

**SERIALIZED**

(in four parts)

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**PART TWO**

“WHEN I MET HIM” (page 85 of the 2001 edition)  
to “SMITH, LOGGER, FISHERMAN, WRITER” (page 125)

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**UPRIVER, BEYOND THE BEND**  
with  
**AT ABBY CREEK**

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poetry

by  
Homer Kizer

(AT ABBY CREEK was nominated for a Pushcart Award by Rick Bass;  
its first 24 stanzas appeared in *American Nature Writing 1998*  
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## WHEN I MET HIM

he was another drunk  
one of those people  
you just want out  
of your way. Oh  
he was friendly enough  
if you gave him a dollar  
or two, would work a bit  
if you caught him early  
in the morning. You know  
the type, the derelicts  
in every town—  
they were around  
when I was a boy;  
they're still here  
though faces have changed.

Don't remember his name  
just his face as he sat  
on the dock with the gulls.  
He was once a highliner  
or so I was told;  
was just like the rest  
of us before going down.  
I decided to ask what happened—  
he didn't remember much.  
Seems he was first mate on a big boat  
(I won't name it—  
neighbors' boy went down with it)  
when they had some trouble.  
The owner had his crew don survival suits  
told the first mate to care of his kid—  
the crabber rolled, sank  
before distress calls were sent...  
the mate & the skipper's boy were alone  
in the Bering somewhere in Compass Rose  
with no raft  
no expectations of help  
just drifting in rough seas  
two specks only God could see.

In a survival suit, you can't stay warm  
stay afloat  
forever  
& you certainly can't be seen from far

so the mate's & the kid's chances were slim—  
don't know what he thought:  
he hasn't drank enough  
to talk about those three  
days when no one even knew  
he was missing.

He & the kid drifted  
by buoys of a crab pot—  
if he hadn't grabbed hold  
if he hadn't held on  
he certainly wouldn't be here  
sitting on a cable spool today.

By law, pots have to be checked every third day  
but even with radio & satellite location  
pots get lost.  
Boats break down, go down  
can't get around their strings  
as fast as they should  
so what were his thoughts  
as he hoped for rescue.  
None of us know:  
he hasn't drank enough yet.

The kid was young enough  
he seems to have accepted  
what happened  
has gotten on with life  
but kids have a way of doing that  
at least for a while.  
But the mate lost faith  
may have lost a lot more  
none of us know  
but all of that *more*  
doesn't matter  
for without faith  
there is no celebration  
there can be no celebration  
of Today.

## THE MISSION

Blue words on a hooded sweatshirt,  
blue baseball cap, coffee  
in a Styrofoam cup, a cigarette—  
a man in a mission, one  
I think about; a jungle camp  
visited in 1964.

I squatted, nervous, alongside  
tracks and felt the ground  
rumble as my stomach rumbled.  
Green as the dying brush growing  
against the barbwire, I listened  
to horror  
stories told as if what happened  
was nothing. Only seventeen, I too  
trespassed between life  
and death. I became a poacher,  
married, opened a gunshop and  
seldom thought about that man  
alongside the tracks, a vet  
that let go of his mission.

That man in the mission—unruly  
black hair, curly gray beard,  
cigarette hidden in his hand—  
knows what it is to wonder,  
then not to wonder.  
He watches  
men wait behind the red light  
in idling cars, choked by emission  
controls. He once held  
a beating heart  
in his hand, stumbled on a temple  
step and struck his head on a stone.  
I know, I was there.  
So with my heart beating, I climb  
northern mountains  
where alders crack stones.

## GUN BLUE CLOUDS GLOW

like hot iron over ridges of frost & birches  
rifled by foraging moose & the white tanks  
of war games played with rockets & radar  
pitting friend against friend  
red army against blue  
as if the future depends upon tire tracks  
across the tundra, silent as that soldier  
from Georgia—and that soldier from Georgia.

The full moon bristles as a face with dogtags  
& frozen feet huddles over a Sterno fire  
& waits for a face with dogtags & frozen feet  
to lay aside the canned heat burning hearts  
& clouds far from balmy shores of home.

Both soldiers listen to a moose snap icy willows  
by the river that groans as open leads steam  
like hot springs, raising misty veils that tinkle  
like sleigh bells at Christmas.

The cold sun rises & scatters rays like words  
of peace across continents—men of good will  
carve turkeys & nations  
serve cranberries as bloody fangs slash hamstrings  
warm flesh & words; a reich of wolves  
gnaws dry bones & devours  
red army & blue.

Resurrected from sleep that soldier from Georgia  
& that soldier from Georgia reach across tussocks  
share rations & howls & nametags on that ridge  
of frost & birches under clouds like hot iron.

## Section Two

### TRANSITION

he called to give  
a writer's name  
who is *pretty good*  
who writes about the same  
land I do, but without  
all that cold war junk  
that is metaphor  
for a different war  
for a different evil empire  
within each of us  
but I wrote the name  
on the envelope  
of an unpaid power bill  
filed it somewhere  
& returned to this screen  
while potatoes burn  
on the electric range  
setting off smoke alarms  
& a sleeping wife  
who doesn't understand  
why I have such a problem  
making the transition  
from gas

the aerie—

following crossing trails  
I climb  
through breezes  
that lift me to the ledge  
the hen launches  
circles  
sails guttural screams  
at me  
as she swoops low overhead  
her downdraft strong  
I would join her  
if she'd let me

atop her spire, two gray eaglets  
with pin feathers pushing through down

her tiercel joins the circle  
both now dive low  
as I lie  
in trampled grass footprints  
twice the size of mine  
I feel the dung  
fresh  
but cold  
make certain a cartridge is chambered  
then stand  
feeling taller than I am  
pushing the pair higher  
till they're specks  
against the sun.

W QUESTIONS—

beyond the river  
a hooter owl  
asks  
who am I  
as I, in predawn darkness  
feed white kittens  
that shine in shadows  
like snowshoes  
before snow flies  
hares the owl remembers  
in boreal forests  
that I remember...

I stare  
into northern darkness—

I had forgotten who I once was  
& why I migrated south for a winter  
& when I intended to return North  
& where in Alaska home remains—  
What am I doing here on the Clearwater  
a question without an answer

so thank you, Owl  
for asking.

PREDATOR—

the shadow  
of the hunting hawk  
passed across my path  
I couldn't locate him  
at first but my hens  
all canted heads  
to see if he passed on  
I looked where they did  
& sure enough I too saw  
wings glide over crowns  
of pines I plan to fall  
next spring

WHO ARE YOU, KENNEWICK MAN—

an ancestor? a sojourner like me  
who groaned when rising,  
whose joints snapped loud  
when dodging atlatl cast darts  
one of which you didn't see—

were you a copper buyer,  
a freetrader who crossed  
inland seas to freight ore  
back to a motherland never  
again seen—  
you left cairns,  
mile markers that, yes,  
can still be read;  
even your delivery schedule  
remains carved in stone...  
it is yours, isn't it  
or were you only one of many  
prospectors seeking metal?

Pain shows in your face,  
a face like my face.

Did you try to escape  
into deep water—  
was that how you had before?

The People have no stories of you;  
for the Corps you are an embarrassment,  
for scholars you remain an enigma.  
Creationists dismiss you,  
yet you were here, just as I am.

You are here as I will be.

## HE SENT HIS BOOK

stories his dad told  
in his dad's voice  
lean as chaps  
hard as rowels  
tough as mustangs  
his dad broke  
to ground hitch  
so ditch riders  
could turn water  
into life:  
corn & cows & hardscrabble kids  
on Colorado's eastern slopes.

His dad left breaking horses  
for a wife & the high country  
of New Mexico where his children  
stung from taunts of being  
Sabbath-keeping heretics  
in a Catholic county.

So following a radio broadcast  
his dad took a job in California  
where one son became a minister  
& I heard his stories in Alaska—  
sound carries far on still  
December nights when a son,  
with northern lights flickering  
like angels on bucking horses  
each bending west  
as if riding another go-around,  
honors his father around a campfire  
of alder & driftwood.

## EQUILIBRIUM—

who are these kids  
who don't understand  
timber as a crop  
who fed them  
who housed them  
who showed them Bambi  
who taught them to be greenies  
whose overzealousness pollutes their minds  
I know who, unfortunately  
it was me & my parents & their parents  
we saw rivers that burned  
rivers turned into sewers  
rivers without fish  
we saw overgrazed rangeland  
paved over farmland  
eroded fields & dust  
we saw slash & burn clearcuts  
& we in our goodness  
pushed the pendulum  
so far across plumb  
it threatens to destroy us  
as it swings back & forth

## AGING

cordwood ricked between black locust,  
leaves fallen,  
dusted with snow  
whiter than the peeling paint  
of the tool shed, empty now,  
like the Ohio fields  
beyond limbs, corn stubble & the far railroad tracks—

I call from Alaska,  
say I need a quiet place to finish  
a novel, a mail order bride & an old fisherman  
spend his last years together, happy, a fairy tale.

*My hens have quit laying—  
There're termites in the attic—  
And I need kitchen cabinets,*  
she says, her hands dusted with flour whiter  
than the tool shed,  
her arms empty as echoes from Ohio.

## AFTER DRIVING ALL NIGHT & ALL DAY

I'm now somewhere in Iowa, alone in a motel  
on a snowy evening four days before Christmas.  
On TV, two fellows talk of hogs: April futures  
are too low. Commitment today means red sales  
of two-fifty a head, and the late news  
shows Chicago's gridlocked tollways  
shimmering like tinsel trees.

Stay home, I'm told.

The camera pans the city: towers like  
so many concrete angels look down on strings  
of headlights & taillights driven into one another.  
Cars hang from guardrails like imported glass  
balls from frosted boughs.

The freezing rain's suppose to stop  
by morning, but tonight trucks lie stunned  
like sows on their sides, suckled  
by blue & yellow strobes of patrol cars.

The Soviet Union is no more,  
its empire crumbling as the Tsar's had.

The Cold War has been won the announcer declares,  
but I'm too tired to care.

I still face another day of driving east—

I wonder what the freeway will be like tomorrow.

## DOGWOODS

scattering pea screenings to whelping turkeys  
I watched changed leaves flutter  
from apples & aspens  
while feeling in chilled aches another change  
sure to happen—

my wife sleeps content  
again a grandmother, her daughter bore  
a little guy who'll not remember yesterday  
or any of this century—

my task seems one of remembering  
change  
& changes  
for him & others—

my sister told me Dad is for her  
a fragment of memory—  
fried baloney hats one Sunday morning—

my life ought to be more than that  
now forty years since that heart attack ended  
farmboy ambitions, I wonder if Dad  
would be as quick to sell, to plant hybrid corn  
as when he was first in Wells County—  
would he be as quick to trade an oak kitchen table  
for Formica & chrome—

after the War, his war  
our future sparkled  
could anyone then know how little we all knew  
or still know—

I'm not in a struggle to overcome  
but to construct from snippets of memory  
a life like mine—

the early sun peeks over pines & warms  
a circle under the dogwood  
its leaves deep red  
as if embarrassed  
for me to remember  
four-petal white  
dogwoods were Dad's favorite

## LOOKING AT APPLES IN NURSERY CATALOGUES

I found Winter Bananas,  
apples I tried before  
Dad died. In that first orchard  
somewhere in Indiana, the fellow  
picking apples was deaf & dumb, but  
he wrote  
the price for a bushel  
on my yellow school tablet.  
I didn't know then that  
years earlier Dad & Dan Gintis  
played mute  
in a restaurant. The waitress believed  
their act, joked about what she'd like to do  
with them. It was a game.  
I didn't understand  
how the fellow picking apples could  
tell customers which to eat,  
which to store.  
Dad just knew  
like he knew where to find  
words.

## CRANES

Three in May, five now, sandhills in the field,  
pecking fallen grain. I saw them again today—

I followed them north last spring,  
Lakeview, Paisley, Kenai, Fairbanks,  
listening as long V's crossed the moon  
like bombers returning from Germany.

Heavy wings lumber southbound,  
join migrating flocks...  
I wonder what Dad thought as  
he stood in German fields,  
far from his home in Indiana,  
or what he'd think of me,  
alone in the Arctic  
in an August rain.

## FROSTED WINGS SHIMMER

over the gray Tanana as southbound  
sandhills cross the crescent moon  
like B-29s headed for the Rhine,  
a river Dad crossed when twenty-nine

(when twenty-nine, I crossed the Yukon,  
arrived in Kenai with four dollars and  
the promise of work in a month). A farm  
boy from Indiana, Dad's letters home

were published in his town newspaper.  
Grandpa saved copies that I remember  
seeing (I was too young to read) when  
a boy on an Indiana farm—Dad wouldn't

talk about war; didn't live till memories,  
like the warbles from high flying V's,  
faded silent....I've now lived longer,  
been published in the local newspaper,

have had a world record and have seen  
my children mature. Although the sun  
hasn't set, the new moon arcs over  
the Tanana where willows and birches

will bud again when sandhills return.

## FORTY BELOW

The headline reads

*30, 40, 50 below . . . !*

For the first time in two winters  
Fairbanks' official temperature falls  
40 below. The chill's lucky for three  
who predicted the dip to occur at 11 p.m.  
January 18th, 1989.

The date catches my attention:  
Dad died January 18th, a Saturday.  
He was 42; I'm 42...

this is the year I've waited for,  
half fearing, half expecting  
nothing. The oldest of three sons,  
I was in fifth grade  
when Dad died suddenly, a heart attack  
in a dime store twenty miles from home.  
Mom didn't drive so he sat in the car  
waiting for her to finish shopping.  
Perhaps he would've lived—  
my brother Ken thinks so,  
became a doctor  
who works at not being like Dad.  
But something happened at Anzio.  
I never heard the full story;  
I only know Dad didn't trust doctors.  
He wouldn't talk about the war,  
not even to Mom, but he must have known  
he had problems.  
He tried to quit smoking,  
lost 70 pounds and got his waist  
below 40.  
He was buried in trousers  
he hadn't been able to wear for years.

## A WESTWARD WIND—

we were to wait at Grandma's for Dad to return—  
he'd bought a moving van, a little one with bald tires,  
had loaded it himself, making use of those years  
he drove for Mayflower; so with the sunrise behind him  
he left Indiana while neighbors watched groundhogs  
& shadows

Uncle Nyle met Dad at Salt Lake—  
I still don't know how Dad knew his brother-in-law  
who lived in Reno & had never been east  
but who took the van to Portland while Dad  
took a bus to Fort Wayne where we weren't supposed  
to be but were for reasons I never fully understood

our Packard had bald tires that nearly stopped us  
in a Wyoming blizzard—  
did cause us to spend a night at Little America  
where Caroleah left the blanket we returned  
two hundred miles to get, glare ice all of the way

when we reached Oregon it rained for six weeks—  
Mom counted the gray wet days after the van  
sold as if she were arguing for moving on—  
she spent the War working in San Jose where she  
remembered orange groves I went to see years later—  
all I found were city signs, leaving & entering  
on the same pole

we bought a house in Boring, five thousand  
dollars & decay—added a living room, a dining room  
bedrooms & I began hearing  
whispers  
about Alaska

if Dad would've lived, he would've been a '59er  
one of those homesteaders that followed statehood—  
I could hear him buying another moving van  
in the way he listened

to *The Wayward Wind*

## CURIOUS ABOUT GOOSEBERRIES

since Grandpa said he liked them  
ripe, I finally asked Uncle Jerry  
what variety grew on the farm, there  
behind the machine shed, where thorns  
stopped cousins, letting kittens  
and chicks escape Sunday get-togethers.

He knew only they always had cream  
on gooseberry pie, that Grandpa grafted  
this to that, got starts from neighbors  
or wherever he could...I didn't know  
when sent to the barn for a spanking  
(don't remember why, only that my cousin  
Rusty was also there) that Grandpa had  
so delicate a touch as to fit scion  
to root, growing new an old variety.

Jerry said he helped drill the well  
that watered Grandpa's gooseberries,  
a two inch hole sixty feet deep...  
I remember that well, its pump, and  
having to prime it that day when  
I had too much fun chasing chickens  
in the hayloft to dread the promised  
swats from a yardstick kept over  
the kitchen door.

As I now near when my grandchildren  
will chase my hens, my grafts fill  
orchards, are sold, and I have  
a dozen varieties of gooseberries:  
Whitesmith, Poorman, Oregon Champion,  
Achilles, Leepared, Catherina,  
Sylvia, Hinomaki Yellow, Pixwell,  
more. And if I am lucky,  
my grandchildren will remember  
the pies of Sabbath dinners  
as I remember Grandma's Sunday dumplings.

charred—

the possibility is slim but real  
I'll lose this foot  
more cooked than a rare steak—  
I feel the heavy throb  
of blood pumped against char  
and I wonder what Grandpa thought  
as he lay in that steep ditch  
caught by fire  
while burning weeds—

he was still spry  
so what happened  
that he couldn't get away?  
Was he, like me, performing  
a task done too many times?

Gangrene took his leg  
to his knee—  
it, too, was his left leg.

His pain must've been horrific  
as he lay hospitalized  
while Dad & Uncle Jerry  
(I stayed in the car)  
searched by headlights  
for his wallet  
containing nine hundred  
silver certificates;

so what did he feel  
as flames licked life  
until it melted  
revealing a son  
unable to visit him  
in the hospital?

Dad helped scrape up pieces  
of a German convoy—  
twenty-miles of incinerated men  
& horses seven days in the sun.  
He never forgot the smell  
of bones too charred  
by jellied gasoline  
for Allies to call together  
in a dry valley some future day.

## PETALS OF EARLY ROSES FALL

among fireweed spikes on fire in nights like day.  
Under leaning birches, bearded heads of hair  
grass bent by the wind nod as I pick trailing  
crowberries & bearberries ripening along the scar  
of a seis line that crawls across the Kenai.  
A distant jake brake, a hooter owl, the chatter  
of squirrels—no longer sure where north is, I  
listen for directions, remembering a broken jar  
left in a sagging cabin. Someone used the fruit  
jar for the chimney of a lamp, its glass bowl  
pale purple & empty. Its flickering once caught  
the glitter of gold. I know for notes on a calendar  
told the miner's story. Who he was, he never said.  
But he noted when he ran out beans & pilot bread.

## REUNION—

went to a family reunion  
a park in Indiana  
4th of July at Bluffton—  
a sister & I rented a car  
drove by the cemetery  
Kizers & Runyons  
was surprized to see so many  
drove past Grandpa's farm  
cornfields now  
no sign there'd ever been a house  
a barn, two generations of Kizers—  
same for where I went to first grade  
Dad attended that school  
all twelve grades in one building  
Uncle Jerry also had  
said I was the size of Dad  
same height  
same short inseams  
I didn't know

photos of cousins—  
no one had met my daughters  
all three were there  
coming from Alaska  
California  
Illinois  
the family had scattered  
after the War:  
Florida, Carolinas, Kentucky  
Oregon, Washington, Idaho  
truck drivers & teachers—  
never have I seen so many  
masters degrees with so few  
doctorates—

neither of my brothers came  
Ben wasn't interested  
Ken was too busy in the Capitol  
one sister couldn't afford the time  
but for an afternoon I listened  
to stories I would've heard  
if Dad had reached my age

## INVITED TO A VEGETARIAN POTLUCK

I searched cupboards for something to bring  
all the while knowing we were short of everything  
except meat & eggs—

on those empty shelves  
in dark shadows a Mesopotamian farmer  
thrashes emmer & einkorn  
careful to save every winnowed kernel  
while a woman shells pulses  
into a potted jar—

I remember Dad hunting rabbits  
on an Indiana farm  
where every corn kernel  
was sold  
to make payments  
on an endless mortgage—  
I remember Oregon after Dad died  
catching trout  
hunting deer  
when Social Security wasn't enough  
when none of us five kids  
were yet old enough to work—

I've grown old  
on meat & little else

but for this potluck  
I take from the garden  
carrots intended for stew  
& from the tree nearest the hen house  
I pick a few apples  
for a remembered casserole  
Mom once made  
a day I failed to kill dinner

## RESPECTABLE PEOPLE DECRY

poor Dotty & Bob—  
a county commissioner voices alarm  
on the radio; the sheriff says  
perhaps the county should shoot back;  
signed petitions at the Big Store  
insist that Ligertown be razed.

Lions & tigers shouldn't be kept,  
let alone crossbred,  
say shoppers waiting to pay.  
*They're dangerous & have you seen—*  
Yes, I have seen the cages, feces & gore,  
but is the county's interest best served  
when (*We've got them this time*, promises  
the D.A.) 19 cats are shot where  
yesterday they sunned themselves?

*What we really wanted was for them to leave.*  
*Their place, a disgrace, looks Third World.*  
And one by one officials file past that circle  
of cameras, all recording today's proceedings  
as if these proceedings were remembered  
deeds written in sand.

What happened that September night:  
were fences cut,  
lions shot in their cages as claimed  
by Dotty & Bob, both charged with cruelty  
(surviving cats were certified healthy)?  
Did escaping lions endanger Lava residents,  
or were county officials merely afraid  
of optimism runamuck?

ASHES—

the cat we call Ashes  
caught another deer mouse  
she made sure I saw it  
when I gathered eggs

I worry some about her  
deer mice carry hanta virus  
don't know if she can  
don't want to find out

she caught a bat awhile back  
the one the cat in town caught  
was rabid—they say it costs  
a thousand dollars for shots

& they're still no fun  
I took the bat from her  
was pretty careful how  
I handled it

but it's hanta virus  
I'm most concerned about

Ashes likes her ears scratched  
her belly rubbed  
she's a good cat  
but it's hard to hold her

knowing she's just eaten  
another deer mouse

american falls—

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

## COVERED BRIDGES

A covered bridge picks up river sounds  
deepens & softens them before storing  
ripples among the rafters where round  
mud nests of swallows & swifts hold fledglings  
hungry as that horse heading home, shod hooves,  
iron wheels, the wagon heavy with hay.  
Timbers creak, echoes still as the shafts of  
dusty light reflecting off the water, rays  
long as I am tall, lean against rough sawn  
boards as if they were old men on the porch  
of the General Store, playing checkers on  
tops of pickle barrels, their feet perched  
a top the railing like swifts & swallows  
on rafters above horses passing by slow.

LEWISTON—

across the Clearwater  
the train groans  
its loads of logs  
downriver where barges  
wait for pulp & lumber  
but too often settle  
for the logs.

Anchorage—

after a spent winter  
in the city  
looking at dirty snow  
while stopped by traffic lights  
I yearn for newgrowth  
other than tract houses  
& highrise apartments  
& potholed asphalt

## LADYBUGS—

on this foggy cold morning  
in faded wingcases, ladybugs  
millions & more  
cling to split rail fencing  
as chip trucks fly by  
mere feet away

they're following the river  
or the road  
to some wintering grounds  
but I only know of ladybugs  
migrating  
to California's Central Valley  
an awfully long ways  
from here on the Clearwater

don't know much about them  
don't know what they think  
as they huddle together  
but in their minds' hardwiring  
are inscribed maps & calendars  
all too small for me to read  
so I can only observe in wonder  
their afternoon departure

FATE—

Swollen, dirty, the Snake floods  
willows & rapids as the river sweeps  
over the highway as days of rain rush  
through turbines turning time into  
aluminum cans & pans that might  
or might not contribute to Alzheimer's  
in politically correct professors  
& patriotically correct loggers  
who together will be,  
by well-meaning sons & daughters,  
warehoused in county nursing homes  
to protect estates now under water.

## A HOMESTEAD—

found a pitchfork  
four rusty tines  
behind the house  
tumbled down now  
a foundation  
two-stories  
pond  
shade trees  
orchard  
all overgrown  
by blackberries  
& roses  
visited rarely  
by even bear  
but once children played  
on a mowed yard  
& the smell of baking bread  
drew men from plowed fields  
& hymns were song on Sabbath  
& a dog barked  
at the minister paying  
his monthly social call  
but no one has asked a blessing  
on this house for a long time

HERE & EVERYWHERE—

rain has beaten down weeds & blackberries,  
leaving exposed  
ten feet beyond where my wife's cat  
was flattened by a chip truck,  
the teeth & purple collar  
of our Brittany missing three months—  
I'd looked for her all one night,  
had called & called,  
had thought she'd chased a deer  
too far to find her way home,  
had hoped she found another home,  
but it was only a car or a truck  
that prevented her return—  
hers & a fawn by the mailbox,  
a raccoon & her litter,  
our white tom cat,  
a turkey,  
more coons,  
too many to keep count,  
every day deer,  
even two social workers  
a couple of months ago,  
someone just last weekend at Kamiah—  
our highway carnage  
must make even God cry.

GOBI LADY—

hallowed symbol  
of the changed season,  
her tall hat  
black & ageless,  
lies in her long tomb  
mummified—  
beauty dried by desert dust  
blankly peers  
across cluttered centuries  
as disbelieving scholars  
resurrect  
her simple spells & potions  
for immortality.

domestication—

fattened on star thistle  
the wild turkeys  
across the river  
call to my turkeys  
who are hard of hearing  
when they see me  
with a grain bucket

## HARD EDGED

chisel chain  
filed yesterday  
bit bark,  
growled,  
pissed chips—

today, I would show  
how to bed old-growth,  
but a spotted owl  
on down-soft wings  
caught media headlines;

band headrigs rust quietly  
beside stilled greenchains  
while with idled saw,  
I meander through firs  
flagged with blood

red surveyors' ribbon,  
blowdowns that had stood  
as boundary trees  
for what would have been  
last year's clearcut.

## SNAGGING EELS

Just another white kid  
to the old man with pole poised over  
the white water—  
narrow & twisting Salmon  
River roared through the chute  
foaming white like a lamprey  
heavy with spawn (eels used to leap  
out of the boil like salmon, sometimes  
clinging to slippery rocks, sometimes  
wiggling over the top as men might scale  
walls)—I, with a hook lashed to a pole,  
joined Indians snagging eels when a Junior  
in high school; I knew their eldest daughter.  
She wouldn't look at me, wouldn't speak  
till I stuck an eel on my arm.  
Her sisters screamed, tried to pull it off,  
but she said, *Leave it alone,*  
*eels turn loose when they feel warm*  
*blood*, and she held it till it did,  
then tossed it in their half-full washtub  
and offered me smoked eel, greasy in waxpaper.  
I couldn't eat it, it wasn't clean.

Good Friday, 1964

now seems a long time ago—  
most students had gone home for Easter  
but I remained in the dorm  
with no money and nowhere to go.  
The proctor took pity  
invited me  
to see *The Great Escape*—

when we left the theater  
news of the earthquake  
had tunneled south:

I saw photos of the fissure  
in Fourth Avenue, of fractured  
buildings & floundered cars, but  
I had no idea how hurt Alaska was till  
I met the men who made millions  
rebuilding docks & downtown  
& town houses that had trespassed  
across a fault line identified  
forty years earlier.

Twenty years later, in Earthquake Park  
where now-prohibited construction  
lets birches swell and stretch,  
I climbed down the cliff  
(the tide was out)  
& found where the tide washed  
against sheared clay walls  
mud stones like stones of riverbeds  
hard, mostly round  
but not yet quite stone  
when I cracked one open—

holding a fragment of the still forming  
rock, I stared at Anchorage's new skyline  
soft pink in the alpenglow of an April sunrise.

[found poem]

*BROTHER TO BROTHER*

1.

*Dec 14th, 1967—*

Just a note as it's almost  
too dark to see. Am still  
on the road crew. It's not too bad  
but gets a little hairy once in a while.  
We had our first guy killed today,  
another one of the wounded  
isn't expected to live.  
Will let you know if something real  
exciting happens.  
Love ya,  
Ben

2.

Warwise this place comes & goes—  
some days nothing at all,  
others, the whole war seems right here.  
I'll be glad to leave this damned country.  
I've never been this jumpy before.  
The worst part is I can't help it.

Ben

SMITH, LOGGER, FISHERMAN, WRITER

Spanner wound wheellocks, fenced pans, swan cocks,  
plains style caplocks, each crafted by my hands.  
Lemans, Hawkins, poorboys: I shot at buckskin rendezvous,  
split balls on axes; threw knives & hawks,  
sticking kings & queens of hearts  
while she stayed home changing diapers, watching  
*The Days of Our Lives*  
and waiting for afternoon get-aways.  
I turned patent breeches from steel shafting,  
fitting hooked plugs to tangs sawn from angle iron,  
stopping barrels  
rifled by divorce.

I heard echoes, loud as rifle shots,  
gossipy footsteps in the house  
where my nail soles scar  
once forbidden floors.  
Dimpled prints  
around the kitchen table,  
greasy from chainsaw parts,  
like the bed without sheets,  
tell everyone that I am  
divorced.

Baited longline skates  
sink beneath two-faced waves  
where the green Pacific meets  
cold Bering currents.  
Gaffed, slimed & iced 'buts  
delivered to Aleutian ports,  
graded by their bloodless sides  
join me to other fishers,  
each divorced,

Poetic catalogs for cells  
pumped by three-chambered hearts  
of what could've been, what was  
and what will be irrigate  
Homeric souls,  
each myself (and others).  
Alone with my characters,  
some of steel, filed frizzens,  
some fallers, some halibut heads,  
I wonder if straying journeys

and failed justifications  
can be made new when brides  
won't forgive.