive like the last one."

"They're the same."

"No, they're not. This one just goes through the water. The other one looked like it was swimming."

"That's just the way you're fishing them."

"No. They're different. This one isn't alive. The other one looked like it was."

I give her a second fly, and I am pleased. She's become observant enough to see why one fly will fish and another won't. In the year since she caught her first fish on a fly, she's become a flyfisher, even though she still can't cast.

When I turn to Kori, her eyes sparkle as she fights another male humpy. Her arm will tire in a little while, and today's lesson will be over. But I see in her eyes that she's hooked.

* * *

A SOJOURNER

The poet Wendy Rose told a Fairbanks audience that when she asks her minority students where "home" is they identify the places of their ethnic origins, but when she asks this of Anglo-American students they identify where they currently live. Home is, to them, a concept rooted in the present. Wendy's observation was that the psyche of Anglo-Americans lacks a strongly held sense of place.

John Haines, citing D.H. Lawrence, wrote about a sense of place. He wondered whether a true literature of the north could develop when so much of what is written about Alaska is, in his terminology, "travel writing."

To start discussions about what is *literature*, I have used, in classes, John's essay about whether a genuine literature of the North will appear; I believe John's point is well made. However, I believe his observations fall within a larger discussion of whether individually important texts only validate personal experience. The texts John would recognize as having a sense of Alaska as "place" would be those that validate John's experiences of living in rural Alaska. "Home" for John is a site east of Fairbanks, a little off the road and painted blue the last time I passed by.

I began fishing Kamloops trout in British Columbia's lakes in 1967. Each year I ventured a little farther north as if I were a fledgling testing my wings. I wanted to relocate to British Columbia, and I even accepted a job in a Prince George pulpmill in 1969. But the mill's personnel manager said he expected the mill to shortly go out on strike, that I should wait until the strike was settled before I moved north. He expected the strike to last a couple of weeks. However, the strike lasted six months, and by the time it was settled, my gunshop upriver from Siletz was keeping

me too busy to think about moving: Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge had been opened to muzzleloading deer hunters for the first time in 1969. I had far more rifles to build than I could for hunters who wanted a crack at the refuge's large mule deer bucks that only knew the killing range of an archer with an arrow. So I stayed in Oregon, shot high power competition, hunted deer with a muzzleloader, and caught many, many steelhead for the next five years. But I didn't buy property in Lincoln County even though I could have and should have. I didn't want to get stuck there. I felt an urge to move-on, to move North, an urge that warred with a desire to stay where I was. Each impulse was equally strong. And if I had been one of Wendy's students, I would not have known where home was. I would have answered that it was where I lived there at Twin Bridges, five miles upriver from Siletz, Oregon. It certainly wasn't Indiana where I was born. Nor was it Holland, nor Bavaria from where ancestors once came. It wasn't really where I lived, but I would have had no other answer to her question. I would have hummed and hawed like many of her Anglo-American students even though some Native American blood flows in my veins.

I didn't travel north of Mackenzie, British Columbia, until 1974, when George Connor asked if I wanted to drive a vehicle to Homer, Alaska, for him. I had wanted to go to Alaska since high school; I wanted to talk to Harold "Bill" Fuller, a muzzleloading gunmaker at Cooper Landing. So after confirming that the road to Homer went through Cooper Landing, I bounced my way to Alaska in George's early Toyota Land Cruiser, towing all the way his sixteen foot speed boat on an eight-foot-wide trailer.

Alaska impressed me much less than I anticipated until I started around Turnagain Arm and up over Silvertip. I liked the Kenai Peninsula and everything I saw. I was smitten as much as I had been by Cecille Sax, my first love. And yes, the semi-realization of the romance of the North produced the same type of feelings of fascination and desire I had experienced at fourteen when holding

hands. Puppy love might not be love, but the emotions it produces are hypnotic.

I took a job in North Kenai felling timber, or rather, felling what the Peninsula calls timber. But after a year and a half of gypo logging and repairing chainsaws, and after buying an acre of undeveloped land off Kalifonski Beach Road, I faced beginning my second winter North without adequate housing and with very little money. Kathy, my oldest daughter, had started school a year earlier, but she was on Correspondence Study through the State of Alaska. I didn't really have a reason for staying on the Peninsula that second winter; so I returned Outside, where I felled white pine in northern Idaho until heavy snow pushed us, as it does deer, downhill all the way back to Lincoln County, Oregon.

Leaving my wife and daughters in a Newport studio apartment with the rent paid for a couple of months and the refrigerator full, I headed back up the Alaska Highway in February 1976. As far as actual travel is concerned, this would be the toughest trip of the many I have made up and down the Highway. I would arrive in Soldotna with four dollars and an empty gas tank.

But on this trip, as I descended the hill atop of which is Alaskan U.S. Customs, I felt, for the first time in my life, like I was *home*, like I had arrived where I belong. The feeling was overwhelming all the way to Northway. A real sense of *home*. But by the time I reached Tok, the feeling had faded although I still felt remnants of it for at least a month. I had felt briefly what it was that Wendy's minority students took for granted.

As I drove across that marshy flat just inside Alaska's Yukon border, I felt a spirit rise from the land and interact with my spirit. It wasn't voices or a spirit being in a religious sense or even something overly transcendental. It was truly a sense of arriving home, or returning to where I belonged, with emphasis on *returning*. And that is how I attributed it until I sailed into Dutch Harbor in July 1979.

When I arrived in Soldotna that February day, a Friday to be exact, in 1976, I had no home; I certainly didn't think of that acre

of raw ground I owned as home. I was as much of a sojourner as a person can be. Yet I felt something that didn't have a tangible manifestation. I felt a connection perhaps less to the physical landscape than to the romance of Alaska, that Alaskan mystic which is in the soul of that hated metatext about the territorial imperative.

Three years later, I looked around my shop, a chainsaw and outboard dealership that was moderately successful, and I didn't see a gun anywhere, didn't see a clean bench on which I could have stocked a gun. Kenai's economy was lying dead in a cesspool somewhere south of Homer. Three of every four people who stopped by the shop were unemployed. I was literally living in grease. I wasn't liking myself much, wasn't satisfied with the direction I was going either personally or professionally. So I put my shop on the market.

It sold nine days later, sold before I could even change my mind.

I carried the contract. But with the buyer's down payment, I bought a 29-foot Bartender (George Calkins' design), rigged it with a pothauler and headed out to Kodiak to fish halibut.

When season closed in the Pacific, I headed south towards Dutch Harbor—the Bering Sea remained open until Labor Day.

During those three years when I really couldn't get away from my shop for long enough to even catch a humpy—the shop didn't seem able to run an hour without me—I would, every so often, remember that feeling of home I had experienced when I crossed the border that cold February day. I began to wonder what it was that I had really felt, or if I had truly felt anything at all. I could almost remember the feeling, but I didn't feel it. And its memory was becoming more questionable whenever I recalled it.

I thought of myself as an Alaskan. I never expected to be anything but an Alaskan. I had lived with an outhouse at thirty below and colder. I had spent a winter with three daughters in a log cabin too small to park a full size pickup inside. I had moose warm their noses against our windowpanes. I had to chase moose off the shoveled path to the outhouse. I wasn't a cheechako. I even

knew where to find ice worms. But I never again felt a sense of *home*. I felt like a sojourner, someone marking time, someone waiting until it was time to again move on. I felt the same thing I felt when I built rifles in Oregon. I was like the patriarch Abraham who lived in a land he didn't possess but a land promised to him. I wasn't looking to go anywhere else, but I knew I wasn't home. It was as if the future and the past had acquired aspects of "place."

On my way to Dutch Harbor, I was again short of money. (There has never been a time in my life when I could enter a restaurant and order a meal without first mentally calculating whether I have enough to pay for it.) Before I arrived in port, I had to catch a few halibut so I could buy more fuel—I laid a longline set in a bay of Akun Island. I laid another set off Akutan, where a female Orca circled the boat all one afternoon. We made eye contact; I talked to her, told her I appreciated her keeping the sea lions that I had problems with earlier in the day far up on the beach, talked to her as if she were a dog. I have no idea if she even grasped my sentiments, but she hung around (perhaps because I looked a little like one of those sea lions). And I put fifteen hundred pounds of halibut in the hold.

Between Akun and Akutan, I started to feel a return of that sense of arriving *home*. At first the feeling was remembered. Clearly, it was the same feeling I had felt when I crossed into Alaska in 1976. And I tried to dismiss it as just me remembering my return to Alaska.

But as I looked from Lava Point towards Priest Rock at the entrance to Unalaska Bay, that sense of arriving home became absolutely overpowering. And it stayed overpowering as I sailed into Dutch Harbor. I have never felt any feeling as powerful. None. And I wasn't returning to where I had been before.

The feeling was, though, that of returning—

Unless some part of Wendy Rose's observation about a psychology of home or place is transferable across generations, I can't explain what I felt. Yes, Howland ancestors had whaled in the Bering, which means they had to pass near Dutch Harbor or

put into port there. Otherwise, I know of no reason why I should have felt like I was returning home when I sailed into Dutch Harbor.

Is genetically retained memory possible?

There is some slim evidence to support the idea that the early ancestors of many Anglo-Europeans dwelt, traded and traveled across a landscape that stretches from China to Europe to the lands drained by the Mississippi. This evidence suggests that they came from Parthia and Carthage and Canaan before famine and wars shuffled them around. It has them as sojourners throughout the historic era, with their history being a mostly lost record of their journeys. It suggests that for them (for me) their sense of place, their sense of home is in a time continuum and is not in a geographic location.

I stayed in Unalaska until Christmas 1979, then came back the next summer. And all the time I was there, I had an ongoing feeling of being *home*, of belonging to a geographic location. But like early Carthagians, business interests dictated that I leave, that I return on the Mainland. I spend the following winter in Anchorage before returning to Kodiak, where I liked living but never truly felt that sense of *home*.

It has been almost twenty years since I have been to Dutch Harbor. In all of those years, I have not again experienced that feeling of being *home* although I have traveled to Kenai, to Fairbanks, to Oregon, Indiana, Ohio, Idaho, Illinois. I don't miss not having that sense of place as much as I am curious about what it was I did feel. I do feel bound to a mental landscape, to ideas, to liberty, to a deity. But if a geographical home exists, it is in the Aleutians and right now I am far from it.

* * *

When the northern Israelite tribes fought the Jews in the days of Kings Jeroboam and Abijah, they mustered an army of nearly a million. While some scholars dispute this number, there is no more reason to reject it than to accept it. For my purposes, let's accept

it. I don't believe these tribes had yet developed guestimate census counting.

But when Assyria took these northern tribes into captivity around 721 BCE, cuneiform records claim the Assyrians captured only 27,290 prisoners, and all of these from the capital city of Samaria even though the Assyrians went through all the land.

Clearly, a lot of Israelite families, who had been there a few years, a few generations before, weren't anywhere in Samaria when the Assyrians finally overran opposition. These Israelites had migrated somewhere; they had fled. I would have. If I knew an occupying force was in Oregon and fighting its way east and that I couldn't stop that force, I wouldn't remain in Idaho for long. And courage, honor, and patriotism would have little to do with my decision. Living to fight another day would have everything to do with fleeing.

Therein lies a mental orientation that might be unique to Anglo-Americans, and related to our concept of *home.* I am not mentally committed to Idaho, or to Alaska, or to any other piece of real estate. I lack the psychological attachment necessary to a parcel of land to die for this field or that hillside or that ditch over there. Rather, I am committed to ideas, to concepts, to a philosophy that has no geographical boundaries. I'm committed to intangibles like "liberty" and "justice," and for these I will fight.

When those northern Israelite tribes split from the House of Judah following Soloman's death, one of the first things they did was to quit "Judahizing," meaning they quit going to Jerusalem for sacrifices, quit observing the holy days that Judah observed. They became virtually indistinguishable from their neighbors, indistinguishable from me and my ancestors—I could be, as far as anyone knows, a Manassite who left one day ahead of Assyrian armor and fled to Tyre, then helped establish Carthage, then their trading colonies on the Tin Isles; or perhaps I could be descended from a Manassite who hadn't crossed the Jordan with Joshua, who fled east towards the steppes where ancestors became Scyths who centuries later would migrate past the Black Sea in covered carts,

settling throughout northern Europe. The name Manassa can be loosely translated as "I forget." And what my ancestors forgot is their stories of who begat whom before printing helped us remember so they had to borrow the stories of Rome and Athens and Judah.

Since every story is both true and false, whether borrowed or original, perhaps it doesn't matter whose stories we have appropriated: the story of America that politicians tell on the Fourth of July forgets the squalor of Lower East Side New York a century ago. It forgets the treaty made with Red Cloud, or how Andrew Jackson rounded up half of the Seminoles. It forgets how few people really supported the Revolution. It forgets much more than it tells. But the story labeled "America" is only one of many in a much larger text few critics have expanded their minds far enough to comprehend. All of us are in a demonstration to prove a point about how we live and should live. We are as free as lab mice in a round cage as we gnaw away at trees and treaties, wheat and weeds. Only the stories of our love for one another will ever escape this cage in which we live.

But we, like those northern Israelites, sometimes forget the identifiers that allow us to track ourselves through shifting time. If these northern Israelites had retained even the observance of the weekly Sabbath as did their cousins in Judah (whom most of the world now identifies as Israel), we would know who they are and where they went; we would know if we are descended from them. Therefore, if we as Americans turn loose of our philosophical underpinnings such as *the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*, or the right to free assembly, to a free press, to freedom of religion, or to the right to bear arms, we, too, will disappear into the spindrift of history. It isn't land that makes us free; it is ideas that should be global in reach. *Home* is in these ideas. If there is a geographic location also attached to these ideas, then it is the landscape from which these ideas sprang.

* * *

KORI'S LEECH

Wading in the shallows of Dark Lake, herding schools of coho salmon fry as if the fry were cattle and they cowboys, Kristel and Kori spot a black leech swimming towards them. Surprised, fearful, Kori screams as she flees the leech's undulations. But Kris, having already studied leeches in school, severely chides Kori for being a sissy: "You're warm blooded. Even if it gets on you, it won't suck blood. It has to have both ends on you to do that."

"I don't care." Kori remains on the shore.

"It won't hurt you. Leeches are annelids, segmented worms, just like earthworms. Get the jar. I'll show you."

Kori fetches the quart mayonnaise jar originally intended for minnows while Kris locates a forked stick eighteen inches long. Using the stick, Kris scoops the leech onto shore, then pokes, prods, lifts, and deposits it into the jar, fills the jar with water and screws its lids on.

I'm not sure what to say when they proudly ask, "Dad, can we keep it?"

Now a leech isn't a baby bird that must be immediately returned to its nest; it also isn't the type of creature I expect daughters to bring home. They've lugged home kittens, a five-year-old tom cat named Chucky, a puppy covered with ringworm, and a bunny rabbit that Kris kept in the bathroom and unsuccessfully tried to train to use the catbox. All furry, cuddly critters. Never before anything *gross*.

In my youth, I brought home various creatures in glass jars: frogs, newts, salamanders, grasshoppers, moths, butterflies, even lightning bugs when I was very young in Indiana. I have kept nightcrawlers, kelp worms, sand shrimp, crawdads and salmon

eggs in first my mother's, then my wife's refrigerator. But I have never kept a leech. I'm not sure that I want to now.

Both Kathy and I, however, tie flies. Since neither of us really have studied leeches and as a good leech imitation belongs in every fisherman's flybox, I waver. My inclination is to say no, but I end up voicing a qualified yes. "You know what your mother will say when she sees it. But if you two can convince her it's okay, and if you'll figure out what it eats and change its water every day, and above all, make sure it stays inside the jar, we'll see."

When their mother arrives home, tired and frustrated from dealing with equally frustrated customers (she's a drivers' license examiner), Kris and Kori rush to her with the jar in hand. "Look what we caught. A leech. And Dad said we could keep it in the kitchen."

That's not what I said, but it's too late. There's nothing I can say now to undo the damage although I try.

Dinner isn't the same with the leech on the counter where Kori's water glass belongs. Kori is mesmerized by the leech's gyrations. She ignores her dinner as she watches the leech stretch, then contract as it clings to the glass jar.

Kori's mother, though, utters the same phrases in the same tone of voice as my mother uttered for days after I sat a nightcrawler on her ironing board. I was twelve at the time, that being the summer I dropped a frog down the front of the babysitter's blouse and ended up having to watch my younger brothers and sisters until school started.

If my hearing were better, I'd know what I'm being called. Perhaps it's better I don't know.

After dinner, my wife soaks behind the locked door of the upstairs bathroom. Kathy clears dishes, puts away leftovers, and begins her schoolwork. Kori's fascination with the leech keeps her watching the jar though she's supposed to run the dishwasher. I tie gangions in the living room as I get ready for the upcoming halibut season. And Kris digs worms to feed the leech—she isn't certain leeches eat worms, but worms are cold blooded.

She dumps a handful of "the smallest ones I could find" on the counter, and Kori unscrews the jar lid. I know what their mother will say if she sees worms crawling across the counter where we eat; I wince thinking about the explosion and know I must stop this nonsense. But Kris and Kori's interest in the leech fascinates me.

Rather gingerly, Kori picks up a worm and drops it into the jar. A third the diameter of the leech and half as long, the worm wiggles slowly down through the water. The leech doesn't immediately sense it, and Kori is disappointed. I realize that she expected the leech to take the worm as a trout would. Nevertheless, she keeps watching.

Her patience is rewarded: within five minutes, the leech locates and attacks the earthworm. It grabs one end and sucks the worm into itself much like a child does a spaghetti noodle. Appearing at first to be merely joined end-to-end, the leech slowly becomes fatter as the worm grows shorter.

Kori drops a second worm into the jar, but the leech seems uninterested. The worm falls beside the leech and actually entwines itself around the leech for a moment. But apparently having eaten its fill, the leech swaps ends, stretches across the jar and clings to the opposite side.

"Get that worm outta there," I tell Kori, "before it drowns. You're gonna have enough problems keeping the water changed without anything rotting in the jar."

Kori isn't about to retrieve the worm with her fingers; she isn't convinced the leech only attacks cold-blooded animals. So before attempting to remove the worm, she confers with Kris, who has corralled the worms on the counter. They diligently study the problem, gravely analyze solutions, and decide the best way to retrieve the worm is with a dinner fork. But when the leech clings to the fork tines, they tell me that if I want the worm out, I can take it out. The leech is shaken loose from the fork and the lid goes back on the jar.

I laugh. But when I rise in the morning, the earthworm is no longer in the jar, and the leech, hanging from the perforated lid, is visibly larger.

The leech swings, stretches, contracts, swims from one side of the jar to the other. One minute it looks like a piece of licorice candy sucked until its limp and soft; the next, like a length of living rubber. Kori faithfully changes water daily as weeks slip into a month. She now digs worms herself. Kristel is surprised by how fast the leech grows—it triples in size as it becomes a kitchen fixture. Even my wife's frequent complaints about it lose their sting. But I'm more concerned about the upcoming halibut season than I am about fly tying. When it's apparent that the leech has outgrown its glass house, I tell Kori, "Get rid of it [Kori has named it, but I never remember what] before you even think about asking for a bigger jar."

Although she says nothing, she can't hide her disappointment. Tears form in the corners of her eyes. Her hands tremble. Kris volunteers to go with her to release it back into Dark Lake, but that only makes the situation worse. And I almost have her get a gallon jar from the basement.

She's eleven years old, and I can't believe she'd cry over a leech. She still won't put her hand in the water with it.

"What if it doesn't want to be free?" Kris asks.

"Don't make a big deal outta this. Just dump it in and come back."

They go together, Kris leading, Kori carrying the jar. But Kris returns without her sister.

"What happened?"

"We waded out and turned the jar over in the lake. It swam out, then turned around and swam back in. Can we keep it?"

"It was probably confused."

"But, Dad, it likes being in the jar. Leeches only eat once or twice a year in the wild—and something's always trying to eat them."

"You've kept it long enough. If it gets eaten, it gets eaten."

They're gone hours, and I begin to worry about them. Eventually, though, they return with the jar empty of water but with the two inches of hard packed sand still in its bottom, the

sediment from nearly two months of adding a few grains of sand a day. In case the jar is needed again, Kori sticks it into the dishwasher with the sand still in the bottom. But that's another story.

* * *

"ROAST BEEF"

Growing up, I never liked fish. I don't know if my dislike stemmed from how Mom cooked it, or if from an association of fish with poverty. After Dad died, meat became scarce. Our diet became pancakes, and macaroni and cheese. The only meat we had was the occasional fish either my brother Ben or I caught. At first those fish were trout, then salmon. Ben and I kept salmon darker than we should have. We kept fish as dark as the steelhead anglers routinely lug home from Idaho's Clearwater River. Some of those dark fish were smoked; many were steaked. And while Mom didn't mind eating those dark fish, I knew how much they had deteriorated since entering the river.

As I became a better fisherman I brought home brighter and brighter fish, but I still didn't want to eat them. I didn't like fish. My tastes in food were, I suspect, culturally formed. I liked peanut butter and cheese and chicken fried steak; and fish, even salmon, was a foreign taste.

I both married and went to work in the pulpmill when I was eighteen. I worked rotating shifts; and on graveyard shift on weekends, Rod Hammer, a boiler fireman, would organize fish fries. Potatoes, salad, pan-fried trout. When I worked graveyard shift with Rod, I was asked to supply the trout. By this time, my skills with a flyrod had improved significantly.

In oil hot enough to smoke, Rod fried those trout only until their upside-eye turned white. Amidst steam pipes insulated with asbestos and long panelboards of charts, gauges and dials; with the recovery boiler behind us, and with night breezes pushing the smell of the Weyerhaeuser tower through open doors (that characteristic pulpmill smell), a dozen of us who were fighting

ourselves to stay awake would feast on fried potatoes and fish, with just enough salad on our plates to provide an excuse for ladling bleu cheese salad dressing over everything.

On those spring and summer nights, in a companionship of men, I discovered that fish shouldn't taste fishy, that when cooked hot and quick trout shouldn't be shunned as I had been doing since soggy trout was the alternative to macaroni and cheese. I actually began to look forward to these fish fries.

I began keeping steelhead instead of giving them all away. Salmon came next: my wife first froze steaks, then filets, then finally whole fish. She canned filleted chunks. And fish became a regular part of our diet before we, like the salmon returning to coastal streams, migrated to Alaska.

For the five years we lived on the Kenai, we ate more salmon than red meat. So when I sold my shop in 1979, bought a boat and began to fish commercially for halibut, fish for every meal seemed normal. Although Kathy literally cut her teeth on venison, Kris and Kori ate mostly salmon or halibut through their formative years.

I didn't think about how much fish we ate until one rainy, winter day on Kodiak when Kori, then nine, looked up at her mother and pleadingly asked, "Isn't there anyway you can make fish taste like roast beef?" I went hunting that afternoon.

* * *

A minister of a Boise congregation objected to the connotations the noun "potluck" might or might not have. He insisted that in his church, shared community dinners would be called "Covered Dish Affairs." He instructed his deaconesses to make sure luck played no part in what was brought to church dinners. His intention was to elevate the status of these dinners above that of chili or spaghetti feeds.

When I first heard his reference to covered dish affairs, the phrasing "his church" struck me as odd. But I let the phrase pass

since after many years in Alaska, I had become used to "potluck" being used as a verb for how, each spring, to dispose of a freezer full of dead salmon. I don't jest. A person potlucked his or her frozen salmon any time after the oils in the fish turned rancid. It was criminally and morally wrong to store salmon for the last months of winter in the city garbage dump; that was wanton waste. Responsible individuals developed recipes for potlucking salmon at covered dish affairs, while hoping his or her dish would be left out warm for long enough it should be fed to the dogs when brought home.

On the Peninsula, reds or sockeye salmon return to the Kenai River by the hundreds of thousands, but on even years pinks return by the millions. I arrived on the Kenai in 1974, a pink year. While I had never before caught a pink, I had caught tons of chinooks [kings], silvers and steelhead, the catching of which requires some degree of skill. Along the Oregon Coast, the only stream I knew of that had a small run of pinks was Little Nestucca Creek (one tributary of the Yaquina River had a small run of sockeyes, which was/is/remains, I believe, unknown to Fish and Game, so other streams could have small runs of pinks).

Pinks or humpies are little salmon, three or four pounds apiece, with some males reaching seven pounds. They are commercial fodder for seiners and setnetters. They lack the mystique of steelhead or Atlantic salmon; they are not salmon a person brags about catching. But they are determined fighters, determined to return to spawn in any flowing water. At Kodiak, I saw one, its eyes pecked out by gulls, crossing a damp lawn, following the flow of a garden hose. But they deteriorate quickly, their deterioration caused by hormones regardless of whether they have reached freshwater. Their bellies turn white; their backs turn green; and the males developed the exaggerated hump which gives them their name, Humpback salmon. Their flesh lacks, even before their change, the intense coloring of reds or silvers; so once their change begins, their flesh lightens even more and softens. In freshwater, as tablefare, they are not worthy of being called salmon. But I have seen such

"watermarked" pinks on ice in an Albertson's and in a Kroger's meat case, both times far from where they were caught.

But the Kenai River full of pink salmon is a lure that catches even experienced fishermen. I was no exception. When I encountered the Kenai full of pinks, bank to bank, a hookup every cast or nearly so, I couldn't resist: I brought home my six salmon a day until there wasn't room enough in the freezer for a moose steak. And I wasn't alone. Every member of the Kenai Church of God had likewise filled their freezer with pinks. These were all watermarked fish, cheechako fare. They should have been left to spawn undisturbed. And their soft flesh certainly didn't improve any with seven, eight, nine months of cold storage.

Yes, if our collective consciences would have allowed we should have fed all of those dead salmon to bears when they emerged from hibernation spring 1975 . . . it is possible the reason bears never developed freezers is they know what salmon tastes like in the spring.

In fairness to the women of the Kenai Church of God, it was all their husbands' fault: if Peninsula husbands didn't shackle their wives with freezers full of dead salmon that must be recycled before bright Kings began to run in May, then maybe more spaghetti and lasagna would have been brought to church dinners.

I didn't realize until I had been on the Kenai for a few years that we, as a church, never had summer or fall communal dinners. Get-togethers always began occurring about when the oils in summer-caught and frozen salmon started turning rancid. That was when to begin potlucking your salmon. Pinks are the first that needed to go. On odd years when there were few pinks in the Kenai, get-togethers would be delayed a few weeks until kings and silvers were inedible. And only commercial fishermen who hadn't put up pinks or silvers for their own use ever potlucked reds (sockeyes).

The first church get-together I attended in Alaska was in the spring of 1975. Four rows of four, 4x8 foot tables heavily loaded with salmon dishes somehow magically appeared. If my calculations

are anywhere near correct, that was approximately a thousand square feet of salmon in loafs, in casseroles, in cream sauces, in fritters, in disguise, salmon plain, salmon steaks on herb bread, salmon about every way it can be fixed except fresh. And my wife contributed her share of salmonfare—she tried to hide her casserole on the second table of row three, but it was there waiting for her when we got ready to leave, hours later.

There is an art to potlucking salmon: the art is in disguising the fish so the dish looks like something edible. Lasagna for example. Even spaghetti and meat balls. I had good luck one year with a taco salad. But church members were as smart as they appeared. If they were fooled into trying a pan of salmon lasagna one get-together, they avoided all pans of lasagna next time. But a few fellows would always sucker on pots of chili (I think they tried the different pots of chili for the hot peppers they couldn't otherwise get at home, and it was worth tolerating a little potlucked salmon to sample good peppers in Alaska, a state where misplaced Texans linger like spindrift on river banks).

The real breakthrough in potlucking salmon came when the Kenai and Anchorage Church[es] of God began catering a free barbecue to Outside visitors all Sunday afternoon during the Feast of Tabernacles. Most years, Feast occurred early enough in the fall that a fellow could potluck his salmon and still have time to refill his freezer with Interior caribou or deer from Kodiak. And Outside visitors seemed to think they were getting a treat when they were served as much potlucked salmon as they wanted.

After five years, I left Kenai for Kodiak and Unalaska—both islands have pinks runs every year. I tried hard to avoid catching pinks, but every so often I would kill one accidently and would have to bring it home. It would get tossed in the freezer and forgotten; it would still be there in spring.

Once I left Kenai, I was often asked, "Don't you miss being in a church area?"

One reason I didn't return to Kenai when I left was that I didn't need everybody knowing my business. But I never felt

comfortable saying, *No, I don't miss the gossip*. I should miss assembling together with others of like mind. I should miss getting together with friends. I should even miss fellowshipping with a deacon who didn't understand authority the way I did.

But we were receiving sermon tapes, and on Kodiak, we had a steady stream of deer hunters staying with us on and off for five months of the year. Then there were halibut fishermen in the spring. We had company almost every week of the year. So I would tell whomever asked if I missed being in a church area that, "When I start missing Kenai, I just go to the freezer, rummage around until I find a dead Humpy, the more freezer burned the better," and they would start laughing and never let me finish what I was going to say.

* * *

THE FIBREGLAS SHOE

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe—
Sailed on a river of crystal light
Into a sea of dew.
—Eugene Fields, *Wynken, Blynken, & Nod.*

Dave and Kristel sleep, he in the same grimy coveralls he's worn for two days, she in the top bunk because she claimed it first. I hold the RPMs at 1500, pass two longliners working the seventy fathom gut joining Izhut to Marmot Bay, then leave Peril Cape behind, and run for Midarm Island at the mouth of Kitoi Bay . . . Izhut Bay is shaped like a mitten with Kitoi being its thumb. I fished there in 1979, so I have some idea where I want to lay gear. I also know that the other side of the island has better fishing this early in the year.

The feel of the water changes, awakens Dave.

* * *

May, 1983. When Dave says, "Fifty-fifty split, I put up the boat, you the gear," I nod yes although I know better. I want to go halibut fishing this year, want to remain in the fishery in case of limited entry. And after being confined indoors all winter, I want to feel the bow plow into a sea, to smell the salt air, hear the gulls, see puffins, seals, the hold full of iced fish. I don't care that my gear is on the bottom of the Bering Sea along with my boat.

"We'll need one more person," Dave adds.

"Kris wants to go to summer camp."

He agrees that Kristel, my twelve year old daughter, will probably be all the help needed so everything is settled. Season is a month away. That gives me enough time to tie gear—I can charge skates of groundline, hooks, snaps and gangions at the local hardware store. One major problem remains, though: Dave doesn't have a boat. He doesn't locate one for a week.

"How much repair does it need?" I ask.

"The owner's gonna change the engine. That's about it."

I know what changing a car engine involves, and I pulled the Jimmie out of my boat; so skeptical, I ask, "When?"

"He'll get the engine when he gets back from herring fishing, a new six cylinder 'Suzi.'"

If I hadn't already bought ten groundlines, I'd tell him I can't go. "When does he get back?"

"His wife called him last night. He's in Togiak, and gonna stay a while longer."

It takes a week to sail from Togiak to Kodiak, and most of another week to make ferry connections to Anchorage and back. I doubt that there'll be a second halibut opening. The first one is six days long; so we can't afford to miss any of it. I remind Dave that there was only one opening last year.

"I'll have the old engine out of the *Angela* before he gets back so we only have to drop the new one in."

Still working in the shop, I say, "I won't have time to help—"

"I know, but we'll make it. You'll see."

Bouquets of pink buoys sprout from the gunwales of every other boat in town, or so it seems. Salmon seines disappear; levelwind reels take their place. Crews hastily nail together baiting tables and hook racks. And the converted seiners raft four and five abreast the full length of the transit floats. Then the schooners arrive. White. Fishing fixed gear. From Seattle. Ketchikan. Juneau. Seward. They pass down the channel with neither bow nor stern wake. The opening's near. Only *Angela* and a handful of derelict

hulls remain in Fuller's boatyard. I go there daily to check Dave's progress, but seldom see him.

Aqua green, a narrow seiner with a cramped cabin and a translucent patch just above the waterline of its bow, the *Angela* is really a decked-over, thirty foot skiff that's too big to fish as a skiff and too small to weather much of a sea. Its engine compartment steals half of its uninsulated fish hold. Its bulwarks are low and without railings. It has no davit.

Covered with grime that no advertised detergent will ever remove, Dave emerges from the fish hold today. "Ain't she pretty?"

I don't answer, but suspect that any halibut with a wiggle of self respect would rather be eaten by sand fleas than found dead in the little seiner's hold.

"The owner ain't back yet. They had another opening."

"That's bad—"

"No. This way he'll have enough for the engine. Without the opening, he would've been short."

The six cylinder 'Suzi requires a shorter prop shaft which, in turn, requires a new shaftlog and Cutlass bearing. The larger engine swings a bigger wheel—a prop with more pitch has to be ordered from Anchorage. The 'Suzi is considerably heavier than the four cylinder it replaces; so heavier engine stringers have to be scabbed onto the keelson. The mast has to be raised, and brackets and guards welded for the new muffler. But the welding shop runs days behind. The keelcooler needs to be replaced, but is only flushed. And the evening before the opening, almost as an afterthought, Fuller's mobile crane lifts *Angela* off the oil drums on which the boat has set for more than two years.

After Dave worries the air out of the fuel lines, the 'Suzi starts. The exhaust manifold heats; I smell scorched paint, but remain on the dock. Dave looks up, and beams. Man against time. He won on this occasion.

"Meet me at the fuel dock." He deftly throws off bow and stern lines. *Angela* heads inbound, down the channel, while one longliner after another chugs out, heading for their fishing grounds.

Underway, with its empty stern high in the water, the little seiner looks like a woman's patent leather pump, and has the grace of a fibreglas shoe shuffling through mudpuddles.

The bulk plant would've been closed hours ago if it wasn't for the rafts of boats still waiting for fuel. It seems every boat anywhere near Kodiak has either just bought fuel, is buying fuel, or is waiting to buy. Appearing naked (the other boats bristle with gear), *Angela* joins those waiting.

Although we can charge bait at the cannery I usually sell to, there's no ice available until morning. Dave calls other canneries. Same story.

"We'll be all night getting out of town, Dave. We may as well wait."

He scowls, but he knows how much remains to be done.

I pay for the fuel. A hundred gallons. A hundred dollar bill, plus the ones in my front pocket. I charge ten cases of frozen herring at sixteen dollars a case. My wife hands me the change from the hundred dollars she spent on boat groceries. And Dave tries to figure out why the hydraulic pump won't work.

"It's backwards, Dave."

He disagrees, but I haven't the time to argue or to look at the pump. Only today did I tie the last of twelve hundred hooks, and splice eyes in buoy lines; so I still have to bolt a jerryrigged hook rack to the ankle-high bulwarks, and wedge a plywood baiting table between the reel and the stern.

Kristel carries her sleeping bag aboard and crawls in the top bunk. Dave dismantles the hydraulic pump. And I stash gear anchors, snap buoys to the handrail atop the cabin, and throw groundlines into the hold (I can't wind them onto the reel until Dave solves the problem with the hydraulic pump). I hang our open-faced blocks, and clip coils of buoy line to the reel's framework, stow extra V-belts and a spare roller chain beneath the cabin steps while Kristel snores.

"I know this pump's okay," Dave says after reassembling it the third time. He's been twisting wrenches without a break for the past forty hours, and wants to take a sledgehammer to the pump.

"I told you, the pump's running backwards."

"It can't be. It's the same place it was on the other motor." He pauses. "You're right. This 'Suzi doesn't turn the same direction."

Turning the pump around requires cutting a notch in the engine stringer. He goes to the boatyard to get a saw while I roundup extension cords. Fishing is determination welded to ingenuity by sleeplessness: it's dawn by the time we get the hydraulic pump working. Season will open in six hours, and we're still in port with radios we haven't checked out. But Dave works on the radios while I run the boat to the cannery. I don't like buying "green" ice [ice that has only recently been frozen melts rapidly], but haven't a choice. The schooners emptied cannery icehouses days ago.

We take on three tons, then plow down the channel as steam whistles start the canneries working. We're joined by skiffs and jitneys that plan to lay gear near Buoy Four, but we're headed for Afognak's Izhut Bay, beyond the range of most skiffs but a bay small enough not to attract larger, more efficient vessels.

The season's two hours old when we enter Izhut Bay, three hours old by the time I drop anchor in a cove behind Midarm Island. The boxes of herring are still frozen. To pry individual fish loose without breaking or mashing them seems tougher than freeing assets frozen by the IRS without paying the owed taxes. Dave's patience fails, and Kristel emerges from the cabin to tell him he's doing it all wrong.

Leaning spruce look at themselves in the water as whiffs of fog cling like moss to their boughs. The cove is as tranquil as a farmpond; only the dollar-size jelly fish remind me that this is salt water.

The point of the hook through the eye, Kristel tells Dave before she disappears into the cabin to make herself a sandwich. I grab a coil of groundline, read the attached card and wonder about the phrase *unwind against the sun*. Translation: uncoil the tarred line counterclockwise. I didn't do that with one groundline in 1979, and the skate never laid straight.

Kristel helps Dave bait hooks. A thousand of them. So another two hours slip by before we're ready to lay our first groundline.

The two longliners we passed on our way into Izhut are picking their gear. Through binoculars, Dave sees them gaff a halibut longer than the men are tall. He takes the wheel. Apparently figuring the engine's broken in, he pushes the throttle forward, increasing RPMs to 2300 . . . the engine slows as if trying to seize.

He flips the shut-down lever, jumps down alongside the engine, and pulls the dipstick. The engine has oil, plenty of it. Perplexed, he checks this and that, but doesn't find anything wrong. He mutters something about ten thousand dollars, and after a long pause, restarts the engine, which now idles smoothly, and seems all right. He increases RPMs. 1000. 1250. 1500. No hint of trouble.

But as the RPMs climb to 2000, the engine begins to die, again sounding to both of our experienced ears like it's trying to seize.

We drift with the tide as Dave stares blankly at the still-white 'Suzi. Spotting the baited hooks, gulls hang in the air behind our stern. My presence keeps them from landing.

"This is what the four cylinder did that was in here, the reason why he changed engines. It's like something grabs hold of the prop and stops the engine. But everything's new. Engine. Reduction gear. Shaft. Bearings. So what the hell's goin on?"

"She ran fine all the way here. Slow, but okay."

We decide to lay gear where we are. The idea is to clip a baited hook to the groundline, one every eighteen feet, a hundred hooks to the skate. Although Dave's crewed on boats since a teenager, he's never before fished snap-on gear. And there's an art to setting hooks, an art not unlike playing pickup sticks with porcupine quills at ten miles an hour in a bouncing boat. He has difficulty separating gangions. He can't get the rhythm, not with four hours sleep in the last two and a half days. And I have trouble following the ten fathom contour. It doesn't parallel the cape, and *Angela*'s depth finder flashes erratically so I don't know when to believe it. With the boat running at only two-thirds throttle and Dave and I having

problems, we take twice as long as we should to get seven skates and six hundred hooks down. In fact, the first skate has been down long enough to pull before the seventh is laid.

Dave and I trade places. I snag the buoy, engage the reel, pick the first snap, and turn to hand it to Kristel . . . she's asleep. Not for long, though. Standing in the hold, she takes gangions; knocks off the old bait, starfish, or whatever the hook has caught other than halibut; and throws the hook in the tub, snap over the edge. We catch halibut. Nine fish on the first two skates. Five hundred pounds. But we catch mostly cod for which we have no market. So after saving enough for dinner and to bait a turn of gear, we have to throw the rest back even through they're dead. And watching Dave kick a hundred or more cod, averaging five pound apiece, over the stern bothers me. I suspect it bothers Dave, too, but it's a non-subject. Just part of fishing.

After pulling the seven skates (and keeping more cod), we head around the cape. Dave and Kristel bait; I run the boat. We lay gear on the outside of the cape, and the laying goes so smooth that when Dave throws the last anchor over, I turn *Angela* around, and slowly head for the cove behind Midarm Island where I dress and ice halibut while Dave tries to figure out what's wrong with the engine. There isn't much either of us can do, isn't much we can check besides fuel—and the Racor filter is full and clean, so water isn't the problem.

"There's something wrong with the venting of those aft tanks," I say. "I've seen chainsaws behave this way."

He checks both tanks. Their vents are clean, and seem large enough.

"Fuel lines must be too small. Can't keep up with demand." He says as he restarts the engine—we'll try to pick the gear one more time before sunset.

But before I can get the anchor pulled, steam bellows from the engine compartment, and continues to billow as Dave dives alongside the engine. Like a curious bystander at a seven alarm fire, Kris asks, "Why is all that smoke coming from the motor?"

Neither Dave nor I answer her as we search for where the head gasket blew. That isn't the problem, though. Dave begins laughing insanely. "Nobody tightened the hose clamps on the keelcooler," he grins sheepishly.

I hand him our five-gallon jug of drinking water. He returns it empty. "That should hold us awhile."

"We can get water at the hatchery." I nod towards Kitoi Bay. "And can lay the rest of our gear in there so it's not in our way."

The temperature gauge pegs its needle when the engine starts. "I'll run this pig," Dave says. "If she's gonna burn up, I'll do it." He says more, but though expressive, his words aren't coherent. And Kristel asks why are we going so slow.

* * *

"Where are you going, and what do you wish?"
The old moon asked the three.
"We have come to fish for the herring fish
That live in this beautiful sea

—*Wynken, Blynken & Nod*

We fish around the clock Thursday and to dark Friday evening. Dave has been up four days, I three. And keeping Kristel awake has become impossible—she falls asleep between snaps, while baiting hooks, even between swings while beating starfish off hooks. But sunset Friday begins the Sabbath: we'll have twenty-four hours to recuperate. To sleep mostly. So we want to get out of the surge, but not run as far as Midarm Island. Thus, we cautiously enter a nameless bay behind Peril Cape, and see a beachcombing cross fox scamper into the spruce timber that grow to water's edge.

The bay appears to end, but our chart shows another bay behind this one. Dave noses the *Angela* around the rocks blocking the narrow channel connecting the two bays—and we enter a surreal seascape. The inner bay is pale green, milky, and quiet. Very, very quiet. We see no birds, no otters, no seals. Naked, black trees stand

like skeletons on the small island we pass. We slide over a rock unmarked by kelp. I doubt we could enter the bay at low tide, but the chart shows seven fathoms of water ahead so we continue.

Dave shuts the engine down behind the second island. Neither of us can interpret the erratic flashes of the fathometer. I slowly lower the anchor. We're okay. We're in enough water we won't go dry over the tide change.

Kristel cooks while Dave and I hurriedly dress halibut. The hold's half full, would be full if the ice weren't melting so fast. We're almost out of ice; we'll have to return to Kodiak Sunday.

Dave turns on the deck lights, and I realize we're not bothered by bugs: usually no-see-ums attack us this close to land. Uneasy, I feel I'm trespassing. Neither the surge, nor the wind touches the bay. We seem to be the only life here.

Kristel calls me to eat. I dip a bucket of water, wash my hands, and slosh down the deck. As the gurry runs over the stern, the bay begins to boil. Behind us. Off each side. The water churns as if it were suddenly heated to a rolling boil.

"Herring! Tons of 'em. Hundreds of tons."

"This is why we're catching so many cod," I say, awed by the spawning ritual, barely visible in the failing twilight.

Dave watches with his mouth open, hands bloody. "If the owner knew about this, he wouldn't have to go to Togiak."

"You gonna tell him?"

"No. He goes as much for the trip as for the fish."

I understand that . . . the herring are still active when I go to bed. Dave says they didn't stop until just before dawn—he stayed up and watched them. As a result, he gets only six hours sleep before I pull anchor Saturday evening, and we again lay gear.

* * *

All night long their nets they threw
To the stars in the twinkling foam—

Then down from the skies came the wooden shoe,
Bringing the fishermen home

—*Wynken, Blynken & Nod*

I've never heard of a wooden shoe with an engine that overheated, nor one that starved for fuel. We didn't cast nets of gold or silver, though our gear cost plenty. The sea we fished wasn't crystal dew: we had to go to the hatchery for fresh water to fill our water jug and the keelcooler. But we filled in a previously unanswered question about where herring spawned, and we filled the hold with halibut. After expenses, we made more than three thousand dollars for the six days we fished. As long as we kept engine RPMs under 1500, *Angela* gave us no problems after the first day—except when I plowed into a big swell leaving Izhut. The compass bounced off the bridge and rolled across the deck. Its screws had rusted in-two. I couldn't trust it on the twenty-four mile run across Marmot from Peril Cape to Buoy Four. But then, like the wooden shoe, *Angela* seemed to know its way home, and wasn't distracted by the porpoise that crossed and recrossed beneath its bow nor by the otters that waved.

* * *

FROM THE MARGINS

While Nixon was being swept into office for a second term and Georgia-Pacific was logging buffer strips C.D. Johnson had left along Oregon's Siletz River, I visited abandoned farmsteads throughout the Coast Range. I was searching for sound apple trunks, trees that I could fall, plank and later use for muzzleloading rifle stock blanks. I didn't want to cut trees still bearing fruit: those trees lured deer to these isolated orchards, usually all that remained of farmsteads where one or two generations of Anglo-Europeans had, for a season, wrestled a few acres of marginal pasture from the cold rain forest.

Sitka spruce, western red cedar, western hemlock, Douglas fir—these softwoods, three, four, sometimes five meters in diameter and often more than fifty meters high, blanketed the windward slopes of Oregon's Coast Range when Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific. They grew close to one another, forming dark forests that represented the conclusion of a botanical cycle that had begun with nitrogen-fixing lupine and alders taking root on rocky ridges. Both Douglas fir and western hemlock grew in large, nearly single specie blocks, their shade blocking sunlight from reaching forest floors. There was little underbrush, and the soil of these floors, like that of Amazon rain forests, was thin, acidic and usually poor. Even coastal river bottoms lacked the deep, rich loam of the Willamette Valley.

Prior to Anglo-European contact, Salish Indians, in permanent and semi-permanent villages, inhabited the river bottoms, congregating around the mouths of major salmon streams while taking most of their sustenance from the water. They, like Lewis and Clark later, found the dense rain forests nearly devoid of game.

Elk, never numerous, were more abundant than deer, and more difficult to kill. Bears were thought by Coastal peoples to be almost kin; and once away from the few burned clearings, small game was scarce, and often, non-existent. The Coast would have been a hungry landscape if not for salmon and herring, shellfish and seals.

The Salish peoples, however, practiced limited agriculture, cultivating camas and tobacco after burning portions of the forests, a difficult task in northern rain forests as Baranof learned when trying to clear a defensive perimeter along Alaska's Sitka Sound. Stands of bastard growth timber suggest that fires as large as Oregon's Tillamook Burn did occur prior to Anglo-European contact, but these fires were most likely caused by summer lightning strikes. Even if Salish peoples wanted to burn large tracts to improve game habitat, it seems unlikely that they could have; and with only digging sticks, they never had very many acres in cultivation. So these ancient, rain forests were nearly intact when a second-generation of Oregon farmers left the Willamette Valley, crossing coastal mountain passes with their axes and oxen. They were armed with a Congressional declaration that these forests belonged to whomever was able to subdue them, and though they encountered some Salish resistance, their real enemy was the darkness of these forests.

The need for light to sustain life is universal: sunlight isn't needed just for subsistence agriculture, whether practiced by Anglo-European pioneers or by Amerindian peoples, but it's also necessary for the browse and pasture that supports game and livestock. Every tree felled, then, became for these pioneer farmers a small victory over a common enemy—darkness. And when buyers began shipping logs to California mills, complete victory was merely a matter of time.

Darkness, however, is also metaphorical. I still, twenty years after Nixon's reelection, find Watergate less troubling than Georgia-Pacific's logging of buffer strips once the corporation learned, from research they paid for, that these strips provided necessary shade for salmon alvins, fry and premigrants. But I think most often

about those abandoned farmsteads I visited that fall of Nixon's reelection, particularly about one: the Van Heinen place.

John Van Heinen, the age that my dad, then deceased, would have been, first took me to see his parents' farmstead a dozen years before I returned looking for stock blanks. We emerged from a stand of large second-growth fir to find, in the distance, a magnificent barn of pegged, hewn cedar beams and long, hand split shakes alone on a knoll like a castle on a hill. The unpainted barn appeared like a vacant Camelot, expecting the return of knights and ladies-in-waiting. It was surrounded by open meadows that somehow seemed magical.

More than thirty meters long and thirteen meters wide, the barn once housed a team of logging horses, blooded mares and gelded stallions descended from lines bred to carry armored knights into battle at Flanders and along the Rhine. I almost felt the presence of the team as I followed the scraped lane towards the barn, which retained the deep red-brown color of cedar heartwood.

The barn was two, two-and-a-half stories high with a partial hay loft; its beams ran its full length and width. Inside, a few rusting tools, most too worn to salvage, and a leather horse collar, slick from mildew, hung over a cross beam.

Milking stanchions, also of clear grain cedar split into two-by and four-by lumber, were worn smooth, and low piles of manure looked more like soil than dung. I felt like I belonged here. A few cows and a market for cream, I knew how to milk. I could take a living from a subsistence farm, milking a few Shorthorns for needed cash.

Grass and bracken ferns, clover and alders—the hilltop meadows were no longer bound by the sagging barbwire that clung like last year's pole bean stalks to leaning posts. And the barn wasn't mine. Nor does any dairy still buy single milk cans of cream. Nor was I mature enough to keep the forest pushed back, to plow under the seedling alders reclaiming the meadows, to take a crop from the marginal soil. The moment of magic passed.

The two-story house where John and his brothers were born was across a swale and next to the orchard. Apples, pears, quince—I don't how many varieties of introduced fruit trees were in the orchard. I knew, though, from the tracks and the number of half eaten apples on the ground, that a lot of deer, some of them good-sized, frequented the orchard. So while John, out of sight, bucked up a wood log across a meadow, I sat in the springhouse where cream was once kept cool, my rifle across my knees, waiting for evening and possibly, a deer to sneak into the orchard. What I didn't see was the absence of tanzy.

I returned to the Van Heinen farmstead my Senior year of high school, this time to get the school counselor a deer. He had been unsuccessful all season. His last chance was the agricultural hunt, either sex within a mile of farm land, the term defined as being ten acres or more of tilled land. Although I knew that by this time the farmstead didn't qualify as agricultural lands, the counselor didn't know, or if he did, he wanted a deer bad enough to ignore the infraction.

I sat the counselor in the springhouse—he filled his tag—and I picked through the rubble of the toppled barn, blown over by the Columbus Day windstorm of a few weeks earlier. Seeing the barn reduced to scattered beams and shingles, I felt a peculiar sort of sadness, almost as if I were surveying the carnage done to Camelot by Saxons and Jutes. Dreams I hadn't wanted to acknowledge were strewn through the persistent alders, which, by this time, were waist high. The farmstead was disappearing; it was being swallowed by the rain forest. Another cycle had begun. The short-lived alders would yield to hemlocks and firs. The meadows, already looking more like fern clearings than farm pastures, would grow closed. In fifty, a hundred years, sunlight would again be blocked out. Deer would be gone. Only memories would remain.

From the Columbus Day storm to Nixon's reelection, ten years passed, not long in the course of even human history, let alone in that of the northern rain forests or of the earth. Yet in those ten years, I married, fathered three daughters, served as a shop steward

in Georgia-Pacific's pulp and paper mill at Toledo, and I opened my own shop, building muzzleloading rifles, lock, stock and barrel. Perhaps most importantly, in that decade I saw a link between mental and physical landscapes, though I didn't then have that language to express the concept. I saw the greed for more production by pulp mill shift foremen translated directly into black-liquor spills, those spills draining into the Yaquina River, killing oysters, clams, crabs, beginning a spiral of death that threatened whole ecosystems. I saw (and as a teenager was a part of) the disregard of game laws that destroyed the salmon runs in Lincoln County's Bear Creek: we gaffed fish on their spawning beds until there wasn't a run. I ran around with fellows who sniped trees across sale lines: any choice tree that would reach the sale-boundary line was cut as if it were part of the sale. These were trees the gypo didn't buy, minor thievery that seemed not to be theft at all but more like not listing all of a person's income on his or her tax form, something that was expected, something everyone does, something no more wrong than what presidents were doing.

Examples of character shortcomings affecting the environment are too numerous to list. Even my cutting apple trees for stock blanks was tainted; for I wasn't buying these trees, nor obtaining permission from the timber companies that bought the abandoned farmsteads at tax sales after starving out their owners. No, I was poaching these trees. I was neither better nor worse than the pulp mill shift foremen who sought a little more production by crowding the capacity of the precipitators and scrubbers until both were plugged, the resulting ash and salt from the recovery boilers killing all of the firs on the hill above the mill there at Toledo. Georgia-Pacific bought the hillside and fell the snags so they wouldn't stand like skylined skeletons pointing bare boughs at the mill.

Neither I nor the foremen thought of ourselves as evil. Rather, we were just doing our jobs, just trying to get by. To us, draft protesters, cowards who wouldn't fight for the country that allowed the freedom to take home a respectable check for an honest day's

work, were what was wrong with the country. It was their attitude, not ours, that was inherently evil—draft protesters and anyone working for the federal government.

I wanted to believe in Camelot, even if it was one without people. But I became disillusioned with big government, with big business, with monomyths and universal goodness. I turned Republican when it looked like Kennedy removed our missiles from Turkey to get Soviet missiles out of Cuba, when I learned of our reprehensible conduct in assuring the Bay of Pigs invasion force of air cover then backing out at the last minute. Billy Sol Estes, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the Plumbers—what was and remains most polluted in our culture is personal integrity at every level of society.

When cutting apple stock blanks now twenty years ago, and in particular, while I climbed the hill to the Van Heinen farmstead, I found tanzy growing wherever sunlight shone, their seed-heavy heads bent low, their necks softened by the rain. There hadn't been any tanzy in this river drainage a decade earlier. I would have noticed if there had been; for tanzy, though having an attractive flower head composed of many small yellow blossoms, is a noxious weed, an import that is poisonous to domestic livestock, that crowds out less vigorous native flowers. To then have it growing on a person's property was illegal, an unenforced and perhaps unenforceable law.

Individual farmers and stump ranchers unsuccessfully fought the spread of tanzy for years. Although they sprayed and mechanically removed plants once or twice a summer, tanzy spread and continues to spread unchecked on state and federal lands, and on the holdings of large timber companies. Individuals' fights against the spread of the weed have been in vain. All a property owner can hope for is to keep the poisonous weed out of his or her calf pasture.

By 1972, tanzy grew among the alders and young firs that had reclaimed Van Heinen's fields, reduced to scattered openings

of a few dozen square meters. It even grew in the sagging springhouse.

The farmstead's house had collapsed. Only the orchard remained. In fact, if I hadn't known of the barn, I wouldn't have thought such a building possible. The tangle of long cedar beams, from trees larger than now exist, was completely overgrown by five-meter high firs, tanzy and blackberries.

I found a rusty shovel, filed short, and a few barn shakes whether from the roof or the sides, I don't know. Nothing more. The barn and the fields were again part of the northern rain forests. If not for the tanzy, the farmstead's impact was no greater than that of a lightning strike. But with the introduction of tanzy, there can be no return to the botanical organization of the previous forest until shade from second-growth firs and hemlocks deprives the underbrush of sunlight, completing the cycle begun with the axes and oxen of pioneer farmers. That, however, won't occur. The retimbered meadows will be relogged long before the tanzy is choked out.

As I hiked around the Van Heinen farmstead, my legs bumping against the soggy tanzy seedheads that incorporated me, unwillingly, into sowing next year's crop, I thought about the injustice of all the work that went into clearing the farmstead being lost. . . . I think the overriding concern of a generation, of my generation, is justice. The civil rights movement was and remains a call for justice. Johnson's Great Society was about justice. The repeal of Blue Laws, which in Oregon occurred while I was in college, was about justice. Clean air, clean water, clean beaches—all are calls for justice. But, as I snapped off a tanzy seedhead and began to break it apart, I saw the futility of attempting to impose justice on others, on society. I also saw that the concept was fuzzy, that justice can never be individually defined, no matter how many seemingly logical arguments are concocted by individuals intent upon imposing their justice on others. It can not be voted on, nor legislated into existence by popularly elected assemblies. It can

only be perceived in how a society's internal landscape is reflected in that society's eternal world.

I realized that day in 1972 when Nixon was triumphant, that the most I could do was to order my life in a just manner, knowing that along the way I would still spread tanzy seeds as I searched for apple trees not already hollowed by age.

* * *

SAVING SALMON

Tom Robinson and I spent many nights together hunting raccoons behind Georgia-Pacific's Ollala Lake before he moved to Corvallis to attend Oregon State. While at Oregon State, he took, for two years, a university-sponsored summer job back on the coast as "go-for" help on a study paid for by Georgia-Pacific to determine the effects of water temperature on salmon and steelhead alvins and pre-migrants, and the effects of logging practices on water temperatures. The job suited Tom perfectly: he was outdoors and not having to work too hard (he had once been my helper in the pulp mill). And he shared with me nearly daily the results of the research project, which are now widely known—in simplified form, the study found that premigrants are stressed and killed as small stream temperatures rise into the mid-sixty degree temperature range. Shade is needed to keep these stream temperatures cool, and leaving a timbered buffer strip a quarter of a mile wide on either side of these small streams is as effective as not logging the basin.

C.D. Johnson left buffer strips along the Siletz River when the company logged North Tract before Georgia-Pacific purchased the company's holdings. Buffer strips made good sense for lots of reasons, including that logging some of the bluffs above the river would cost more than the timber was worth. Leaving a few trees, as far as C.D. Johnson had been concerned, was a small price to pay for controlling erosion and flooding, especially the type of flooding that washed out their logging bridges.

But Georgia-Pacific was a new company, newly formed and new to the Coast: in one paragraph, G-P's history is that of a small southern lumber company buying the holdings of C.D. Johnson

when the Big Six western timber companies were, by not buying, trying to force C. D. Johnson to lower the company's sale price. G-P borrowed short-term money at a high interest rate from an insurance company to make their purchase. Then to change that short-term money into long term indebtedness, they dumped logs on the market, depressing log prices for a decade. Whereas C.D. Johnson had kept their huge sawmill at Toledo operating with three logging sides, G-P opened up twenty-five sides, each side putting out nearly twenty truckloads a day. Roughly a hundred fifty loads a day were leaving North Tract through Valsetz, and another three hundred loads were leaving through the Gorge (i.e., Logsdon & Siletz). The log market was glutted. Log prices fell, fueling the need to also open South Tract. C.D. Johnson figured they had more than fifty years of logging. G-P logged out both tracts in fifteen years. But G-P paid off its short-term indebtedness, then borrowed against the regrowth on clearcut hillsides. Each growing seedling has, what, one-tenth of a board foot in it. Each year it will grow larger so more money can be borrowed against it. But this is now long-term debt, and this money can be used to build pulpmills and plywood mills and buy more timberlands, making a fledgling corporation attractive to investors and creating another self-made American millionaire.

When G-P's logging manager received the preliminary results from the Oregon State study on which Tom was working, he directed that the buffer strips C.D. Johnson had left be logged before the corporation was prevented from doing so by regulations intended to save salmon and steelhead runs. What was ordered was legal but morally wrong. The parties involved knew that. So, yes, I make an accusation of deliberate corporate wrongdoing, stemming from middle management operating within a culture of greed. I'm no treehugger; I know the people involved. I have worked with them, eaten at their tables, and I know in their personal lives they are basically moral people—

Ray Preston was a faller cutting the buffer strip across from Bluejay Creek when a rootwad of a big fir pulled loose, sending it

and him headfirst down the bluff. He landed on his forehead on a lava outcropping. His eye popped out. He was across the Siletz, working alone, cutting that oldgrowth buffer strip as Ray Aires had ordered. He didn't know what to do with his eye—he didn't like staring at himself—so he put his eye back in after brushing the fir needles off it. Then with his saw still idling alongside the stump, he climbed down the remaining cliff face to his thermos and poured himself a cup of coffee. He said the steam from that coffee hurt like hell as it seeped behind his eye. But after a cup, he said he felt a little better so he climbed the rest of the way down to the Siletz River, waded it, and waited alongside the Gorge road until the crummy picked him up a couple of hours later.

Ray got some sight back in that eye, but after that accident, ever so often his mind would shutdown like that of drug addicts. I'd be talking to him and I could see his mind turn off. I would just pause until he turned back on. Then I would resume where I was and he would never know the pause had occurred.

Perhaps this is what happened to G-P. Their corporate conscience turned off for awhile, then turned back on when they donated a few redwoods to an environmental group. The environmentalists were happy, and G-P felt good about themselves, and neither of them ever knew the corporation killed a fish run.

I first fished the upper reaches of the Siletz River in 1965. I knew these upper reaches existed when I was still in high school, but the Gorge road was new and heavily traveled. I didn't have wheels, and my stepfather didn't like ducking log trucks. The extension of the Gorge road was G-P's initial contribution to the demise of the run.

Jim Miller's dad used to own the Lighthouse Texaco station where Highway 101 crossed D-River (the station was right in front of George Calkin's boat shop). The station sold fishing tackle, and Jim's dad was an accomplished fly fisherman. When tourists stopped to ask how fishing was in Devil's Lake, Jim's dad would show these

tourists frozen ten and fifteen pound rainbowed trout he claimed he had only a few days before caught from the lake. But he was a liar. What he showed those fishermen were summer steelhead he had caught in the upper reaches of the Siletz River. He would drive up Drift Creek to the end of the road, then hike over the south side of Cougar Mountain to Gravel Creek, then hike down Gravel Creek and fish the Siletz as far down as Elk Creek. And he caught hundreds of steelhead on these trips using a Spruce fly, an orange Bucktail Caddis, and a Bearpaw, but other than the one or two he ate while camped alongside the Siletz, he only brought back a single fish which he would use to help sell tackle to day fishermen in Devil's Lake.

When I first started regularly fishing the upper reaches of the Siletz, I went away from flies because of how hard it was to keep premigrant salmon and steelhead off them. I fished hardware, mostly wobbling spoons with hooks too large for smolts to impale themselves. I wasn't a fly fishing purist, and no matter how gently I released a fly-caught premigrant, some of them didn't make it. Behind every fisherman then fishing the Upper Siletz were dead premigrants. But there were hundreds or even thousands of them in every hole. Neither I, nor anyone with whom I fished envisioned not seeing swarms of premigrants chase a lure or fly.

However, the buffer strips had all been logged by the summer of 1971, the summer when I caught one or more steelhead a day for the whole summer. And it was then when I noticed something I hadn't before: many dead adult steelhead. These were not fish that had been caught and roughly handled. Rather, they had died from either lack of oxygen, or because of high water temperatures in the long, shallow runs of the Siletz's upper reaches. These were almost always bright, ten pound or larger fish. These were the larger breeders of a summer run of steelhead almost as large as winter run fish. These were the fish needed to sustain the run.

I knew the Siletz was in trouble, but I had troubles of my own. I caught enough summer fish in 1972 and 1973 for us to eat

steelhead whenever we wanted, but I was too busy with a business that demanded fulltime attention to worry about diminishing numbers of premigrants.

It wasn't until I returned to Oregon in 1987 that I felt shock: there wasn't a premigrant to be seen in any drift I fished that day I spent on Siletz's upper reaches with Robin Karnes, an outdoor writer from Newport. There wasn't a premigrant under Red Bridge, the hole on Lincoln County's Salmon River in which I plunked for chinook when twelve and thirteen years old. There wasn't an adult fish either. Both rivers were nearly devoid of life. And I felt as if I had been betrayed, as if I had never seen anything as sad, as if a part of me were dead.

Mom used to tell about her dad, Grandpa Howland, describing the flocks of passenger pigeons that migrated over his childhood Michigan farm, the sky black with birds, the flocks taking hours to pass, their extinction blamed on hunters. I understand that a bird virus actually killed most of those pigeons, that hunters just postmarked their doom. Regardless, their loss diminished everyone who had seen those flocks. A little bit of each witness' spirit died with those pigeons.

Siletz's salmon and steelhead runs aren't yet dead, but they are certainly very sick. Perhaps a virus will be blamed for killing them, the retrovirus that hides within the motives of decent human beings, the virus that breeds *greed*.

Jim Miller's dad died years ago, as has Jim. Jim's daughter didn't know her grandfather, and I doubt she tells stories of him fishing the upper Siletz when the only way there was to swim or walk. Perhaps a few people still remember the Lighthouse Texaco station there at D-River, and perhaps some of them remember seeing those rainbowed steelhead. My stepfather stopped at the station once, and I remember seeing two fish, almost white from frost, both about eight pounds apiece. I remember being told the fish came from Devil's Lake, but then, my stepfather told of gaffing silvers at night in the shallows where D-River runs across the beach. So I believed that those fish came from the lake.

But when I saw those two frozen fish, there was no longer a run of silvers in D-River. The breeders had been killed. Their gravel redds had become front lawns, and the lake was full of bass and weeds. I hope the day never comes when the only Siletz steelhead left is covered with white frost.

* * *

UGAK BAY

1. Weathered In—Ugak Bay in November

Driven water races in walls, crests smoking. Waves higher than houses slam into barrier rocks, bury them, then muscle the cape, tossing trees and kelp against its face. Wrapping around the headlands, the wind bangs against the beach, bends grasses and breaks sedges. Blasting sand stings stunted cottonwoods. Alders snap. The bowline of my Zodiac snaps as the tethered raft swings in the lagoon.

Combers roll up the creek and run to the first beaver lodge. The creek seems to flow backwards. The lagoon floods the flats on each side. A driftwood log three feet thick rocks in the wind. And across the lagoon, otters tracks blow away.

Rain pelts the unpainted sides of our cabin, pushes through the soaked plywood and drips inside. The ceiling drips. My coat drips. So do Glenn's and Lorrel's. Huddled around the drum stove, flakes of rust popping loose, the three of us listen to spruce boughs flap like wings.

In the spruce grove between the cabin and the surf, our deer, pushed by the wind, spin right, then left. When we found big bucks on the valley floor, we should've known a storm was due. Instead of loading up and getting off the beach, we stayed a night, stretched now to four days.

The size of a canner kettle and supported by four soup cans, the drum stove looks like a sieve holding fire. Glenn checks the thermometer on his zipper pull: 48^0. "No wonder I'm cold." He shifts positions, buttons up his vest and asks, "Any cookies left?"

Glenn, a minister, nervous and soft-spoken, has never been away from a telephone this long before. He wants to call home; wants to check that the meeting hall will be ready for Sabbath; wants to arrange for a substitute speaker. But the nearest phone, just put in, is at Kelsin Bay Inn, eight miles of angry water and ten miles of road away. It might as well be in Moscow, Idaho. He had intended to catch yesterday's ferry to Homer, but now, has to trust his wife to make arrangements.

A Realtor, Lorrel has to get back for a different reason: Crone's disease. He has been able to control it by eating an extremely high fiber diet. Although we have plenty of venison and potatoes, we're out of everything else except cookies and coffee. So he fears a relapse. I feel his anxiousness, hidden in cutting wood and checking the outboard despite the storm. I suspect Glenn feels it, too.

A single mantle lantern burns despite it being noon. The coffeepot perches precariously on the stove's sagging top. My .458 Ruger and Glenn's rifle lean against a stud behind the stove; Lorrel's lays on his wet bunk. Raingear and jeans hang from nails driven into the rafters—the cabin is eight feet by twelve, with a flat roof. Socks hang from a line above the stove. A long-handled axe leans in a corner by the door, and a strip of backstrap lies on the square of plywood that serves as a table.

Another rust flake pops from my side of the stove. Through the new hole, I watch rose colored flames wrap themselves around lengths of alder. The flames are like little men playing king-of-the-mountain, bowing to one another, jousting till all slide off the limbs' round sides, then scrambling to their feet and racing to the top. They push and punch, shove and kick one another. The alder "pops," and blows them all up. Then new flames spring from under the limbs and flow around the sides till they meet on top.

"I was supposed to close a deal in Kenai, today," Lorrel says. "A piece of commercial property."

"The *Penga*," I say, "laid in Big Bay, Shuyak Island, weathered in for thirty-one days."

"Is that the record?" Lorrel asks.

"Probably not, but it's the longest I know of. The hardware manager at Sutliff's once spent thirteen days on the Alaska Peninsula waiting for a pickup. Ray Mackey of the sport shop spent eleven days on Afognak. Just what you wanted to hear, huh?"

"Hey," Glenn says, "what do you hear?"

I listen. Nothing. "Wind's died down. Rain's stopped."

"It's already warmer in here." Glenn checks his thermometer. "Sixty-nine degrees."

Lorrel opens the cabin door. Over his shoulder, I see a hint of blue sky behind clouds more white now than gray.

"The groundswell," I say, "will run another twelve hours at least, if the wind's laid down for good."

"I'm gonna check the beach," Lorrel says.

A single set of deer tracks, spots in the gray sand, extend down the beach like a dotted line separating surf from scud. Mounds of foam linger behind mats of kelp. The surf is murky with suspended sand. Soaring gulls hang overhead, and a bald eagle sits in the grass. The eagle flies when we come too near.

"We can go in the morning?" Lorrel asks.

"Should be able to." There's no guarantee this break in the wind will hold; the guarantee is it won't. Tomorrow's Friday, and none of us want to be here through the weekend. "In the morning, we'll need to load the Zodiac while it's still dark."

High tide, a fourteen-footer, is at 5:00 a.m. We should launch through the surf as soon as there's enough light to see. It's hard enough getting an empty skiff off this beach at low tide. A running groundswell will make getting off nearly impossible. Our load of deer will only increase the impossibility if that were possible.

We eat the last of Glenn's cookies and drink the last of the coffee. We're going, I tell Glenn, because we're out of coffee. He smiles, says he'll tell the story differently, that we're going because we're out of his wife's cookies. Lorrel says, "I don't care why we go just so long as we do."

But we don't go when we should. Morning seems not to come; it's still very dark at eight. And it's ten before we finish loading the

Zodiac. The tide is mostly out, and the mouth of the creek runs shallow across the beach. The left rear tube, patched too many times, is soft, but the air pump is buried under the deer, thirteen deer, a waist-high mound in the middle of the raft. Sleeping bags and packs, the lantern and Glenn's cooler are wedged around and in front of the deer. The kicker can and extra gas jugs are behind the mound. There's not really room for us. The keel drags in the gravel, and I worry about another hole in a tube. The pump should've been loaded last.

"We have to push through the breakers before I can start the kicker. We're gonna get wet."

"Suppose," Lorrel asks, "the Coast Guard is looking for us yet?"

"I hope not." I know his wife worries about his health and will alert them if he doesn't call home soon.

With an oar in hand, Glenn climbs into the bow while Lorrel, with the other oar, sits on the starboard tube, behind the transom. The breakers crash onto themselves and send the surge washing past my numb feet. The Zodiac rides heavy. Following the ebb of the big breaker of a series, I push the sluggish raft into waist deep water, clamber over the transom and jerk the starting rope. The outboard coughs. Glenn and Lorrel paddle furiously. And the next breaker crashes over us, drives the skag into the sand, spins the raft around and washes us ashore.

Lorrel bails while I push the Zodiac out again. This time, the outboard sputters long enough that when the skag slams into the sand the shearpin twists off. A second and a third breaker slam against Glenn, fill the raft, and we're washed ashore.

Lorrel steadies the inflatable while I change pins. Glenn scours the beach for a couple of poles longer than the oars. He finds a piece of split cedar, then climbs back into the bow. Lorrel and I push the Zodiac back into the surf, as cold as a mountain brook. I climb in, try to start the drenched motor, while Lorrel holds us steady in chest-deep water. We take another breaker over us. A foot of water flows over the transom, but the outboard coughs, coughs again, catches and smooths out. Lorrel scrambles over the side. I

gun the motor; it whines. The bow lifts, and the raft pushes through the next curler.

We're beyond where the groundswells break before another wave arrives. We're soaked and cold, and water still runs over the transom. I grab our submerged kicker can, check its vent—it's open—then balance the can on the mound of deer. The can feels empty, only a little gas sloshing around in the bottom. It should be half full: I mixed three gallons this morning, the last of our lantern gas.

Groundswells lift us high, tipping us, then roll on past. Lorrel pukes. I need him to bail, but he's seasick, too sick to even climb all the way into the bow. He leans against the deer, and looks as dead as they are. I get Glenn to crawl around the mound of deer (a doe, ten big bucks and a couple of knotheads—the limit is five apiece this year). He trades places with Lorrel.

Glenn bails, coffee can full after can full. But the Zodiac continues to respond slow, and gallons more water washes over the tubes, keeping the raft full. The groundswell is ten, twelve feet high, and rolls in from the southeast. We're heading north-northeast and have to cross the lumps quartering. Fog lays along the middle rip. And Glenn continues to bail to stay warm.

The fog, thick enough I barely see Lorrel in the bow, collects in my beard and runs down the inside of my wool underwear.

"Do you have a compass?" Glenn asks.

"No."

"Will you need one?"

"I don't think so." I don't explain that I only have to kept the groundswell on our stern quarter to run a straight line.

But running a straight line is the least of my worries: the tube I sit on is almost flat. My butt drags water.

I don't see the kelp patch I've always skirted until we're in it. Without thinking, I say, "I've never been here before," meaning in the kelp.

"Are we lost?" Glenn can't read my mind, and neither of us can see anything twenty feet away.

I don't answer though I hear him. I'm worried about whether we have enough gas. We're a lot longer crossing Ugak than we should be. The outboard is working hard, but the raft is too heavy. And I reach up to tip the can, which feels the same as before.

"Do we have enough?" Glenn asks, his tone of voice betraying his concern.

I wonder which will happen first, the tube going flat or us running out of gas. I'm still wondering when the lumps change direction. The fog thins, and I see the headlands between Portage Bay and Pasagshak. Three, four miles to go. Lorrel doesn't move, not even to shiver.

Kinked inwards, the cone-shaped tail of the tube I sit on flags. Burying the air pump was stupid. I remember sitting next to a Japanese fish buyer on a flight from Anchorage to Dutch Harbor. He told about his problems getting American canneries to pack salmon roe to Japanese specifications. He said, "The only cure for stupid is KILL!" I don't think his English was good enough for him to realize what he said.

Perhaps we should've waited for high tide this evening. We would've if all of us weren't so anxious to get across Ugak before sunset.

The prop steadily screws its way through the bay. At last my Suburban, with its heater, is in sight.

Running lean, the outboard gains RPMs. I tip the can this way and that, hoping the fuel pickup finds a little more gas. And I shiver, now violently.

Without realizing it, I run the Zodiac's bow ashore.

2. A Glass Float—Ugak in May

Swirling gulls, puffins, murres dive through baitfish and glare, then bob up, silver tails wiggling between their beaks. Two eagles sail over, bank, climb. Catching the updraft off the cape, they spiral upward until they're specks against the sun. My Zodiac, bowline tied to an alder the thickness of my thumb, floats in the

lagoon, rippled by the afternoon breeze. Pink and white buoys dot the beach, sixty inchers mostly, and a blue plastic bucket lies upside-down on a skinned cedar log. Rafts of brown kelp, tangled yellow crabline, wads of bright orange seine lead and dark green web—all lay pushed against the gray sand bank. And a single set of bear tracks meander between the high tideline and the incoming surf for as far as I can see.

Kristel picks up a dull orange trawl float, one ear broken. She rolls it past a dungy shell. It bounces over a bleached razor clam, open among scattered geoduck shells.

A brown saki bottle with protruding Japanese characters molded in the glass and a yellow *Joy* bottle, both half buried, interest her. She shakes sand from the one and brushes it off the other; she discards the dish detergent bottle and carries the other by its long neck.

She finds an otter slide, asks what it is, then asks, "Do they bite?"

"Only if you pull their tail."

"Are you teasing?"

I climb the knoll, smell the fox again, but don't look for its den. I probably could find it, but Mom kept a vixen and kits for pets when a teenager. She said they gnawed holes in her quilts, never really became tame, and stunk. The knoll smells like old skunk, slightly masked by blooming alders and salmonberries. On the alders, yellows blossoms hang long, while pale violets poke up around their tangled trunks. Tiny tufts of deep green leaves push out from cane joints beneath the salmonberries' cerise blossoms.

Behind me, Kris picks through pebbles. Now that she's fourteen years old, she has quit saving beach gravel just because it's pretty. She's looking for agates; she's already found one with a water bubble in it.

We have come here to reflag the property lines of her mother's homesite up the valley. Her mother is now a drivers' license examiner in Anchorage, and prefers highrises and asphalt to her tracks in the sand.

Breeze rustled salmonberries make the knoll roll in pink waves ahead of me. A doe stands skylined. Scrub cottonwoods stand lime-green, their unfurled leaves shielding spent blossoms. And crows caw from nests in the spruce grove by the cabin Glenn, Lorrel and I left in a hurry last November.

Fireweed shoots, fern fiddleheads, and new grass blades reach through the trampled thatch, brown as last fall.

I push open the cabin's door, and smell the weasel before I see it on the bottom bunk where I will sleep. Clicking its tiny teeth, feigning attack, its thrusts look like a striking snake, fearless and fearsome. It tries to drive me back out the door. But I point my .458 at it, and say, "Bang." The weasel dives for a gnawed hole, and disappears as if never there.

The crumbling drum stove has been replaced by an upright oil barrel, its front chopped open to make a crude Franklin stove. Someone in more of a hurry that Glenn, Lorrel and I left boxes of Hamburger Helper and Rice-O-Roni, grounds in the coffee pot, grease in the frying pan and a stack of dirty dishes. The weasel has scattered rice across the floor, and left teeth marks in the grease. The coffee grounds, I imagine, grew moldy without its help.

Outside, tin cans strewn through the grass and ferns as far as easily thrown from the door rust under paper labels, loosened by the wet winter. Blazo cans riddled by bullets sit in a line across the creek—fifty yards, seventy-five yards, a hundred.

When Kris sees the mess in the cabin, she says, "I'll need hot water, lots of it."

I light the Coleman stove while she sweeps. By the time I lug the last of our gear from the beach, she has the dishes, pans, plywood table and counter scrubbed clean enough to eat off. The cabin looks pretty good, almost as organized as our apartment in Anchorage—after a winter in the city, a winter spent looking at dirty snow and traffic lights, I'm ready for new growth other than tract houses and highrise apartments.

Kris sits on the top bunk, examining fractures in the agates she's found when the short-tailed weasel, already in its summer-brown

phase, stands up a foot from the stove. It hisses at us (I'm on the bottom bunk), drops down, bounces closer and hisses again.

"He's cute," Kris says, swinging her legs off her bunk to jump down.

The weasel spins and squirts through a hole under the door. Kris is right behind, and gets a glimpse of it bounding over bent roses thirty yards from the cabin. "He's quick," she says, climbing back onto her bunk. "Will he come back?"

"Would you?"

Morning brings drizzle and a booming surf.

Disdaining raincoats, Kris and I hike up the valley to find every ribbon marking her mother's homesite down. It looks like bears batted at the bright strips of surveyors' tape. In addition, sharp claws or horns have shredded the pink buoy Dave hung for a swing—the ground beneath the buoy looks plowed. And I check the chamber of my .458. I don't want bear troubles. There's no help on this side of the bay if something happens.

I chop alders, drive stakes, hang flags, and have only finished two of the four property lines when I'm ready to go beachcombing. The drizzle ended hours ago, and the sun now hangs suspended in the west, poised to swing downward towards the northern horizon.

The surf has retreated to the flats, though it remains high. Kris pockets red, brown, green jasper while I pick through windrowed driftwood, looking for lumber. For a while, she drags two buoys, then caches them when she finds a white plastic bucket. Soon, she carries the bucket, now half full of unbroken clam shells, and drags a second pair of buoys.

Ahead, shiny green and wet, a glass float sits by itself. Fourteen inches, the Japanese float, blown in a mold, is the first I've found since Kristel's age on the Oregon coast. I wonder how long it's been on the beach, conspicuous as our tracks, footprints as lonely as Robinson Crusoe's and Friday's.

The glass ball doesn't seem important to Kris, who's more interested in knowing the names of the clams for which she has found shells. I try to tell her about people driving cars and pickups

on Oregon beaches as they hunted for floats day and night; I try to tell her about seeing a glass float in the surf then racing other beachcombers for it, about the prestige of finding a big ball or a rolling pin float. But my words are merely wind blown slow. She doesn't understand—there's no one else here combing the beach.

After dinner, I tell her, "A bath tomorrow. You know why." The *why* is the two weeks we camped on the other side of the bay, fishing Dolly Varden.

"I can't. Not tomorrow."

"I'm gonna take the raft and see if I can catch a halibut in the morning. You take a bath while I'm gone." I stress *take* because she's too old for me to threaten to give her a bath. For the past year, she's rebelled against everything her mother does or enjoys; her mother spends hours soaking in the tub.

The surf rolls all evening. I listen until the gulls and crows quiet down. Although only May, it doesn't really get dark. But the birds seem to know when it should. Kris snores. And a buck with velvet forks trots past the door.

The tide's near flood when I, with just a rod in the Zodiac, launch through knee-high breakers. Once in the bay, I run around the corner, then mooch, drifting bait along the bottom. I don't immediately catch a fish, but that's okay. The clouds breakup, and the sun warms the fabric tubes. I lean against one side and dangle my feet over the other, all the while being pulled by the falling tide back towards Gull Point.

Near the creek I splashed out of, I see Kris on the beach, my .458 slung over her shoulder (the rifle looks half her height). The bight is a mile across; the beach, washed clean by the flood tide, is almost as long. Now, Kristel's tracks are the only ones in the sand: she wanders as the bear had, between the high water line and the surf. And she still smells like a bear that's been feeding on dead humpies when I return.

"I'm not taking you back across the bay until you smell better—"

"Dad! you're crude."

"Do you need me to heat water for you?"

"No." She glares at me. "Just leave."

"Give me my rifle and I'll hike over the cape. I found another eagles' nest."

Following crossing trails, I round the cape, locate the rock spire off the cliff face, and begin climbing the cape. The aerie is on top of the spire, a hundred fifty feet off the cliff and about the same distance below a grassy ledge at least four hundred feet up.

The higher I climb, the stronger the breezes. I sort of cling to the cliff as I cross a rockslide. I feel like I'm walking in space as I near the ledge.

The hen launches, circles, and sails guttural screams at me as she swoops low overhead. In her aerie are two, gray eaglets, with pin feathers pushing through their down.

The tiercel joins the hen. Now, both of them dive at me as I step onto the ledge, its grass trampled by footprints twice the size of mine. Ducking the eagles, I feel a mound of dung, fresh enough the grass in it hasn't yet wilted. The dung is cold. Nevertheless, I lower the Ruger's block to check its chamber—its barrel is full of sand.

Sand trickles into the chamber, preventing me from reloading the singleshot. I try to shake, try to blow the sand out. But it clings in the chamber as if glued there. I look for something to push through the bore. There's nothing on the ledge but grass and bear dung and one flight feather. Using the feather, I brush the worst of the sand out of the action and chamber, insert a cartridge, but still can't close the block. I try again, get more sand out, but still can't raise the block. Again, I try. But enough sand clings to the feather barbs that I end up putting in as much sand as I get out. And all the while, the eagles whistle overhead. I feel their downdraft when they flap to turn and make another pass.

Realizing the rifle is useless, I feel a twinge of panic: I don't want to meet the bear on the narrow trail that dips across the rockslide, the only way off the ledge. There is, however, one daughter I want to scream at.

Kris has tied the door shut from the inside and covered the window. She hollers, "Stay out," when I push on the door. Her sense of modesty is well developed.

I wait for her to finish. Screaming at someone on the other side of a closed door doesn't work.

By the time she unties the three cords holding the door closed, I've cooled off.

"What's wrong?" she asks.

"Your neck's still dirty."

"I washed it."

"With sand, maybe. Not soap." I show her the Ruger's chamber and barrel. She says nothing, but appears very contrite. "Take another bath tomorrow while I finish flagging the lines. I'm not hauling you back to your mother dirty. She won't let you come again."

"But Dad—"

* * *

LEGALISM

Legalism—a word that abounds with negative connotations. Even the sound of the word is ominous. It is the signifier for everything our enlightened culture opposes, the signifier that evangelical Christianity shuns with vigor. It represents authoritarian oppression of action and thought, of liberty and freedom. It is what all of us must avoid as we hold fast to the traditions that made us a free people—

Time Out. Don't we want those things that legalism gives a culture? The rule of Law and respect for that rule. Isn't that why Presidents appear with police chiefs when they ask for more gun control? Don't we want respect for private property, for limited government, for personal rights as defined by Amendments to our Constitution. Beginning with the Magna Carta, our English heritage has been that of no person being above the Law; for isn't an opposite of legalism anarchy? There was a period of time when every man did that which was right in his own eyes (women were without rights). Utopia wasn't ushered in. Rather, Israel ended up serving Philistines.

Our culturally fractured psyche shadowboxes with our national history of legalism. We want legalism's signified without the signifier; we want those things that legalism has bestowed upon us without the restrictions evoked when hearing the word. We have been, since our Revolution, a people in a contract with ourselves as to how we shall be governed. We are quick to claim our legal rights as delineated by that contract, and the ACLU helps prevent the central government from trampling those rights. We advertise that certain truths are self-evident, but how is a right to pursue happiness self-evident? How is a right to liberty self-evident? Or the right to

life? What really is it that defines us as a free people if it isn't our tradition of legalism?

George Wyscaver, when showing me the work of a Japanese woodcarver, a gunstock carved while George was stationed in Japan, told me the older woodcarver said, "All Americans are slaves."

"No, Americans are free," George had insisted.

"Not free. You have to punch time-clock. You not free."

What the woodcarver told George would periodically trouble him, which was why he related the incident to me one night while we were working together on the recovery boilers in G-P's Toledo mill—he was lead fireman; I was second helper. George knew he wasn't free. He had a new house, new vehicles, a wife with fairly expensive tastes. He couldn't quit the mill even though he wanted to. He couldn't make enough money anywhere else to pay his bills. But he was unwilling to admit that he had traded freedom for things.

"Well, George," I asked that night, "are you free?"

"Of course. We all are."

"Then why don't you quit?" I knew he wanted to leave the mill, but he had built a new house rather than starting a business as his brother had or like I had. His only way out of the mill was his stock portfolio, small but growing.

George never mentioned the Japanese woodcarver again although I did on a couple of quiet nights in the mill when I wondered about what that woodcarver said. Like George, I was then a figurative "wage-slave." Initially, I had freely accepted the credit so readily extended to Georgia-Pacific employees. After all, we have a right to pursue happiness, defined at the time as a new Bronco and enough gas to run all over the West. I remember saying sharp words to my wife in November, 1969, when we received back to back three hundred dollar a month gasoline credit card bills. I said rather loudly that we couldn't spend more than one hundred twenty-five a month on gas. And this was when gas averaged thirty-two cents a gallon.

I had liberty within the law to come and go pretty much where I pleased. I had enough "things" to think I was happy. But I wasn't

free. And in time I began to feel that G-P underwrote that extension of credit all of us received. No G-P employee was, seemingly, ever turned down for a new car or boat or house. Before long, all of us sought overtime. We couldn't afford to miss a day of work. We belonged to Georgia-Pacific as much as if we lived in company housing and bought groceries on credit at the company store. We were all debtors. In September 1970, I added up the unsecured debt I had accumulated: I owed $5,100 and had virtually nothing to show for it. And because of the income my shop generated, I owed less than most of the fellows with whom I worked.

I knew if I was ever to quit G-P I would have to cut my spending. All of that liberty I had accepted in accumulating debt had to be muzzled. And a budget wasn't helpful; for I didn't know when I had to make big ticket purchases. Nor did I ever know how much money I had coming in. I knew what my G-P wages were, but I might in one evening double the amount I earned in wages for a week. So I adapted the principle that I couldn't buy anything unless it made me money. It was nice to know I could buy a particular thing, but I had to actually apply a legalistic yardstick to my spending before I curbed it. And by March, 1972, I owed less than six hundred dollars when I paid cash for a sixteen-foot camp trailer, my first purchase in more than eighteen months of something that wouldn't return a profit.

Legalism in its many manifestations served as a lever for me to move me to do what I wouldn't have done otherwise. It caused me to remember a deity for whom I wouldn't have had time otherwise. It caused me to examine how I treated others, and to keep my treatment of others within clearly delineated boundaries of respect. And only when those legalistic parameters become an actual part of me, of how I thought, of how I treated others did I not need legalism as a lever.

Legalism only works when applied internally. Externally, it creates cheaters.

Within my mind I hear objections: if a person has love, then legalism isn't needed. But love is a signifier without an absolute

signified, meaning it is a fuzzy concept. Hitler loved the German people; yet when the war was lost, he ordered a scorched earth tactic which Albert Speer attempted to countermand because the tactic would have left the German people without the means to survive.

Working in the pulpmill, when I felt the sharp point of G-P's production staff penetrating where it didn't belong I accepted a shop steward's job. This caused me days of what turned out to be needless agonizing: I grew up believing unions were the cause of most evils in this country, a position I defended well. I hadn't wanted to join the union, and I didn't have anything to do with the union during my first couple of years working for G-P. It was just there as an evil which extorted dues. What Ken Kesey didn't understand when he wrote *Sometimes A Great Notion* was how anti-union the popular sentiment of the Coast was. So for me to accept even the lowly position of a shop steward meant compromising strongly held beliefs. If a foreman for G-P hadn't exercised extremely poor judgement in what he required done during an annual boiler shutdowns, I would have refused the position.

But foremen directed operating personnel to shinny across a 2x12 plank over a gap sixty feet above the boiler firebox, then stand on boiler tubes placed four inches apart, then with pikepoles, operators were to chip away overhead blocks of built up salt the size of small automobiles. Some of these blocks weighed tons. And jagged chunks weighing hundreds of pounds regularly fell beside the operators, who had to quickly dance across the tubes to get out of their way.

I filed a safety grievance, and within hours, two engineers said millwrights could run hot water through the I-Ks (rotating steam lances that kept deposits from building up on the tubes while the boiler was operating). The idea was tried. It worked. And instead of G-P paying two crews of operators around the clock overtime for a week or longer to chip away the salt in each of the three boilers, two millwrights did the same job from outside the boilers in two days for all three.

I inherited the shop steward job because more senior operators weren't interested in getting involved; I also inherited hundreds of safety slips upon which no action had been taken for years. I didn't know what to do with those safety slips so I filed dozens of safety grievances the first year I had the job. Most were rejected. But with increasing experience and a very legalistic interpretation of our union contract, I started winning a few of the grievances, especially ones that made foreman wince . . . I was working with George one graveyard shift when our foreman wanted a particular valve closed. It was a stormy winter night. Wind gusts were fifty knots with hard rain. The valve was between buildings and ninety feet in the air with no catwalk to it. To get to the valve required crawling along four ten-inch pipes banded together. Its valve stem hadn't been turned in two or more years. And for safety and common sense reasons, I refused to crawl out onto those pipes banded together.

George, though, feared the consequences of refusing an order. He feared there might be serious trouble because of my refusal to crawl out on those pipes. I really believe he thought he was helping me, not that I couldn't ably defend myself by this time, as he had me watch the boilers while he did what he thought was my job.

There have been a few times when my anger has been almost uncontrollable. That night was one of those times. George was more afraid of the foreman than he was of falling ninety feet. He risked his life because even with union representation and a contract that clearly said any task could be refused for safety reasons, he didn't feel free enough to say, "NO." I wanted to actually beat some sense into him. I wanted to explode because of the risk he took thinking he was doing the right thing.

When the mill superintendent arrived in the morning, he reamed both George and the foreman for being stupid. I know; for I stopped by the office to verbally unload on the superintendent. But when the superintendent saw me enter, he raised his hand to

stop me as he said, "I'll take care of this." I stayed long enough to be satisfied that he had.

I believed what our contract said; I was willing to fight for the letter of that contract. I believed in legalism, I hate to say, for legalism protected me and gained me some degree of independence.

When I quit the pulpmill, what almost nobody did who had worked there as long as I had, I became my own boss and advocate, insurer and employer. And I found I didn't really know how to work, an oversimplication but the most succinct way of saying that Georgia-Pacific's timeclock had let me start at a certain time and stop at a certain time. Our union contract had established craftlines which said this job is mine, but that job is yours. It defined overtime, defined what were paid holidays. It created a grievance procedure. Together, it and the timeclock had insulated me from the freedom to fail.

Even though I had been operating my gunshop for years on a full-time basis when I quit, I hadn't relied upon it to pay our monthly expenses. I had been plowing the money I made in it either back into the shop or into toys: I had forty-one original singleshot cartridge rifles on racks in our bedroom.

Once I quit, I was, so to speak, operating in the spirit of the law. The first legalism abandoned was craftlines. Economics dictated that I become electrician and plumber, mechanic and laborer. Whatever needed built or repaired, I was the one who did it. When I purchased a new bandsaw, I was the one who wired it in. When I traded for standing trees, I was the one who fell and planked them, then cut them into stock blanks. When I decided I didn't like cast breech plugs, I was the one who machined ones from rolled steel. When I needed to replace the ring gear and pinion of my Bronco's front differential, I was the one who learned enough about differentials to do it (but I traded stocking a rifle for putting in a new clutch in my Maverik).

Without a timeclock to tell me when to start work and when to stop, I began each day in the shop as soon as I got

dressed—sometime around six a.m.—and I stopped when I was too tired to continue. Usually Johnny Carson was on by then. And the number of hours I worked had no direct translation into what I earned: I was paid for completed work, regardless of how long it took to complete the job.

I no longer had any medical insurance; I couldn't afford any. Holidays were just days I didn't complete any work. Vacation was whenever I could afford not to complete any work for a few days. A morning spent fishing became a luxury. But by the definition of that Japanese woodcarver, I was now a free man. And there were perks: one hot May afternoon, I closed the shop, hung a sign on the door, grabbed a rifle (a .58 caliber muzzleloader I had just completed), and I hiked up the canyon behind the house where the shade of large second-growth fir dropped the temperature nearly twenty degrees. I hadn't hiked far before I killed a bear, my first with a muzzleloader.

The legalism of how I interpreted G-P's union contract as a shop steward wasn't unlike how a constitutional attorney wrangles over our founders' intent. That legalism somewhat equalizes the unequal relationship between employee and employer, or between citizen and sovereign. And that type of legalism has been preached by priests and wouldbe prophets for millennia. It is the type of legalism which caused Victorians to identify with Job, who said he would come before God as a prince, while they held form tight after losing faith.

But I won't come before anyone as a prince: My exercise of that self-evident right to pursue happiness has allowed me to work harder for longer hours in riskier situations and without assurance of financial compensation. For the past two and a half decades, my annual incomes in actual dollars have been far less than what I earned in the pulpmill. However, I have been nearly as free as that woodcarver in occupied Japan where the only gunstock that could be carved belonged to an American sailor.

Freedom has never been about money, but always about the individual recognizing his or her inalienable rights, which have

always needed legalism to lever recognition into application. When legalism is abandoned for fuzzy love, I won't have to wonder where I am free. I won't be.

* * *

DUCKSTEW

1.Bubbles

Wanting to fly by itself—wind gusts reach fifty knots—the aging Grumman Goose lumbers onto the crosswind strip. Hal will be killed in a year when his Goose goes down in Ouzinie Narrows. Earl will understand why. But today, Hal powers the amphibian past a Coast Guard C130 that sits waiting for gusts to let up. He crabs into the wind; and instantly airborne, we slip sideways, fall, bounce up, down, up, before gaining enough altitude to rise above the smoking salt spray of the inside bay.

December 1982. After months of anticipation, Doug, Dan, John and Earl have met me on Kodiak Island for a planned deer hunt. They arrived from Anchorage this morning, and we were to have flown across the island hours ago. But all flight around Kodiak is by weather, and this blow slipped under satellite photographs. It's not supposed to be here, nor are we supposed to still be on Kodiak's east side.

Now mostly airborne, we look up at low hanging spruce boughs as Hal continues to crib into the wind as he tries to get around the point and over Ouzinie Narrows. The Goose hits pockets, drops into the spray rising from Hannah Rocks, shudders, shudders harder, then pops up a hundred feet as if it were a yoyo on a string.

We fly at a hundred forty knots, but rain strikes down on the cowling, bounces off. And Earl scowls.

Blowing scud drenches wing floats, and my stomach dumps lunch into a garbage bag shared with Dan, a certified Mercedes mechanic with an appreciation for fine automobiles.

Dan and Doug are on their first deer hunt. Doug is a C.P.A., and a summertime youth camp director. He has an appreciation for nature and a natural world that can be experienced in short sleeved shirts.

Reared in northwestern New Mexico, Earl is a minister, a pilot, and is almost a carbon copy of my brother Ben in both personality and appearance. I have, since getting to know him, respected his opinion on both spiritual and secular matters.

John will be ordained a minister in a year, but on this trip, he will come close to getting Doug and himself killed.

I live on Kodiak; and in two weeks, I will, with my daughters, return to Kodiak's west side to put in our winter meat. If I harvest an animal on this trip, the deer will be a bonus.

Once through Ouzinie Narrows and over Marmot Bay, the Goose climbs. We cross Viekoda Bay, pass around Cape Uganik, and splash down near the head of Mush Bay. Like some sort of prehistoric beast, the Goose lumbers ashore, disgorges us and our gear, then spins in a half circle and returns to the sea. I watch Hall taxi into the wind, then catch a swell, bounce up and become airborne. I will fly with Hal one more time before he catches a wing in the Narrows.

I have arranged to borrow a skiff from Jeanie Shepherd, who lives at the site of the former herring saltery near the head of Mush Bay. So after hastily setting up camp, Dan, Earl and I hike along the gravel beach to her place. Rain falls steadily, the most civilized way to say that big drops of water beat our heads, our shoulders, drip down the small of our backs, down our legs and into boots, filling them, and generally drenching us, making even our optimism about tomorrow's hunt as soggy as if it had been steeped in scud and the gale, then wrung flavorless and left like a used teabag on a saucer.

Dan carries his twenty horsepower outboard over his shoulder. He's six-one, two hundred pounds. Earl's a little taller and as heavy. I'm heavier, and strong enough to wrestle seventy horse outboards in and out of test tanks without using a hoist. But as we pass the

once-gray skiff next to the saltery, I fear I've made a mistake: the skiff is probably the one Jeanie offered to let us use. The holes in its bottom have been plugged with concrete. It's plank—five-quarter inch yellow cedar—and it has been patched with several layers of half-inch plywood. It probably weighs a literal ton, and wrestling it on and off beaches might be impossible.

Jeanie's not home. However, Chief, an older Eskimo woodcarver who has volunteered to teach Jeanie how to carve miniature sleds, comes to the door and says, Yes, that's the skiff we can borrow. Then he adds, "You'll need something to bail with, here." He throws me a five gallon bucket.

Earl and Dan look at me as if I were a used car salesman trying to sell them that skiff.

With stone galling stone, it is all the three of us can do to slide the skiff down the sloping gravel beach. We push and the skiff moves an inch or two, then three or four. We push and gravel slips beneath our feet and the skiff goes nowhere. We push and the tide inches closer. We push and the one stone grates on another, squealing as if dying. We push and the skiff slips a foot, then we slip and fall behind it. But the tide keeps inching closer.

"Will your motor push this?" Earl asks Dan when the bow of the skiff finally meets the rising tide.

With the oily smoothness of an idling Mercedes, Dan says, "Sure it will."

I don't know that Dan intends to leave his outboard with me for me to use if I need it. Two years from now, he'll call from Anchorage and ask if I want to buy his motor. Only $750. Not much considering I have used it for a couple of years. I only know that on this day I don't believe his little Volvo Penta will push this skiff, which I'm not yet convinced will even float.

Jeanie returns, drenched, despite being bundled in raingear. I tie both of her bowlines to her running line, and all of us warm up in her kitchen. We drink coffee and eat peach cobbler. Her porch and the front of her house (the old Finley place) sit on pilings, none too high. In two weeks, the highest tides of the year will be

on her porch. And the surge from the highest of those high tides will lap against her front porch door while she serves Christmas dinner to Kathy, Kristel and me.

Dan's outboard is a shortshaft. The former snagskiff's transom is twenty-five inches. Earl and I remain skeptical about whether the outboard will work, but for different reasons. I explain about cavitation. Chief understands, but says, "It'll just make lotsa bubbles when you go fast. Slow's okay."

Dan says he doesn't mind going slow, but his "slow" isn't Chief's . . . I first met Chief a year earlier. He said he was happy to meet me; for when he sent his chainsaw to town for me to fix, he didn't have to shoot it. It seems that when the previous mechanic working for Sutliffe's Hardware had repaired his saw, his saw didn't work when he got it back. Instead of returning it across the island, Chief had dropped his saw at the tideline and had then shot it with his .30-06.

With Earl, Dan and myself in the skiff, and with Dan's outboard pushing the skiff as fast as it can, harlequin ducks swimming along the shoreline leave us behind. The outboard idles in gear. Faster, it overheats, its water intake ports being in the bubbles. But we will spend longer wrestling the skiff in and out of the water than we will spend idling across the mile-wide bay, and we will spend longer crossing the bay than hunting.

By morning, the weather has lightened to being a breeze accompanied by drizzle. Earl cooks—he will every meal, seeing how he has brought with him a briefcase full of spices.

John and Doug get their first close look at the skiff: they excitedly run back up the bank, explaining they've captured two "Artesians," both of whom are now prisoners in the skiff. Dan ignores them as he counts his peanuts, divides salted from unsalted, then divides both piles into the number of days we are to be here. I, too, ignore John and Doug, but I'm fascinated by Dan's obsession with his peanuts. I asks him about their importance. He shrugs, refuses to answer, and looks a little like President Ford with a full head of hair.

After breakfast, after sunrise, we idle across the bay, with everyone taking a turn bailing. He could use one or two more five gallon buckets.

I drop Doug and John off first, then Earl, then Dan before I beach the skiff near the mouth of Uganik River. My intention is to climb to a bench two hundred yards above the beach. But when, fifty yards uphill, I turn to look behind me I see the tide has already fallen far enough to leave the skiff thirty yards above water's edge. The tide had been near flood when I beached the skiff. It will be hours after dark before it will float the skiff where it is.

Since I will return here in two weeks with Kathy and Kristel, I'm less interested in shooting anything than I am in not having to wrestle the skiff any farther than necessary; so I slide down the bank I have just climbed, and I swing the bow of the skiff around and begin pushing, using driftwood limbs as rollers that don't roll.

I squirm one side of the skiff towards the water an inch or two, then the other side a couple of inches. The skiff would be lighter if it were all concrete. I shed my shirt, grunt, strain, lift and push. I'm working too hard to curse the skiff or the falling tide; my thoughts are devoid of expletives as I sweat to catch the falling tide.

The tide book doesn't help much. While the east side of the island has Kodiak tides, with simple addition or subtraction of a few minutes for bays north or south of town, the west side of the island has Seldovia tides minus hours, then with the addition of minutes for inside bays. It's easier to look at where the water is than to read the book and guess how much to subtract, then add back.

A pair of mallards whistle overhead, and the dog-like face of a seal watches me from seventy yards. I would try to talk the seal into trading places if I liked raw fish. The seal is probably too smart, though, to push a skiff the tide will again float tonight.

Once the skiff floats, I climb into it and let the sun warm my back. I've worked hard enough for one day.

Through binoculars, I watch a doe on the cottonwood covered knoll where a year ago in late December, under those same trees, I shot three bucks: I came down from above the bucks, shot each in the head, and knocked each of their racks off with my .458. I took a lot of good natured ribbing about the cannon I carry when accompanying off-island hunters. It wouldn't have done any good to point out that those bucks were ready to shed their antlers, or to mention bears—when facing a bear that stands taller than the eves of my house, even an elephant rifle seems like a rat gun.

A shot. Another. Close. Probably Dan. I suppose I better see if he has anything.

Dan isn't where I left him so I continue around the point to where Earl should be.

Both Earl and Dan are there, both waiting with a deer. And I nose the skiff ashore, careful to keep in deep enough water I can back off the beach.

Earl's buck is a four by four, not counting eyeguards. Dan has shot a spike that he insists is not a yearling. When he opens its mouth to check its teeth, I take a picture of him. In the print, he appears to be kissing his little buck, mouth on mouth.

After loading both deer, we push off. Earl bails. Dan takes control of the tiller and tries to coax a little more speed from the bubbles, but finally settles for idling in gear. We could row faster if we had a second oar, and Earl suggests we christen the skiff the *Sea Turtle*. I argue for *Sea Slug.* Dan says he wouldn't want to go to sea in the skiff, that the skiff ought to be a flower planter beside Jeanie's barn, that nothing connected to "sea" ought to be in its name. So we settle for calling it *Bubbles*.

One thing about Kodiak, the weather can make dramatic changes in just a few hours. Yesterday's "blow" has been replaced with as bright a day as the island can experience in December. Although the sun is too low to the horizon to be warm (air temperature is below freezing), its brightness reflects off the chop caused by the breeze pushing against the tide. That glare is nearly blinding.

We get to where we are to meet Doug and John a little early, and we scan the alders, elderberries and stunted cottonwoods as we drift, Dan bailing. The alders are bare, but we see neither deer nor hunters on the hillside.

Chilled from being damp from sweat and wet from the leaks in the skiff, Earl checks his watch. Seeing that we aren't much early, he draws his .357 and says, "I'll see if I can hurry them up."

He fires a shot. Its report echoes off the hillside, skips across the bay and bounces back. Forty crows caw in confusion as they swap perches in the cottonwoods along the shore. Gulls cry on Packers' Spit, and in the next cove, dozens of mallards rocket upwards and sail overhead, heading towards the mouth of the river. But there is no answering shot.

Most everyone I know was taught by fathers, or uncles, or stepfathers to signal by shooting. Three shots means a person needs help. One shot in the air is a request for location. A person just knows when a shot has been fired at game or fired in the air. That difference in sound is one of those things a person hears without ever being able to adequately describe what it is that he or she has actually heard. Some words help like hollow-sounding, but hearing that difference is sort of like seeing a sunset, or Mt. McKinley pink in alpenglow. Words only validate a person's experience; they never truly convey the experience. What a person brings to my words determines how large or how well rounded is this text; for the person who hasn't heard the difference between a shot fired at game and one fired in the air, a shot remains a shot just as a gun remains a gun or a hunter, a hunter.

Earl waits a few more moments, then fires again, and again.

Now, except for the crows, the bay is still.

The silence troubles Earl, who has known John since they were in college together more than twenty-five years ago, and who has hunted with John many times before. He says it isn't like John not to answer a signal shot.

There has already been a bear mauling this year on the other side of the ridge we are hunting, and though cold today, it hasn't

been so cold a bear couldn't be out. But none of us want to mention bears at this moment.

"They could be together on the back side of the ridge," Dan says, as if trying to apologize for no answering shot.

"If they haven't started down," I say, "they won't get off by dark." The ridge is a thousand feet high, and easier to climb than descend. December days are short, and if clouds move in, nights can be very dark. "There's a deer crossing that patch of snow right on the crest."

"Where?" Dan reaches for my binoculars. I bail while he looks. "I see him. He's a big buck, big, big rack."

"There's another one," I say, "to the right of him and lower."

"How can you see that far?" Dan asks, having worn glasses most of his life.

Earl fires three more shots into the air, and the crows swap perches again as they caw.

Still no answering shots—and no Doug nor John in sight on the hill. We won't know until later that it was John's idea for them not to answer Earl's shots.

Dan starts his outboard, and we idle towards Packers' Spit, turnaround, and idle back past the pickup point, past where Earl and Dan hunted, past where I slid the skiff down to the water (the furrows cut into the gravel are still visible but are being filled by the tide), turnaround again, and idle back to the pickup point. Our little six mile voyage has taken us more than an hour, and the sun is already below the horizon. But neither Doug nor John are where they are supposed to be.

Both Dan and Earl fire shots. No answer. Earl fires more shots. We drift for awhile, drift until it's too dark to see up the hillside before Earl says, "Let's head for camp, come back whenever they show. They'll be all right."

I don't have a better idea. If we had a skiff that could travel, I would run around the point and see if they are on the beach in the next bay north. But it's all *Bubbles* can do to stay afloat, and as for

traveling fifty miles, forget it. And wandering around on that hillside in the dark would just get all of us in trouble.

When the tide changed, so did the weather. Clouds began to appear about dark, and now the breeze pushes in warm, moist, soft air—the night feels like walking into a warm wheelhouse after working all day on deck. The warmth is almost staggering.

It takes an hour to idle across the bay. Lanterns are lit. Earl starts a pot of stew while I cut wood and Dan skins both bucks. Six o'clock becomes seven (sunset was a little after three o'clock). The night, velvety black, stays warm. We don't yet know that Doug and John, with three deer, are still on top of the ridge (the limit is seven deer apiece this year). Earl probably would've had more to say if he had known.

When the stew is ready, I ask Earl if he would like me to fire a shot before we eat. "With that cannon of yours?" he asks. I nod, and both he and Dan join me on the edge of the bluff.

With its muzzle angled skyward across the bay, the .458 roars, sending a column of bright orange flame twenty feet into the air. From the crest of the ridge, I see the flame of an answering shot long before hearing its boom. Earl turns, pauses, says nothing though I see that his spiritual conversion is being tested. He returns to camp and fills a thermos with coffee. He steps into his rainpants. But before he can put on his coat, Dan says, "I'll go. There's no sense in all of us going."

To everyone I had stressed the need to be off the ridge before dark; so pissed, I only ask Dan, "Do you know where you're going?"

"I think so."

"I'll hang a lantern in a tree. Keep it to your stern."

"Simple enough."

"Take enough gas you can start a fire. It'll be a long time before they get to the beach."

Earl hands Dan the thermos and a flashlight, then he and I push the skiff into deep water, and hold it while Dan fumbles with fuel line and primer bulb. We hold it until the outboard starts. Then after a bowl of stew, Earl and I sit on the bluff and

watch the skiff's serpentine wake through binoculars. We can't see the skiff, but Dan has the little Volvo running at half throttle. The prop churns the bay white. The skiff seems powered by an eggbeater.

Near the far shore, Dan uses the flashlight to locate the pickup point. Once ashore, he kindles a fire, using probably more than a gallon of gasoline judging from how high the flames explode into the night. The fire casts a ring of light a hundred yards in a diameter for a couple of minutes before settling down to a few flickering red tongues before more gas is added.

Even small sounds carry across the bay: Earl hears the gas can bump against the side of the skiff. Both of us hear Dan holler for Doug and John, then hear them answer.

Three-quarters of the way up the hill, I see a pinprick of light, a pinprick so weak I'm not sure I saw it. But I see it again, and a third time. It reminds me of lightening bugs in Indiana, seen from across Grandpa's corn fields, specks of cold light quickly fading.

Earl goes, then comes back with coffee. "Do you," he asks, "know if they took a flashlight with them?"

"Not that I know of, but that's either them or Rudolf the Red-Nose Reindeer's blonde brother." What neither of us know is that Doug almost stepped off a cliff; and now, John and Doug are feeling their way through alders, checking each opening by the flame of a single BIC lighter which will run out of fuel in a few more flashes. We hear them holler something to Dan about "trouble with Vic," assume they are talking about a guide who is a common acquaintance, and don't realize they are really saying *Bic* until later.

Earl and I see Dan's flashlight beam start up the hill; we watch the shaft of light pick its way through alders that are tough going in daylight. Then about a third of the way up the hill, the beam turns around and starts down.

It's after ten p.m. when Dan leads John and Doug into the ring of firelight. The weather changes again, and both Earl and I feel the temperature begin to fall fast. It will dip to zero before morning.

Another hour passes before John tells Earl about the big buck he and Doug had played hide & seek with near the snowline all afternoon, probably the same buck we saw from the bay. He and Doug hadn't answered our shots for fear of spooking the buck. He also says that after Doug nearly stepped off the cliff, they had cached Doug's deer and they will have to climb back up the hill tomorrow. Earl says nothing.

John gets a deer the next day while Doug drags the three deer they cached to the beach. Earl gets another buck, smaller than yesterday's four-point. Dan loses his knife, he thinks, in a gutpile and he spends the day looking for it. He sees deer high, and he will say, later, that after last night he just didn't feel like climbing for them. But I think the missing peanuts steal his incentive . . . Dan's peanut calculations are foiled by someone having "helped him or herself to the nuts." We ask Dan who he's sleeping with. He ignores us, insists that saying *him or herself* is the proper way to speak, and returns to recounting his nuts.

He thinks, at first, that Doug helped himself to his nuts while he slept, then thinks it was John, then Doug again. He is certain it wasn't either Earl or me. More salted ones have disappeared than unsalted. And that remains his basis for suspecting Doug; for John is extremely health food conscious, determined, Dan says, to die healthy.

The number of missing nuts grows between his counts, a fact that troubles Dan greatly.

Doug, as a CPA, continually offers Dan suggestions for better ways to keep track of his nuts. Saying that putting peanuts in piles is like keeping receipts in a shoebox, Doug advocates a double entry system which, Dan says, is nothing more than Doug eating one nut for every one he counts. Earl smiles, a little too knowingly. John skins the deer; and I return the skiff to Jeanie, and ask if I can borrow it again when I come with my daughters.

"Sure," she says, inviting me to cache my gear in her barn. I accept. Kathy, Kristel and I will come in a Beaver, which costs half as much per hour to fly as Hal's Goose. We could not have fit into

the Beaver us, my stove, Dan's outboard and Kristel's twenty-three pairs of socks. Yes, she will bring that many pairs. So leaving my gear and extra groceries in Jeanie's barn saves two hundred dollars of what I will eventually pay for the motor.

Our return is as smooth as the flight out was rough. My wife awaits the unloading of our deer. She will butcher them; she does professional work, having practiced on so many while we lived in Oregon. She ferries everyone from the airport to town, sends me for freezer paper, starts Earl wrapping, and tells John and Doug to knock off the horseplay: they have a deer's tongue that looks like a penis from across the room.

Kristel, twelve years old, tells Doug he isn't much of a man, not being able to drag three deer downhill through the alders in the dark. She showers him with "wimp" barbs, and no amount of hinting will still her sharp tongue.

But Doug has worked with kids and has five of his own. Knowing Kristel wants to attend the summer camp where he is the counselor despite her being a year too young, he challenges her: "If you can drag a deer off that ridge you can come to camp with your sister this summer, even though you're not old enough."

"Well, you're a man and ought to be able to do it." Kris then turns to me and says, "I'm going hunting with Kathy." Before this, she hadn't wanted to go even though I had wanted her to come along. "And Dad, I'll prove you're wrong. Girls can keep a fire going." She adds.

I look at her mother to make sure her going is okay.

Then Kris says, "If I have to shoot a deer myself, I want a scope like Kathy's."

"Doug," I ask, "who at Denali don't you like?" Denali is the location of the camp where Doug is counselor.

2.The Stew That Shouldn't Have Been Made

After Doug, Dan, John and Earl board their return flight to Anchorage, Kristel starts making a list of what she will take hunting.

At both the bottom and top of her long column of extra clothes are "socks." She wants me to load more ammo for her and to take her shooting Sunday; she isn't a very good shot. Another day of practice might help, but probably not very much since she periodically closes both eyes before she pulls the trigger. And she says that we'll have to get some peanut butter and hot chocolate mix, "not the kind you gotta add milk to." She also wants to know if there are rocks across the island (by rocks she means "real agates").

She starts packing her clothes and raingear, boots and hats before Dan and Doug land at Anchorage . . . Dan will never find out what happened to his peanuts. His marriage and his business will fail, and I will lose track of him. That will be my loss. Earl will be transferred to Tulsa to pastor a church, and John will change jobs and end up in Minnesota where he, too, will pastor a church. Doug will spend more time with summer campers and have fewer chances to hunt. None of them will ever hunt Kodiak again although each of them will keep promising to return. Even I will leave the Island. But I will, after an auto accident and after my marriage ends, return many times with Kristel before she takes her doctorate in Chemistry and settles down with her husband in Minnesota.

Two days after Doug and company leave, a mound of groceries and gun cases, duffle bags, sleeping bags and plastic bags of I-don't-know-what begins growing on the living room floor. It divides and redivides like amoeba. And the mounds acquire auras of permanence where they block entry into the livingroom. They seem as ancient as shell middens by the time the Christmas school break finally arrives. Still, my wife adds a few more things she feels are absolutely essential the evening before we are to fly across the island.

Kathy and Kristel, looking like experienced hunters, have the car loaded before I'm up the morning we head for Mush Bay.

The pilot of the Beaver doesn't think everything will fit in. I don't either. But Kris insists there is nothing we can do without; so the pilot stuffs bags where he can, sits Kathy in front and hands

her a sleeping bag to hold. Kris and I sit in back with a duffle bag jammed between us.

The Beaver, on floats, chugs over the island with the grace of an airborne stone. Kris says it *shakes a headache on*, meaning, I think, that its vibrations cause her head to hurt.

The flight lasts twice as long as the return trip in Hal's Goose will take. But then, God didn't intend for beavers to fly.

We camp in the same place. Kris gathers wood while Kathy and I pack our mountain of gear off the beach. Then leaving Kathy to entertain herself, I hike, with Kristel in tow, around the bay to where *Bubbles* awaits my return: the skiff is half full of water and I doubt if much of it is rain.

Jeanie invites us in for coffee. We stay for awhile, but I have to go. In all of the groceries, there is no meat. I need to kill dinner. I had hoped to get here early enough in the day to kill a deer for camp meat, but shadows are already lengthening. Darkness is likely to catch me on the hill if I start after a deer this late in the afternoon. But rafts of ducks bob in every cove. I have a shotgun with me. So I ask Jeanie and Chief to come by camp after dark and we head out, with the outboard idling in gear.

When stalking ducks with a skiff, timing is crucial: the motor must be shutoff and out of the water before the ducks are too far away to shoot. This is an art I have not practiced. Flock after flock are out of shotgun range before the skiff's forward progress has stopped—it is very dark when we finally return to camp with one mallard.

I lived on ducks the year I attended Oregon Tech: I started that second year of college with one hundred thirty dollars. One hundred ten dollars went for tuition. I got along without textbooks and without much of anything else. Reloading component vendors supplied the school's gunshop with powder, primers, wads and lead shot; so shooting reloaded shotshells and being right on Klammath Lake, I harvested ducks, and ate ducks for three meals a day until I couldn't again eat a duck.

Despite the passage of time, I haven't been able to force my hand to put a piece of fried or roasted duck into my mouth since

that year when I was seventeen and without rent or grocery money. My hand stops six inches from my mouth, and no amount of "wanting" will make it come closer. However, every once in awhile I again try to eat a duck. This is one of those times.

But as soon as I dress the duck, I begin to relive that year when for more than a month I couldn't even afford cooking oil and had to eat duck roasted without salt.

My problem this evening is how to fix this duck so it loses its identity.

Kathy and Kris check it over for pellets. They are all for letting me eat the whole duck while they have peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I suggest they share it while I eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. "Naa, that's all right, Dad. You go ahead and eat it."

I feel the responsibility to cook a proper dinner, something appropriate to a hunting camp. To me, that means stew. But duck isn't venison, and I don't have Earl's briefcase of spices. In fact, spices are the forgotten items on this trip.

After browning the filleted breast, cubed in half-inch chunks, I add a little flour, water, potatoes, carrots, onions, salt. The stew looks edible. I taste the gravy—the duck taste is strong.

If I had quit now, admitted that what was wrong with the stew was my dislike for duck, my daughters would've eaten it with only a little grumbling. But I wanted to get rid of the duck taste. That proved a major mistake: I add a spoonful of prepared mustard, more water and flour, more potatoes and another onion. The duck taste is almost gone.

I add a little more mustard, and the stew suddenly tastes like mustard. The Dutch oven is full; so I can't add more water. I have no other spices. And Kris says, "I'm not eating that!" after smelling it.

To me, the stew smells like mustard and duck bowels. I have to do something so I add a pat of butter, a spoonful of honey, and some instant chocolate (the remains of a packet Dan had opened). And again, the stew is better. I shake in a little catsup, and Kris asks, "Does the recipe call for catsup?"

"Sample the broth. Tell me what you think it needs."

Kris wrinkles her nose. Kathy says she feels sorry for the duck. By this time so do I. And I add a handful of quick oats to thicken the broth, which should be gravy but hasn't been since I added water the second time.

"Pretend your refugees in Africa, you're starving, and this is all there is," I say, ladling a mixing spoon full of "stew" onto Kristel's tin plate. "And if you don't eat it tonight, you'll get it for breakfast."

"I'm not hungry," Kris says.

"Eat it or you're staying in camp the whole trip."

The stew cools on Kristel's plate before she eats a third bite. She complains about it being cold, but quickly adds, "That's all right. I don't want more." And she hasn't eaten her third bite when Jeanie arrives with Mona Brown, her dog.

Suddenly, Kristel's plate is licked clean.

Kris says the stew really wasn't so bad, and I see Mona Brown begging for more.

"It was better," Kathy tells Jeanie, "before Dad put in the oatmeal." And too quickly, Kris adds, "Yeah, Dad missed lotsa ducks. He made me lay in the water in the boat and wouldn't let me get up while he shot and shot and shot. I used to think he was a good shot."

Jeanie laughs hard enough to spill her coffee. Mona Brown's tail thumps the cot leg. And Kris gives a detailed account of each duck I missed, especially the one sitting on the water, the one that dived twice before shot reached it.

Saying the cannery gave her a turkey and that Chief bought another one when in town, Jeanie invites us over for Christmas dinner, then leaves, still chuckling about Kristel's indignation at lying in loose water while I missed ducks out of range, shots Kris thinks I should've made.

The stew is no better cold in the morning. Skim ice bridges the creek. Leaves crunch as does the moss, raised with hoarfrost. The breeze smells of snow.

I have Kathy and Kristel gather wood and water, but I don't make them eat the stew. Instead, I cook pancakes. And while dumping yesterday's coffee grounds, I see something small and white. Not a rabbit. A cat with light colored eyes. It runs when I look directly at it.

"Did you see the cat, Kris?"

"Where?"

"By the pile of wood you were supposed to pack in last night."

"You didn't get me here until after dark and then I was wet from lying in the bottom of the boat, remember. . . . Is the cat still out there?"

"It's pretty wild. I think it's just here sniffing around where I dressed the duck last night."

Kristel's fire takes off, again. The drum stove and the bottom joint of stovepipe glow redorange hot. But she isn't paying the stove any attention. Rather, she's outside calling, "Kitty, Kitty," so she doesn't see me dump half a bucket of water on her fire. Steam bellows from the stove. "She's gonna burn us out," I tell Kathy.

Kris returns, saying, "That kitty is so cute. She has one blue eye. Her other eye is brown or green. It's too dark to tell which."

"How do you know it's a she?"

"She has to be. She's cute." Kris checks her stove, and adds another piece of birch and a piece of spruce driftwood.

"That's enough wood," I say, stopping her from adding a second piece of birch. "If I wanted to camp in a sauna, I would have brought a lighter sleeping bag."

"But Dad, how can I keep a fire going if you won't let me put wood on it?"

Kris doesn't know yet about burning black birch, about how much heat it puts out and how much creosote it makes when burned green. She will. Although she won't melt-down the stove, she will wrinkle it. She will keep the fire going for nine days, banking it both in the morning and at night. But the pipe will creosote shut, finally choking her fire; so she doesn't keep it going for as long as we are here.

3. "Doesn't Break Like A Stick"

As she gets ready to go hunting, Kristel dumps out her duffle bag. Rolled pairs of socks tumble out like Nerf balls, bounce off her cot and onto the ground. They keep coming, and coming, and coming.

"Did you bring every pair you own?" I ask.

"No. One pair was dirty. . . . You said to bring lots of socks."

"Why so many? How many pairs were you figuring on wearing a day?"

"Some of them aren't very good pairs."

Kathy visits Breezy Point, the outhouse belonging to the Bear Camp. Without a door and built over a narrow crevice at the edge of the bluff, the outhouse is flushed with each tide change. The crevice also serves as a wind tunnel, with the outhouse hole acting as a venturi restriction—wind whistling through the crevice makes visiting the outhouse a chilling experience on frosty mornings.

Kris rattles another piece of green birch into the stove, then ducks outside to again call the cat, leaving her clothes piled on Kathy's cot. Snow has begun to fall. And Kris can't find the white cat she has named Midnight. Finally, as Kathy and I check our rifles, Kris tempts Midnight close with a buttered piece of pancake, but she is unable to lure the cat inside.

"If you don't want to stay in camp, Kris, you'd better be ready to go in five minutes. I want to be across the bay before good light."

"I'm ready to go!"

"Why aren't you in the skiff?"

"There's nothing to sit on. Besides, you didn't tell me to get in the boat."

"Get your rifle, raincoat, my thermos and go stand beside the skiff."

"Why didn't you say that earlier if you wanted me to do it? But there's still nothing to sit on."

I scowl at Kris as Kathy picks up both hers and Kristel's rifle. And Kris drops my thermos—I'm glad it's stainless steel. She chases after it, picks it up, then slips on the ice-sheathed stones, falls, and sends my thermos bouncing on its cup a second time. "You're gonna have to carry it, Dad. It makes me outta balance." And she leaves it, and runs back up the bank, calling, "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty."

At this moment I would like to have a word with Doug. Actually, I hope she drags a deer off that hill. He deserves a couple of weeks with her.

She will not only drag one deer off that hillside, but a second—and through alders for a mile, choosing a better way through them than I took the day before. But she won't see the four-point buck she puts out, the only deer that Coast Guard party of eleven kills.

The snow clouds sit on the bay which is without a ripple. They muffle the outboard; the skiff passes through the darkness, leaving no wake. I steer by dead reckoning, and by the feel of the water. Kris complains about fog in her eyes, throws half a bucket of water on me when bailing, and kicks water on Kathy. The transition from child to teenager is a watery affair, best done in daylight—I tell Kris to sit in the bow and not move. "But Dad, what if we bump into something and I fall out?"

"I'll know you weren't sitting down."

I beach the skiff where I had dropped Earl off, lengthen the bowline and rig a floating anchor, then push the skiff back into deep water, hopefully deep enough the skiff won't go dry at low tide.

Kris whispers, "Is it light enough to start up the hill yet?" I tell her to wait a few more minutes.

When color starts to appear, Kathy climbs above the hightide line, stares at a cottonwood and birch covered knoll, then starts off, her rifle slung over her shoulder. I know she would rather not climb the hill. Her knees will swell. She knows they will. She has arthritis. She hopes that Kris can go with me in the future, that she can stay home, but she would rather climb than eat salmon

the rest of the winter. We have already eaten half of the buck she shot on Afognak in November.

"Is it light enough to go now?" Kris asks, dragging her rifle as if it were a limb.

"Pick up your rifle, put it on your shoulder, and stay beside me. But if we get separated, head for the beach and wait where I can see you."

She nods as we take off, keeping to the right of Kathy.

We climb less than two hundred yards when I see a small buck watching us from an alder thicket. We are here for meat, not trophies. He falls when I shoot. And Kris runs ahead, her rifle still slung across her back.

She reaches the buck before I do, her gun still on her shoulder. Although I envy the elasticity of her legs, I wonder about her thought process.

"But Dad, he had to be dead. You shot him, and you said you were a good shot with a rifle, even if you can't hit anything with a shotgun. Do you know how many times you missed last night? You couldn't even hit the one on the water."

"You don't need to tell that, and I haven't practiced shooting sitting birds. If I hear anything more about that duck, you'll be eating duck stew until you're eighteen."

She thinks for a minutes, then says, "You know how much that would be for shells."

"I'll raise the ducks."

"Mom won't make me eat it, not with mustard and oatmeal in it. Kathy's right. It was better before you put in the oatmeal."

"We'll eat it every day we're here. The ducks won't want to fly in this fog. I ought to be able to kill a half dozen with the shells I have left."

"You wouldn't really shoot another one. They're cute, bobbing with their bottoms up when you were trying to make them fly."

"Why wouldn't I shoot another one?"

"There's lots of stew left. I didn't see you take seconds."

"I need to lose weight."

"Then Kathy and I can have all of the backstrap tonight?"

"One more word and you will have talked yourself into eating stew."

"I want to take this deer down to the beach now."

"You'll be there in fifteen minutes. What will you do the rest of the day?"

"Wait."

"You're coming with me. The climbing will do you good. You're not spending the day doing nothing on the beach."

She follows me after I dress the little buck, but after a dozen steps, she says, "I'm tired."

"You can't be tired."

"I want a drink."

"You can't have one. Look, Kris, you're not tired. You're not thirsty. Just be quiet and follow me."

She pouts as she lags behind. The hill is steep and the frosted leaves slick. My knees don't work like they used to: I stop every few steps, scan the hardwoods, catch my breath, and expect to see another deer at any moment.

"I'm bored."

And I hear the thump, thump, thump of a bounding deer, but don't see the deer. I run uphill like I used to when I logged, only now gasping and puffing, swallowing breaths. I break out of the cottonwoods and see Kathy motioning that the deer went through the alders above her.

Kris catches up and again says, "I'm bored, I didn't think hunting was this boring."

"Didn't you hear the deer you spooked?"

"No."

"Didn't you hear that thump, thump, thump?" She nods yes. "That was a deer and your big mouth spooked it."

"I'm sorry, but I'm still bored," she says.

"Go ahead and drag that buck to the beach."

"Can I?" Suddenly no longer tired, thirsty or bored, she takes off.

I yell after her, "Stay by the skiff. It'll be three o'clock before I'm there."

It is three o'clock before I return to the cove with another deer. It has snowed most of the day, and is snowing hard now. Big, wet flakes drift down like inverted umbrellas. Kris sits on a driftwood log, elbows on her knees, her chin resting on her hands. Kathy is with her, sees me, waves, says something to Kris who looks up, but doesn't see me until I'm on the beach.

"If I were a bear, Kris, I could've bit you. How long did it take to get the buck down?" It leans over the other end of the log.

"Fifteen minutes."

"What did you do with the rest of the time?"

"I haven't been bored," she says defensively.

I see why: she has a piece of beach gravel in her right hand and her pockets bulge. "You're not taking rocks home. I'm not rich enough to fly gravel from one side of this island to the other."

"Not even agates? Grandpa wants me to find him agates."

"Any you find here will be fractured, worthless, just gravel." I look across the bay. The fog has darkened, and the snow isn't letting up. "We got to get going."

It has been dark for an hour when we reach camp. Kathy and I unload the skiff and hang the deer. Kris checks the stove, which still has in it enough coals that she gets the fire going without having to use a match; so she contends that the fire hasn't gone out.

Dinner is canned chili and reheated stew, but I'm the only one who takes any stew. I step outside to eat, and Kathy and Kris change into dry clothes—and Mona Brown greets me. She really likes my stew.

The fog has lifted ten feet, maybe a little more. The breeze has picked up. And down the beach, I see a floating ribbon of light coming towards camp.

When Jeanie gets close, I say, "There's a couple of livers in the skiff for you."

"I thought I heard a shot this morning."

"You're in time for dinner."

"Duck stew?"

From inside, Kris hollers, "It's still awful."

Jeanie giggles. Mona Brown licks my plate. And Kathy warns Kris, "Be quiet or Dad will make you eat some."

Kathy washes her plate off so Jeanie can have some chili; Jeanie decides against trying the stew. She uses Kristel's cup which still has a little chocolate stuck in the bottom when Kathy fills it with coffee, and she invites Kris to go down the bay with her tomorrow, maybe see a shell mound, maybe stop where two skulls washed out of the bank last summer.

"Real skulls?" Kris asks.

Jeanie says they are more likely to find lamps or net stones than a skull; she doesn't know I'll be subpoenaed to testify about the double murder and burial of two neighbors, only fifty miles from here. Her nearest neighbor is twelve miles from here, farther if she had to walk. She goes thirty-five miles to check her mail, and about the same distance to the cannery where she works in the summer as a cook. The murder of the two brothers will surprise everyone. The state will have a tough time getting witnesses to testify for there were no witnesses.

"How big are net stones?" Kris asks.

Forming a circle with her fingers the size of a bagel, Jeanie says, "Like so, not too big."

"Dad won't let me take any rocks home. What about arrowheads?"

"Maybe. Spearpoints . . . but most points were made of bone or ivory. I've never found a whole one. Too fragile."

"Can I go?" Kris asks me. "I can, can't I?"

"Do you think that deer qualifies you for summer camp?"

"I drug it off the hill, didn't I? And Mr. Hanson could've shot his close to the beach. You didn't have to go clear to the top."

"I'll have to tell Doug how close that buck was to the beach."

"I drug it off—and that's what he said. He didn't say anything about how far I had to drag it."

"Fifteen minutes—"

"It doesn't matter. Besides, it was almost to the top."

"Of what, the knoll? You weren't up a fourth of the way."

"It still doesn't matter. You only went up cause you wanted to kill another deer. You didn't have to."

"I'll be by for you, Kris, in the morning," Jeanie says, wrapping the livers in a towel. Kathy has been quietly feeding stew to Mona Brown—Mona hasn't quite finished the pot when Jeanie steps into a swirling flurry of heavy snowflakes that seem to fall upward. Kris sees the snow and rushes outside, calling, "Here Kitty, Kitty, Kitty."

"That cat's wild," Jeanie says, "and doesn't let anyone near it. She's probably found herself a warm hole under one of the buildings at the Bear Camp."

I don't know how Kris expects to see a white cat as hard as it is snowing, but she keeps calling long after I climb into my sleeping bag. When she finally comes in, she is covered with snow, chilled, and she stokes the fire with dry driftwood. The rear of the stove glows orange. I fall asleep sweating.

The fog and snow are gone by morning. Kris waits for Jeanie while Kathy and I take the skiff to Gobblers Knob, named for a bear hunter from Arkansas who had hunted turkeys on a knob like it at home. The name stuck because the knob would be a good place for turkeys if any were ever planted on the island.

We bring three deer back to camp, but see four more big bucks on top of the ridge on which I shot the others. The limit is seven apiece this year. Kris won't kill any. In fact, seven years will pass before she kills her first deer. But Kathy and I finish out our limits.

Kris is in camp when we return. She doesn't say much about her day other than she found a broken spearpoint. "Where is it?" I ask.

"Chief has it. He said he would give it to me tomorrow when we come over for Christmas. I told him we don't keep Christmas so Jeanie said when we come over for dinner. She's nice."

Although I wonder why Chief wanted to keep the broken point overnight, I don't pursue the subject. I figure Chief, in his late

sixties, has some ritual that needs observed. "Did Jeanie find anything?"

"She was busy answering my questions. She didn't have much time to look."

The morning tide, the highest of the biggest series for the year, is too far in by daylight to walk the beach. So with yesterday's livers in a gunny sack, I lead, carrying my rifle slung across my shoulder, overland, following a well-worn bear trail through alders and stunted cottonwoods. It is possible to see a bear even in late December.

Kris and Kathy leave their rifles in camp. Kathy carries our rolled up raingear, and Kris complains. I try not to hear what she says about not letting her put enough wood in the stove to keep the fire going if we stay until dark. And I don't understand why she isn't more excited about getting her broken point back from Chief.

A couple of small knolls separate us from Jeanie's place. With most of the snow melted, the morning feels like March. The trail is soggy, but the air is crisp. Kris lags behind. She stops to look at fox scat, at fresh deer tracks, at some bright green leaves, at the dungy and king crab pots behind Jeanie's barn, at Jeanie's two Rhode Island Red hens. Kathy and I pause so many times to wait for her that my patience has worn extremely thin by the time we climb onto Jeanie's porch . . . earlier that summer, Jeanie had chased four bears off her porch with a broom.

I don't realize why Kris has lagged so far behind until Chief greets us: "I fix your spearpoint, Kris. Ye-cripes, you break a good one."

"Don't tell," Kris pleads.

"What don't you want told?" I ask.

Jeanie says, "She found a notched, carved head, and I wasn't paying her much attention so when she asked if it was anything, I said it looked like a stick. . . . She said, 'It doesn't break like a stick.' I took a closer look, and it wasn't a stick."

"She broke a spearpoint?"

"Dad, I would've thrown it away if I hadn't broken it. It didn't look like anything."

It doesn't break like a stick, an expression of innocence that will stay with her through her teens—she will, in high school, be named outstanding math student, outstanding chemistry student; she will win "Best of Show" for an oil painting made from a slide I take of her dragging deer; she will attend University of Alaska Fairbanks on an Honors scholarship; but she will not escape *it doesn't break like a stick*. The expression will become the handle of her attention: it will be all I have to say to rein in her otherwise unbridled enthusiasm for life. Although too young now to comprehend the significance of artifacts, she will understand that the trial & error method isn't always the best way. But how do sticks break? How are we to know without breaking a few?

Chief hands her a triangular cardboard tube. Inside is a four inch long, barbed point, repaired with Super Glue.

"If it didn't break like a stick, Kris, how did it break?"

"Dad, promise you won't yell. It didn't look like anything."

"I believe you didn't think it looked like anything."

"It broke kinda hard. I knew it wasn't a stick when I found it, but Jeanie said it was. . . . I had asked her what a lot of frozen sticks were. I guess she was tired of me asking questions."

"So you broke it because you knew it wasn't a stick. What did you think it was?"

"I didn't know. That's why I asked Jeanie."

Jeanie's turkey, roasted in her woodrange's oven, is as good as my stew was bad. The tide surrounds the house. Chief lifts a piece of plywood covering a hole in the backroom, and the surge washes across the kitchen floor. Jeanie wades ashore. She wants to take a picture for the newspaper. Tourists next summer will think her house quaint, but they will ask why are the pilings under it so high. And they will wonder how she got the Bristol Bay gillnetter she is restoring so far from the water's edge without any machinery. She will serve coffee and tell about shooing the bears off her porch. They will ask if she was scared, and she will say the bears were

scared because they knew they didn't belong on her porch. But she will say nothing about where she swept the water that surged across her kitchen floor.

The tide is low when we return to camp. Kris finds a white plastic bucket, fills it with starfish, and complains about how heavy it is. She wants me to carry the bucket. "What are you gonna do with the starfish?" I ask.

"Dry them. You won't let me take any rocks back."

Towards the mouth of the bay appears what looks like a city, with every light in every house turned on. Through binoculars, I see the "city" is one of the vessels the Coast Guard uses to patrol the Bering Sea . . . in the morning, eleven hunters will disembark and manage to get their skiff hungup. They will have to wait for the tidechange to lift their skiff free, and they will find themselves cold and wet. Jeanie will serve them coffee, and tell them to watch out for a rock in the channel. I will see them, tomorrow night, carefully sounding their way out the bay, traveling no faster than if they were drifting with the tide, thereby making *Bubbles* seem like a speedboat. And all of us will laugh about Jeanie rescuing the Coast Guard.

Hal will come for us in a week. Kristel's starfish will still not have dried, but she will have made friends with the white cat. Her pillow will weigh twenty pounds; her coat more because of the agates she will smuggle onto the Goose. Kathy likes flying in the Goose: it seems like a real plane to her. I will have taken a record book buck from Gobbler's Knob, but this return flight will be the last time I fly with Hal.

* * *

SHAMEFUL

Late August, 1988. Kris, Kori and I descend into the golden Tanana valley. Birch leaves have already changed colors as have cottonwoods and willows. A sea of golden leaves stretches to Fairbanks, North Pole, and beyond in air so still it seems not to exist. Not one leaf flutters. Not one leaf falls. Leaves just hang on white branches as if they were newly minted coins. They hang, and hang, and will hang for more than a month.

I left Kodiak yesterday so the stillness of the air seems eerie. I want some kind of a breeze to blow, but none does. I feel like I have entered a still life painting of a valley of yellow leaves; I move about in the painting, but nothing moves around me. It is as if nothing around me is truly real.

In two days, Kris will begin her first year of college at University of Alaska Fairbanks. A year ago, I had no idea how I would send her to college. The auto accident in 1984 that left her mother hospitalized for eleven months, left me destitute. I struggled to pay rent. We knew there would eventually be a monetary settlement, but that knowledge did little except to put all of our lives on hold.

Before the accident, I had begun to write magazine articles about, mostly, sport fishing. But the accident left me caring for an invalid wife and our younger two daughters—Kathy struck out on her own, and at eighteen, became the office manager for the Anchorage Better Business Bureau.

Following the accident, there were no more articles written about going fishing or going anywhere else. Instead, I had to fight with a couple of magazine publishers to get paid for articles that had already appeared in print. I had to fight with state unemployment, with Wage & Hour, with creditors, with Human

Services, with attorneys and the hospital. I wrote lots of objections, lots of explanations, but nothing about the outdoors.

To be somewhat productive during this period, I wrote a novel that was accepted by Alaska Nature Press. However, before that novel could make me much money the publisher of the small press was also involved in an auto accident which left him unable to continue running his business. He sold out to a university press that doesn't publish fiction.

That novel, however, gained me acceptance into UAF's graduate writing program even though I didn't have an undergraduate degree. By me entering graduate school the same year that Kristel is a freshman, I can send her to college. Money is available: between the stipend I'll receive as a teaching assistant and what I can borrow, I will be able to school Kris this year and Kori in two years. This is not how I anticipated sending them to college, but once again I see no other viable option. Plus, I remember what dorm life was like for me. I believe living at home will benefit both of them academically. It will certainly benefit all of us financially.

So as we descend into Fairbanks, having never experienced truly cold weather despite being in Alaska for over a decade, I give up thoughts of hunting and fishing. I'm a middle-aged graduate student who hasn't been in college for twenty-three years, who left to marry and open a business before taking a degree, whose weakest subject in school was English, and who has no more physical possessions in the world than will fit into a 1969 Ford LTD.

Cold weather comes in January. For five weeks our daytime high temperature is less than fifty below. It is sixty-seven, sixty-eight below on campus, and seventy-five and more below at the radio station on Farmers Loop.

The old LTD quits the first day of the cold snap; so we, like half of Fairbanks, resort to riding city buses and taking taxis. Ice fog limits visibility to a few yards, and the planes landing at the airport seven miles out of town sound as if they are landing on top of us. The density of the cold air causes a barometric pressure reading of 31.85 inches of mercury, and planes are limited to

daylight only landings. And I realize that Jack London never saw seventy-five below, that his story "To Build A Fire" is nonsense.

Willard Scott does *The Today Show's* weather from in front of the old Fred Meyer's sign on the last day of the cold snap, and I go to work for DownUnder Guns as part time counter help. If I can't go hunting, at least I can talk about guns and hunting, about what is new and what does or doesn't work. I can talk about moose, wolves, bears, and the caribou that migrate through the outskirts of Fairbanks.

When moose season opens in 1989, I am teaching a section of Freshman Comp, tutoring in the Writing Center, taking twelve graduate hours of Lit and Forms courses; plus, I am still working part time in the gunshop. I don't get out hunting for even a day. But as this fall semester winds down in early December, Kris surprises me: "Dad, it's shameful that you let me get to be nineteen years old without having killed a deer. I think we should go hunting." I don't need additional encouragement.

I call and make ferry reservations for Kodiak.

My old LTD is tired. It never fully recovered from last winter's cold weather. But Kris worked all summer in the deli section for Carr's, saved her money and bought a decade-old Pontiac that has been rebuilt and seems to be in good enough shape to make the nearly twelve hundred mile round trip from Fairbanks to the ferry terminal at Homer. The Pontiac is her first car, and she is pleased with it. It is certainly in better shape than my first car.

Kris insists that we need a new stove; so a trip to Alaska Tent and Tarp leaves her a couple of hundred dollars poorer and us with a sheet metal stove and collapsing stovepipe and a new coffee pot, all of which will have to be fit into her Pontiac along with sleeping bags, foam mattresses, dufflebags, my 12 foot Zodiac and fifteen horse outboard, rifles and enough ammo to carry-on a war. I have no clue where, on our return trip to Fairbanks, we will fit in the deer we will take.

While working at the gunshop, I acquired a used Ruger 77 in 7x57 for Kris. I know the gun shoots under one inch groups, but

when I take Kris to the rifle range she has difficulty keeping her shots on a Leupold sighting-in target. Thinking that perhaps the cold has effected her rifle (it is thirty-five below as we shoot), I try her rifle: it again shoots under an inch.

"How come," Kris asks, "when you shoot my gun is still pointing at the target? When I open my eyes—"

I never let her finish her sentence. Closing her eyes just before she pulled the trigger was the problem she had when twelve years old. But I haven't, for a host of reasons, taken her shooting since then. She is correct: it is shameful that I haven't taken her with me in the past seven years.

We talk about keeping her eyes open; she practices keeping her eyes open. And she shoots acceptable groups as I wonder if I would have gone seven years without taking a son shooting. Sure, her mother being bedridden, then wheelchair-bound has something to do with not taking her shooting. I didn't go shooting myself for a couple of those years. But I managed to get away from the house enough to take Kris to track practice and to track meets (she threw the shot in high school and earned her way to state). And since being in Fairbanks and working for the gunshop, I have visited the rifle range at least every other week. Why haven't I been bringing her? I just haven't thought to.

Since working for the gunshop, I acquired a Bell & Carlson fibreglas stock for a barreled Howa .270 I had picked up from John Schirmer before coming to Fairbanks. Figuring that this combination of fibreglas stock and bolt action will handle Kodiak's wetness better than my No.1 .25-06, I check its zero after I am convinced that Kris will keep her eyes open, or at least one eye open when she shoots.

The Howa prints small groups three inches high at a hundred yards, but what I don't realize is that fibreglas stocks behave differently at thirty-five below than at thirty-five above. In subzero temperatures, glass stocks are harder and give more bounce to even well-bedded barrels—they shoot like you have rested your stock's forearm on a rock. Impact points drop as temperatures rise towards

zero. At Kodiak, the Howa will shoot six inches low and will cost me a long range buck before I realize what the problem is. The walnut stock of Kristel's Ruger isn't as temperature sensitive. So much for technology.

We leave Fairbanks in a snowstorm at ten p.m. If we didn't already have ferry reservations, I would wait a few days to go.

Fish and Game has been warning drivers about the number of moose on the road between Talkeetna and Wasilla—there is one less after a yearling cow dives off a snowberm in front of us. The Pontiac's passengerside headlight just clips her head. Its headlight breaks, but the bracket is fine. And we have to go thirty miles before I find a telephone from where I can call the State Troopers so the animal can be salvaged.

Once we are loaded on the ferry, I sleep most of the way to Kodiak, where we arrive just before daylight. I feel like I'm again where I belong as I smell the harbor, the canneries; hear the whistler buoy and the clang of the cardeck ramp. I didn't want to leave here in 1979, nor in 1983, nor in 1988. And I feel like I have been a sojourner, destined to wander with a bag full of wind and memories of a place that never will again be mine.

We head for Pasagshak Bay, and park the Pontiac where I camped with Kris and Kori for all of the summer of 1983. This is the usual spot where hunters park when they cross Ugak Bay to reach Eagle Harbor or Hidden Basin.

After unloading the Zodiac, we inflate it and load it with enough grub for a week across Ugak Bay. I intend to stay in the same cabin Kris and I stayed in when we brushed the property lines of her mother's homesite claim, that claim now lost.

There are eight miles of winter water between us and Gull Point—we are both wet and cold by the time we beach on the other side. And the rain has intensified: it comes in driven waves that stand tall and slam against the cape.

A corner and half of one sidewall of the cabin have been ripped away. Evidently a bear smelled food inside the cabin, which has been ripped open as if it were a picnic basket.

The beach fisherman who originally built this cabin has left a roll of plastic gunny sacks under the lower bunk—splicing the gunny sacks together, I manage to cover the hole made by the bear, making the cabin now as much a tent as anything. Kris will need all of her skills to keep the fire going. I imagine the cabin will hold heat for ten or fifteen seconds after the fire goes out.

The rain is hard enough to keep Kris in the cabin while I scout the valley where her mother's homesite had been. I see nothing but rain. No deer are out, and I don't feel like pushing the alders. So I return to the cabin just before dark, drenched and without meat.

Before morning, the rain lets up; the wind dies down. By dawn, the temperature has risen and the morning feels balmy as we climb the ridge that leads to the ledge overlooking the rock spire where the eagles' aerie is.

We jump a doe not a hundred yards from the cabin.

Kris watches it bound uphill and into some alders where she sees a buck, at which she shoots four times without coming close.

"Are you keeping your eyes open?"

"I don't know."

"Concentrate on keeping your eyes open, on watching what you shoot at after you shoot."

We climb another couple hundred yards and get above an alder-filled ravine full of deer—deer run everywhere, and in that moment of excitement and confusion, Kris kills her first animal. I kill four, and our work begins. We spend the rest of the day getting them back to the cabin and hung up. Because they will get wet when we recross Ugak, I don't skin them.

That night, by the stove, Kris wonders if she really killed her first deer or if I had shot it. Everything happened so quickly, she doesn't know. Yes, she shot at the deer. But I shot so many times before she could shoot again that she just doesn't know—and knowing for sure seems unusually important to her.

During the night, the rain returns. Hard rain. The kind only the coast gets. So we spend the next day sitting by the stove,

listening to the pounding surf and the wind in the spruce boughs behind the cabin. We listen to crows and gulls and the creek, and we talk about her keeping her eyes open when she shoots.

Because I didn't like where I had hit a couple of those deer I shoot the Howa at a Blazo can across the creek. Sure enough, it shoots low. But I think the low hits are just me so I don't change its zero even though I know I should. I don't want to believe the fibreglas stock will move around like wood or that it will change the Howa's impact point; I want to believe, this time, in technology.

By dawn of our third morning across Ugak Bay, the rain has let up and deer are again out. In fact, a little buck stands between Kris and our outhouse hole when she goes out to do her morning business. If it were daylight, the buck would never have left the spruce grove alive. As it is, he doesn't like me bringing out the Coleman lantern so we can get a better look at him. He bolts, and where he will be by daylight, we don't know. I doubt close to the cabin.

We hike up the valley towards her mother's homesite. Kris is ahead of me and she has already crossed the beaver dam when a deer appears two hundred fifty yards above us.

I shot a deer in almost that same location a few years ago. It took me three hours to climb to where the buck fell, and I don't feel like climbing the hillside this morning. I'm content to watch through binoculars, hoping to see an animal more worthy of spending the morning climbing.

Kris is on the other side of the alders the beaver have been cutting. I can't see her; so her shot comes as a surprise. The deer collapses and begins to roll downhill.

It rolls—and rolls—and rolls until it is twenty yards above Kris. This deer is no doubt hers. And I have no doubt about her having kept her eyes open.

Her shot puts out a large buck to the right and above her deer . . . my shot is low.

Now believing my hits on the Blazo can, I change holds. But I don't get another shot at the big buck. Instead, I get a chance at a different buck.

We limit out in the next hour.

However, after dragging these deer back to the beach we wait until the following day to recross Ugak Bay.

There have been times when I found it difficult to support the National Rifle Association; when I think some form of gun control beyond a steady aim seems reasonable; when I think that a certain individual isn't responsible enough to own a gun even though the individual hasn't yet broken any laws. I saw one of my customers target practicing in his front yard while his kids ran in and out of his line of fire. I saw another one shoot a doe during a buck-only hunt just to kill something; he left the doe lie, which is probably what angered me most.

There are plenty of other examples that make me fear losing my right to shoot, to own firearms, to hunt, to defend myself. But having a sense of history, knowing that despite all of our technical advances we are the same people who were Carthaginian traders or Scyths from the steppes of Russia, I get over such nonsensical thinking about a need for limited gun control by remembering why the Second Amendment was written in the first place. Governments by their very nature become tyrannical if they have no fear of those whom they govern. Our forefathers didn't want a repeat of Charles banning Protestants, or George banning Americans from owning firearms. In the case of Charles the First, Parliament debated the issue of whether only Catholics could own firearms, and Cromwell settled that debate by removing Charles' head. And as far as King George banning muskets, it was the king who was banned from American shores

When we get close enough that I can see Kristel's Pontiac, I want to remove someone's head—

Her Pontiac is riddled with bullet holes.

Twenty-three cars and four airplanes were riddled with bullets one of the nights we were across the bay. The planes were inside the Coast Guard compound at Woman's Bay so only someone passing through Base Security could have vandalized them. Who is responsible has never been determined. A couple of Coast Guard

families with teenage sons were immediately transferred to Florida. That is as much as the State Troopers know.

Kristel's Pontiac is completely trashed. All she has for insurance is basic liability so she has no recourse but to write off the vehicle. And there have been a few times in my life when a murderous rage warred with my sense of reason. This is one of those times.

If the Pontiac were mine, losing it would not bother me as much. But it's Kristel's first car. It represents a summer's worth of work for her. And having been soaked by spray while crossing Ugak, I now literally steam as we wait for the troopers to come and tell us what they already know—they had called Kori in Fairbanks when they first found her Pontiac shot up. Kori told them that we were across Ugak. Rather than interrupt our hunt, they waited until we returned to talk to us.

The officer who comes out to tell us what happened calls Dick Waddell for me (I worked for Dick in 1988). Dick drives out the fifty miles to Pasagshak, picks us and our deer up, then loans me twelve hundred dollars so I can buy a pickup and get home. I will be forever thankful to him and his wife. Without his help, the loss of Kristel's car would have caused us real difficulties.

Our founding fathers, for whom Charles and Cromwell weren't figures in ancient history but key political players closer in time to themselves than Abraham Lincoln is to us, were never confident that they had formed a government that would endure. I believe they thought that as long as this nation remained a country of agrarian landowners, freedom was possible. But we are no longer rural, and a significant percent of our population isn't invested as property owners. And freedom cannot tolerate the irresponsible use of firearms. Just can't.

Kristel harvested a nice deer when she learned to shoot with her eyes open, when she learned not to fear the muzzle blast and the recoil of a discharging firearm, when she learned that she controlled where and what her bullet stuck. Learning to keep our eyes open is always a matter of reason overcoming fear.

A free populace shoots with their eyes open.

When Kris and I return to Fairbanks, the secretary of the English Department calls and wants me to meet Joe Brushac, a Native American writer and poet, at the airport; she can't think of whom else to call and Joe's plane will be arriving in a few minutes. Without unloading the pickup, I hurry to the airport. And just as Joe is about to get into the pickup's cab, he sees the mound of now frozen deer and says it looks like I have been hunting on the reservation. We get along fine.

* * *

AFTER GRADUATION

During the summer of 1991, Idaho State University offers me a Doctor of Arts fellowship in English. Kris and Kori tell me that I'm old enough to leave home; so I spend an academic year Outside, returning North just after Kris graduates with her Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry. She has been accepted into the graduate Chemistry program at UC Irvine, and she doubts that she will return to Alaska once she starts graduate school. She wants me to take her back to Kodiak for the summer.

Driving the same pickup I purchased on Kodiak after her Pontiac was vandalized, I load our camping gear into its bed, along with enough blocks of green birch that I can carve all summer. Both of us are short on money so we agree the summer will be spent eating what we catch. And once again, we board the ferry in Homer and disembark twelve hours later.

The island is as green and sunny as it was brown and stormy when we were last here. We head for Pasagshak Bay, but we make camp where the river comes out of Lake Rose Tead, about a mile from the beach. We camp in a stand of stunted cottonwoods that will prove to be the highest spot in the area when a week of rain causes creeks to overflow.

While Kris's mother was wheelchair-bound, I carved a large number of wobbling plugs. Some of them have brass lips, sink, dive deep, and behave like crawdads (they proved very effective on smallmouth bass in California's Lake Shasta and in Iron Gate Reservoir). Some of the plugs are minnow imitations with Plexiglas lips. And the Dolly Varden in Lake Rose Tead have never seen any lure like these plugs; they seem determined to eat whatever the plugs represent. One large Dolly after another impales itself on

the treble hooks. I begin to look for a plug I can cast and not catch a fish. I don't find that plug.

Kris has brought along the plywood shelves she used for a bookcase her four years at UAF. She now nails the shelves together to build a crude smokehouse, and by evening, she has my and her limits of Dollies smoking. She insists she knows what she is doing, that she received instructions from Mrs. Clucas, that I won't even have to check her smokehouse.

And I don't have to.

For six weeks, she keeps her small smokehouse going as I catch Dollies, then Reds, then Humpies, then Silvers.

I get up early each morning, go down to the lake and make a few casts before starting carving for the day. I stand in the stillness of dew and fog, listen to the looing of Burton's cattle, and marvel at how green are the hillsides of alders and grass and salmonberries . . . Bill has quit cutting his bull calves, and they now charge through the alders with their noses up and their horns back as if they were elk. He no longer loses cows to bears. And I feel transported back in time to when Norsemen herded cattle on the Shetland or Faeroe Islands. The quality of sunlight and the greenness of islands and the misty magic of the mornings have me looking for Loki.

But what I find is a steadily advancing calender: by the middle of August, Kris and I know we will have to leave soon. We pick a day, again make ferry reservations, break camp, and leave with more than eighty pounds of smoked salmon, which Kris distributes to fellow graduate students once she arrives in southern California. She has yet to return to Kodiak.

That fall, I teach, on an honorarium, woodcarving in UAF's Native Arts Studio. The pay is poor, but I don't feel bad about falling an old-growth birch, perhaps a first generation tree.

I regret that Kodiak doesn't have decent wood for carving. No yellow cedar. No red cedar. No large alder or birch. If it had wood I could carve, I'd be there now.

* * *

CALENDAR NOTES

Locked gates usually made from railroad track barred unauthorized traffic from the logging roads that penetrated, like arteries, private timber holdings along the Oregon Coast. They prevented me from traveling many of these roads when I was a boy—the locks were protected by their location inside lengths of steel pipe eight inches or so in diameter. Knowing where roads were that allowed a person to get around these locked gates was coveted knowledge, especially for those of us who heated with wood.

When mills used double circular saw headrigs, any log with twisted grain, no matter how slight, would bind the saws; so logs with a twist were left on landings regardless of their size. Most of these twisted logs were butt cuts six-feet or more in diameter and about twelve hundred years old (four hundred years old timber was considered "bastard growth"). They were free for the taking if we could get around a gate so those of us who lived in the shadows of highline logging shows made our winter firewood from otherwise cleargrain fir logs larger in diameter than we were tall. One or two blocks from such a log, when split, would fill the bed of a pickup.

Getting around a locked gate also meant casting to undisturbed steelhead in a headwaters tributary, or harvesting a buck that wasn't people-shy from an abandoned homestead orchard, or making shake blocks from a sniped cedar log. Getting around a gate was a form of trespassing that seemed perfectly acceptable since the owners of these timberlands were as removed from us as was the Federal government, the concept of private property a little fuzzy to all of us when so much of the region was public domain.

I don't remember any of us having a key to a gate, nor of us needing a key. If a spur road that bypassed a particular gate wasn't

known, locks were jimmied or shot off. Locks were always of the best quality. To spring them required a screw puller designed just for that task. Millwrights in the sawmills, and in G-P's pulpmill made hundreds of these pullers. Until I moved to Alaska, I believe everyone I worked with had one of these pullers hidden behind a pickup seat. . . . I once traded off a Colt .38 Super because its bullets wouldn't penetrate a lock—any high-power rifle made quick work of locks.

The weak point of the gates' common design was the half inch by two inch steel strap that attached the lock. That strap could be hacksawn in two, or as my stepfather did, burnt in two with a cutting torch—to give my stepfather credit, he usually had a welder in the bed of his pickup, and he would tack the strap back together so the gate would be locked but easily opened whenever needed.

To keep trespassers out, some of the private timber companies employed an individual to live in a company house beside the gate, and to open and close the gate as needed. The pay for being a gatekeeper usually wasn't much; the house was their biggest benefit. Most of the gatekeepers I knew were either retired or disabled. And many of them would scribble on a calendar when he or she opened the gate in the morning and locked it at night.

One gatekeeper I knew was fired when a giant corporation bought out the small timber company that had employed him for more than thirty years. He was given a week to move from the house where he had lived for all of these years. He didn't think that demand was fair so he took his years of calendars to Wage & Hour. The people at State Employment accepted the times recorded on those calendars as when he had started work each day and when he had finished work. The State went after that giant corporation to get the gatekeeper back pay for thousands of hours of overtime. He received enough to buy a house.

While working for Georgia-Pacific, I thought about keeping my own time, but when I tried to record my hours on the kitchen calendar, I encountered problems. First, for months in advance the meeting times for the Rock Creek Ladies Club and for the Siletz

Chapter of T.O.P.S. were already taking up space on the calendar. Then there were other numbers and cryptic notes that seemed to have something to do with a twenty-eight day cycle. When I sort of deciphered them, I left the calendar alone. Although I still didn't trust Georgia-Pacific, I wasn't having to sleep with the corporation.

After Kathy was born, my wife began taking birth control pills which regulated her cycles for the first time in her life—she was reluctant to give them up. She thought one child was enough. There was, in the 1960s, within her circle of friends just as much debate about overpopulation as there is now. She didn't want to bring to life children the world couldn't support. But I effectively argued against the wisdom of her friends. Kristel was the result of me prevailing, and after Kristel was born, she concluded that two was the right number of children for us. Her hesitancy about having a second child was completely gone.

I wanted more. I was happy with two daughters, but I wasn't then, nor am I now afraid of overpopulation. Land is presently so poorly used that if better managed, the world will support ten times its current population. Arguable and another subject. For now it is sufficient to say that I started lobbying for a third child as soon as Kristel came home from the hospital.

Perhaps I was effected by a cultural bias towards sons; perhaps I wanted a son to carry on those things that I do; perhaps there is within each of us a desire for immortality through the continuation of our name, our lineage. Whatever the reason, my suggestions about her giving up birth control pills as soon as her body somewhat recovered from Kristel's birth were about as subtle as rifle shots.

There used to be a locked gate at Camp Twelve, outside of Siletz. The road was one end of a veined system that flowed between Toledo and Twin Bridges. The area, roughly a five mile by five mile square, had been logged fifteen or so years earlier. Since it was logged, there had been only minimal summer maintenance on the roads. Culverts had washed out as had some of the timber bridges. Trees were across many of the roads, and in places the roadbed had slid into creeks.

Tom Robinson and I used to hunt at night along the streams in that area. Usually we were after raccoons. Occasionally we chased a bear (bears weren't then game animals along the Coast). Sometimes we took whatever we found that would make dinner. But always, we thought ourselves alone in the area as we wallowed through mudholes, bucked downed trees, and searched for shining eyes. Tom had a military jeep which, when its windshield was folded down and its tires were underinflated, would just slide under that locked gate.

Tom didn't have any children of his own. I don't think he wanted any although he would play with Kathy, then with Kathy and Kristel for hours. He was from the Valley, had been at Coos Bay for a while, and was working at the pulpmill to earn enough to put himself through Oregon State. He was afraid of overpopulation and of resource depletion. He worried about the logging of Amazon rain forests, and he sought his degree so he could teach those things he knew, or thought he knew to younger generations.

My wife found an ally in Tom as I continued to lobby for another child. But we didn't see him often after he started college as an Industrial Arts major. Plus, my gunshop was keeping me busy: I didn't have time to hunt coons or chase bears. I still hadn't quit the pulpmill even though I had a full day's worth of gunwork to do each day.

I don't know whether I caught my wife at a moment of weakness or if I slid under her defenses, but a year after Kristel was born, she agreed to give up her birth control pills. Her decision was short lived. Two days into her cycle, she said she would be going back onto her pills as soon as she had her period—Kori, our third daughter, was born nine months later, and my wife had a tubal ligation before she left the hospital. She didn't trust me not to talk her into having a fourth child.

Jim Miller brought out a Zouave for me to repair and shoot. All that was wrong with it was his lack of experience with muzzleloaders. I cleaned it, checked it over, and put it up before I

headed into the pulpmill to work a swing shift. It was deer season. I had been up since four-thirty that morning; so I was fighting myself to stay awake by the end of that swing shift. Nevertheless, when I saw a coyote in my lower pasture on my way home, I loaded Jim's Zouave, grabbed my seven-cell flashlight and went looking for it before I turned in.

When the alarm rang at four-thirty the following morning, I staggered sleepily from bed, thought I would take Jim's Zouave hunting to prove to him that it would kill a deer (as a dedicated magnum shooter, he had doubts), and was about to load it when I remembered how thoroughly I had cleaned it with boiling water the day before. I thought that, perhaps, it might still be wet inside. I thought I had better pop a cap on its nipple before I loaded it.

There is a lot to be said for safe gun handling. There is no substitute for safe gun handling. My wife's uncle had seven holes in his kitchen floor in front of his refrigerator where, over a forty-year period, he had accidental discharges when unloading the Model 94 Winchester with which he hunted. In now my forty years of shooting, I have only had two accidental discharges. One of them was when I popped that cap.

The muzzle of the Zouave was pointed in a safe direction, but I was in the kitchen when I popped that cap—the Minie ball punched a fist-sized hole through the kitchen wall, cut a furrow across the livingroom ceiling, and cut the curtain rod over the picture window in two before lodging in the outside wall.

In the livingroom, my wife covered the hole in the wall by relocating her copper stick-match holder. She then moved the kitchen calendar to cover the hole at that side of the wall.

In the calendar's new location, it was a little hard to reach. Writing notes on its was nearly impossible so my wife quit using it to record those little bits of information that were important to her. But then, since her tubal ligation, she wasn't taking birth control pills and she didn't seem as concerned about her weight. She was, in important ways, more friendly.

No one but us would have known about that hole in the wall or the furrow across the ceiling if Kathy had not pointed them out to my customers. Both certainly impressed her.

* * *

KEYSER

Kori bore my first grandchild, Kevin James Hall, two months ago. I haven't yet held him. But I will soon, said with the necessary qualifiers.

I have long awaited this grandchild: if there is anything I regret during the course of my life it is that Dad didn't live to see grandchildren, or even his children grown. Married at thirty. Dead at forty-two. Dad left me with memories that are obligations to pass on to generations not yet conceived. He was curious about who he was and where were the Kizer roots. During his War-time campaign through Europe, he asked local people how they pronounced his name. He looked for where K-i-z-e-r was pronounced as Kaiser, and the only place he found was in Luxemburg. His conclusion was that we were from there. But he couldn't know for sure; for no memories remained of our continental history. The stories were lost.

What Dad didn't know was that a written history of the Kizer/Keyser family in America does exist.

My memories begin with an image of a green sky. The snippet is very short. Less than a second. Years later, Mom said that green sky occurred the day my brother Ben was born. The color was caused by the tornado, which convinced her to give birth to Ben at home rather than in the hospital. I was sixteen months old, and I'm certain that Ben being born at home was an exciting enough event to have created all kinds of memories. But the only memory of that day I have ever been able to recall once my memories became seemingly continuous is the color of the sky and the presence of someone behind me.

Another snippet of memory, that of me crawling up a ditch bank, is from a few months after Ben was born. Again, the snippet

relates to a traumatic event: apparently I had opened the rear car door while Dad and Mom were on a backcountry road in Indiana, and I fell out, landing down a ways in the drainage ditch. I only remember crawling a few feet up the bank and watching the car get smaller and smaller, then bigger and bigger. Nothing else. I don't know if I was hurt. I don't remember getting back into the car. I only remember an instant of panic at seeing the car leave me behind. This instance of panic might be a few seconds in length, but it seems shorter than that. It seems more like glancing at a few frames of film. But those few seconds have stayed with me whereas being stepped over by a cow while Mom was milking, and being bit above the eye by Mom's collie, both incidents occuring about the same time, aren't retained in my conscious memory.

My youngest sister Marie has only two memory snippets of Dad. One the bologna hats (Dad frying bologna). The other of Dad carrying her down a flight of stairs on his shoulders. Both of these snippets are only a few seconds long. They are for her Dad. Until she read a poem of mine, she didn't know Dad's favorite blossom was four-petaled, white dogwood.

I used to think about dying young; I suspect it was normal not to see myself living longer than Dad. I didn't want to leave a young family. As a result, my daughters were born when I was 21, 23 and 25; I married at eighteen. I didn't want to wait until I was older as Dad had, thanks somewhat to Hitler. I didn't want to have a three-year-old (Marie's age) when I was 42. I didn't want to do to one of my children what Dad's death did to her. But I never really considered—until I was older—that there is no guarantee of anyone living through tomorrow. Yes, statistics favor youth. Accidents, however, neither check your age nor your health before they occur.

When I see a dogwood in bloom, I remember why I wanted children when I was still young; remember why the blossoms cause me to confront my morality. Yes, their petal structure has cultural significance. Yes, this significance is important to me. This significance might have had something to do with why Dad liked

them. A dogwood in full bloom reminds me of battlefield cemeteries, green and white, the blossoms as temporary as life.

A few days ago I called my Uncle Jerry to ask about how Grandpa acquired that second forty acres of the farm. He didn't know. My uncle was the youngest of seven children and born ten years after Dad. While there is much he remembers, there is also much nobody told him. The fire that destroyed Grandpa's first board house (there had been a log house previously) was in 1921, four years before he was born. That fire had deeply impressed Dad, who was six. All my uncle knows of that fire is the house had been yellow. For my uncle, the buffalo wallow was already tiled fields by the time his memories begin. However, he did tell me that second forty was the west-side of the farm, something I hadn't known.

By right of first-born birth, I have the obligation of remembering Dad for Marie, of relating to her what I know to have occurred prior to when her memories begin. This is actually every living person's obligation, and in other cultures and in simpler times, it was an obligation taken seriously. Stories kept alive history and the lessons of history. But with global television, with five and more movie channels continuously broadcasting, with video games and the future emphasized, the stories of the past seem merely nostalgic. They might be cute, perhaps even interesting, but for too many, they aren't meaningful. The silicon chip has changed everything—but so has the story I told about Marie remembering Dad frying slices of bologna, and as the outside edges of those slices shrunk, their centers bulged up to make them look like little hats.

We live in a story; our lives are a story we tell, and if all of those stories were told better, Jerry Springer wouldn't have a show. If we are to have that bright, bold future too many politicians promise, we shouldn't be looking to the future but to the past.

When I began running around Kodiak Island, one of the places experienced skippers warned me about was Olga Bay. Its entrance is a deep, narrow channel between bluffs. The bay is large and its

entrance small; so sea level in the bay is several feet higher than in the Pacific. As a result, the falling tide runs very fast while the rising tide pushes against that gravitational fall. If a skipper is to keep from running into rocks or bluff or aground, the skipper can't look where he or she is headed. No person, nor boat can react fast enough; the current is too swift. But the skipper must watch where his or her boat has been.

Skippers steer a straight course into the bay by gauging the disturbed water behind their sterns. The moment they quit looking behind them, they will run into some obstacle. The course is steered by adjustments made to the passage of the past.

Society responds as sluggishly as a ship. A rudder change doesn't translate into an instantaneous directional change. The bow is a long ways in front of that rudder. A lot of water has to pass under that bow before enough water is deflected to push the bow off its course.

The Bibical record of humanity doesn't begin in Genesis, but in the epistle of John when the Spokesman speaks the world into existence. But as a society looking into the future, we won't consider the possibility that this world could have been spoken into existence. We don't see the relevance of ancient stories in our lives. Rather, we are like a fish tender heading into Olga Bay, oblivious to the need to be guided by our cultural stern wake.

If I don't tell Kevin James Hall that his great-grandfather's favorite blossom was white, four-petaled dogwoods, Kevin will mature just fine. He will be just as strong, just as tall, just as smart, and just as likely to have to fight another Hitler as was my dad. However, if I tell Kevin that his great-grandfather's favorite blossom was dogwoods, and that when I see dogwoods, I see those green fields in France where thousands of white crosses remember American soldiers who died fighting to create the story of America, he will find himself involuntarily linked into that story which will then become his to steer.

Some cultural critics would not want him to learn about a metatext created by his forefathers, a mega-story believed to have

excluded "others." Their perception of story, however, limits what these critics are able to perceive. Perhaps if they were to look behind them, they would see that all stories are currents and crosscurrents in a single larger story about why we are here.

Most bays around Kodiak Island are easy to navigate when looking forward from atop a flying bridge. Skippers don't have to check charts or depths. They only have to punch in Loran C coordinates, or now GPS coordinates. Sometimes they don't even have to stay awake . . . once Ollie Harder fell asleep when he rounded Buoy Four, ten miles out of Kodiak. His vessel was on autopilot, and didn't make the little two hundred foot dogleg into the channel. It ran aground on the end of Near Island. And even if Ollie had been awake, looking behind him wouldn't have done any good. All that mattered was his failing to stay awake.

For all of my life, we have been a nation on autopilot, skippered by a secession of sleepy politicians, one with his pants around his ankles. So far we have avoided running aground, but if we travel far enough for long enough, we will enter a figurative Olga Bay where we can only go safely forward by remembering our past through our stories.

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