

Telling Oregon's Stories

Oregon State University Press at Fifty



OSU
Press

50
years

A Sampler

Telling Oregon's Stories

THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS AT FIFTY

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CONTENTS

.....

<i>Foreword</i>	5
Fool's Hill: A Kid's Life in an Oregon Coastal Town JOHN QUICK (1995)	7
Peace at Heart: An Oregon Country Life BARBARA DRAKE (1998)	14
Spirit of the Siskiyou: The Journals of a Mountain Naturalist MARY PAETZEL (1998)	25
North Bank: Claiming a Place on the Rogue ROBIN CAREY (1998)	31
Empty Nets: Indians, Dams, and the Columbia River ROBERTA ULRICH (1999)	41
Two Wheels North: Bicycling the West Coast in 1909 EVELYN McDANIEL GIBB (2000)	47
Linus Pauling: Scientist and Peacemaker CLIFFORD MEAD & THOMAS HAGER, EDS. (2001)	52
Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses ROBIN WALL KIMMERER (2003)	56
New Era: Reflections on the Human and Natural History of Central Oregon JAROLD RAMSEY (2003)	66
Up All Night MARTHA GIES (2004)	72

Now Go Home: Wilderness, Belonging, and the Crosscut Saw ANA MARIA SPAGNA (2004)	79
Child of Steens Mountain EILEEN O'KEEFFE McVICKER with BARBARA J. SCOT (2008)	89
With Grit and By Grace: Breaking Trails in Politics and Law, A Memoir BETTY ROBERTS with GAIL WELLS (2008)	93
Pedaling Revolution: How Cyclists are Changing American Cities JEFF MAPES (2009)	97
Afield: Forty Years of Birding the American West ALAN CONTRERAS (2009)	103
To the Woods: Sinking Roots, Living Lightly, and Finding True Home EVELYN SEARLE HESS (2010)	107
Another Way the River Has: Taut True Tales from the Northwest ROBIN CODY (2010)	119
Mexicanos in Oregon: Their Stories, Their Lives ERLINDA V. GONZALES-BERRY & MARCELA MENDOZA (2010)	130
Mink River: A Novel BRIAN DOYLE (2010)	137
Remembering the Power of Words: The Life of an Oregon Activist, Legislator, and Community Leader AVEL LOUISE GORDLY with PATRICIA A. SCHECHTER (2011)	145
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	149

FOREWORD

.....

“Telling Oregon’s Stories is a celebration of all that is intriguing about Oregon, and a testament to the importance of OSU Press, which informs and helps shape our relation to the place that inspires and sustains us.”

—Kathleen Dean Moore, *Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Oregon State University and founding director of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word*

What does it mean to live, work, and play in Oregon? For fifty years, the Oregon State University Press has been publishing exceptional books about the Pacific Northwest—its people and landscapes, its flora and fauna, its history and cultural heritage. The Press has played a vital role in the region’s literary life, providing readers with a better understanding of what it means to be an Oregonian.

Founded in 1961 when the University adopted its current name of Oregon State University, the OSU Press at first published mainly scholarly works on the biological and natural sciences. But sprinkled throughout our list were titles about Oregon that appealed to the book-loving public. In our first year alone, we produced eight books, including *Atlas of the Pacific Northwest* and *Winter Twigs*, both of which are still available today in later editions, and the best-selling *Weather of Oregon*, which retailed for seventy-five cents.

In 1961, the *Eugene Register Guard* heralded the arrival of the state’s first university press. “Our friends in Corvallis have stolen a march,” the editor wrote. “They have a going concern over there and . . . are spreading the name of their new university around the country. Few activities lend

more prestige to a university than the university's imprint on a line of books."

Fifty years—and nearly five hundred books—later, the heart of our mission is still the same. We are a scholarly publisher with distinguished books in several academic areas—from environmental history and natural resource management to Indigenous studies—and we publish titles that celebrate, evaluate, invent, and illuminate the Oregon condition. Between these covers, we've selected excerpts from twenty recent books that we think you will enjoy. And, we hope to inspire you to read more; many other engaging reads can be found on our Web site at <http://osupress.oregonstate.edu>.

Throughout the past fifty years, the Oregon State University Press has enjoyed the attention and support of readers in Oregon, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. This collection is our way of saying thank you. We hope you'll continue to support our efforts; there are many more rich and compelling stories to come.

Fool's Hill

A Kid's Life in an
Oregon Coastal Town

JOHN QUICK (1995)

.....

"Anyone old or interested enough to understand that boyhood and foolhood are pretty tightly entwined will enjoy Quick's account of how, as a kid, he struggled to unravel the two."—*The Denver Post*

The first memoir published by OSU Press and a longtime staff favorite, Quick's boyhood memoir of growing up on the Oregon coast during the years leading up to World War Two is rich in wiseacre humor and sharp revelations of childhood secrets.

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SENTIMENTAL CRAP

"Dad," my mom said to my Grandfather Frank. "You have to write down some of the stories about this town."

"No," he said. He didn't look up from his soup.

"But you have to," she insisted.

"No, I don't have to," he said.

"Nobody else will do it," she said.

"Louie Knapp will do it," he said. "Louie Knapp is *doing* it."

"No," my mom argued. "He's only talking about it. He tells stories in the barber shop and that's it. If you're not a man in need of a haircut or that awful "Lou" person, you won't hear the stories. Not at all. The stories evaporate into thin air."

"Or thin hair," my Grandfather joked.

Mom ignored him.

"Somebody's got to write them down," she said. "And you're the only writer in town. You're the only writer in the county."

We were having lunch in the breakfast nook. They don't build breakfast nooks any more. Ours was an indentation in the kitchen with a table and two benches on either side. It had a window and it seated four. However, there were five people sitting in ours during the conversation I'm trying to tell you about. My sister sat on a stool at the end of the table. My father sat next to the window and read *The Oregonian*. It was a morning paper published in Portland that got down to our town on the bus and was distributed about lunch time. My father wasn't in the conversation because it was my mom talking to her father and he knew better than to get involved in anything that might look like taking sides. My sister was in a big rush to go someplace with her friend, Louita.

We were having baloney sandwiches and alphabet vegetable soup. I was the only family member who required mayonnaise, mustard, and ketchup on a baloney sandwich.

(I like writing the word "baloney" because it was a popular word used by adults in mixed company when I was a kid—mixed meaning a combination of people, some of whom said bullshit most of the time and the others who said baloney all the time *instead* of bullshit. There is no place in my life for the spelling "bologna," this being pretentious, I believe.)

I was interested in the conversation because it involved my grandfather, who was a sort of hero to me about that time because he was giving me marching instructions with his Spanish-American War rifle.

"I've heard," Frank said, "that June Knapp has talked to the typing teacher at the high school and that the teacher will come out on Saturday mornings and write down some of Louie's stories."

"That story is about two years old," my mother said energetically. "It didn't happen. It isn't happening. It won't happen."

Grandpa Frank was stirring his soup very slowly and systematically as if looking for something.

"There are a variety of reasons for my not trying to write the history of this town," he said. "I'm too busy. And I'm too tired."

"That's not a variety of reasons. That's only two reasons. And they're no good. You're not too busy."

"I'm Justice of the Peace," he said.

"Phooey," my mother said. "This town is peaceful and everybody knows about justice. All you have to do is marry people now and then."

"And sentence transgressors," he added.

He was looking for something in his soup and I suddenly realized what he was doing. He was fishing individual letters out and arranging them on his bread plate. I was across the table from him and couldn't see exactly what he was up to.

"And as for being too tired," my mother continued, "you're not too tired to walk for miles on the beach and build bonfires that are almost as big as houses."

"An exaggeration," he said.

"I must remind you that more than one ship over the horizon has radioed the Coast Guard to ask if the whole town was on fire!"

"A fluke," my grandfather said.

This was before America got involved in World War Two and we got the coastal blackouts that made bonfires illegal.

"Here's what I think," my mother said, ever prepared to tell people what she thought. "I think it's your duty to sit down and write some of the stories about the history and the people and the funny incidents that you remember."

"My duty," Frank repeated.

"Yes, your duty."

It was about this time that Alida, my sister, hurriedly washed her dishes and put them in the dish drainer and rushed upstairs to her room for something. Alida was eight years older than me. (Is eight years older, and has maintained this lead over the years. It meant more then, of course, because I was in a lower grade and she was way up in high school. Little boys and budding young women didn't have a lot to talk about. Except maybe to fight over the Sunday funnies.)

Frank was silent. He was putting words together from the letters he'd carefully spooned out of his soup.

The word “duty” had a galvanizing effect on my father, it appeared, because he excused himself and left, saying that he had to re-open the store.

He took the paper with him.

I ate the last bite of my baloney sandwich.

“It is your duty because you are the grandson of the founder of the town.”

“I’m not the only grandson of the founder of this town,” he reminded her.

“To be sure,” my mother said. “But you’re the only one who lives here. Except Leslie of course. And you’re the only one who gives a damn.”

Everybody was using the word “damn” a lot that year since it had been legitimized by Clark Gable in *Gone With the Wind*. They tried to work in the whole sentence and start it with “Frankly, my dear, . . .”

Except Crawford Smith, the fisherman with the deepest, loudest, and foulest mouth in the county, who was much more apt to say: “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a shit!” Or worse. I heard him yell this up to the crane operator on the dock—that guy who lifted boats completely out of the water and put them on boat trailers on the dock.

“Why must I be the one who eternally gives a damn?” Frank asked.

“It’s part of your job,” my mother said. “It’s part of your responsibility.”

“No Bless O Bleege,” Alida said, who had just come back downstairs and who then sped across the room and exited through the kitchen door.

I didn’t know what she was talking about. I thought it was something she made up to mean “good-bye” or “so long.”

“Here’s what I think,” Frank said, looking up from his typographical efforts. “I believe that I don’t know as much history as you think I do. I don’t believe that I remember as many anecdotes as you think I do.”

I remember that I didn’t know what an anecdote was, but presumed it to be a relative of some kind.

“And,” Frank continued, “I think that just about anything I wrote would be a lot of hooley.”

“But you know a lot of beautiful stories, Dad!”

"Junk," he said. "Trash. Sentimental crap."

My mother was silent. She was trying to think of another approach. It would never have occurred to her to be direct. Direct and simple. I think that if she'd said "Please write some stories as a favor to me," he would have cheerfully done so. But what can you expect from a family in which no member was ever known to have uttered aloud (or even whispered) the words, "I love you"?

"Besides," Frank continued, "who cares? Who will ever care in the future? The words would only be words. Nobody would understand them. They would simply be my observations and reflections about unimportant matters."

"It would be important," my mother said but, as she said it, she knew that she couldn't prove it. Not in a million years. In my family you had to have proof. Absolute proof. Otherwise your ideas would never fly. They wouldn't get off the ground for even a second. And she couldn't even begin to prove her point about importance. Her conviction slackened. She would have to think of an angle. She was about angles. Side roads. Getting things done indirectly. She was a beautiful woman and I don't believe beautiful women ever learn how to be direct. Maybe they don't need to. They get what they want with hints. Artifice.

"Here you go," my grandfather announced. "Take a look at this!"

He pushed his bread plate around so that we could see it.

He had spelled *NON COMPOS MENTIS* with the alphabets from his soup.

It seemed an extraordinary accomplishment to me at the time. "What's that?" I asked.

"It is a Latin term," Frank said. "A legal expression. It means *not of sound mind*."

"Like nuts?" I asked.

"Like nuts," he said. "Exactly."

He scooted his large frame off the breakfast-nook bench. "I've got to be going," he said. "I've got to go for my walk."

This reminded him to look out a kitchen window to the distant mountain down the coast.

"Cap on Humbug!" he said. (It may have been my grandfather's grandfather who first noticed that if there was a patch of cloud on the very top of Humbug Mountain then showers could be expected within an hour or so.)

"Don't stop thinking about the idea of writing some stories," my mother urged, needing to have the last word. I knew that she would spend a lot of time reflecting about an angle during the coming days.

"Do you want to come for a walk with me, Ellen?" he asked my mother.

"No, thanks," she said. "I've got to get back to the store."

"How about you, Johnny?" he asked me.

"I'll go part way with you," I explained. "Maybe to the tunnel through Battle Rock. I told Barnie Winslow I'd meet him around 1:30. We're going to play Commandos or something."

"Okay," he said. "Let's go."

"I've got to do my dishes," I said. Having had it hammered into me to both say so and do so.

"I'll take care of them," my mother said, uncharacteristically. I could tell she was thinking. "You two go ahead."

Which we did.

It was a Saturday. I'm sure of that. We didn't have lunch together on week days. And grandfather insisted on a big dinner at his house late on Sundays. So it was a Saturday, to be sure.

The two words, sentimental crap, have always stuck with me. They were a deterrent, for a long time, to writing things down. Especially stories that were not epics. Stories that were little. Unimportant in the great cosmic scheme of things. But, as somebody explained, "They're the only stories you have—so write 'em down. What is sentimental crap to some people may have some meaning to others. And the fact that you care ought to mean something."

And I do. I don't have Rhett Butler's attitude at the end of *Gone with the Wind*. I do give a damn, or at least sort of a damn. Enough of one.

Point Number Two: I should do it while I'm still *COMPOS MENTIS*.

Finally, I'd better do it while there's time. My grandfather was finally persuaded to start writing his stories, his recollections, but—of course—you can imagine what happened. He ran out of time.

He capitalized on the intention, nevertheless. At the instant he decided to try, he announced to everybody that he was "working on a history." And that was before the first word was written. Nobody ever found any notes or pieces of manuscript from this history so, presumably, it was all bullshit. It was like the character in *The Mikado* who keeps saying: "It's as good as done!" After a while, he mesmerizes himself into believing that "If it's as good as done, then there is no need to actually *do* it!"

Peace at Heart

An Oregon Country Life

BARBARA DRAKE (1998)

.....

“This meditation on farm and countryside is a sweetly accurate, unpretentiously subtle portrait of a real place and people really living there. It offers the reader something rare and to be cherished: an honest description of happiness.” —Ursula K. Le Guin

In the late 1980s, Barbara Drake (a poet and teacher) and her husband sold their home in Portland and moved to a small farm in the Yamhill Valley, where they raised sheep and geese, kept bees, and made wine. A finalist for the Oregon Book Award, Peace at Heart captures the ordinary joys and quiet, everyday blessings of country life.

.....

PEACE AT HEART

Now that we have been on the farm for ten years, I look back and wonder at how casually we made the move, as if there were no perils at all, as if we knew what we were doing.

We didn't need to leave the city. Things were going well. I was in my forties, three years into a second marriage. I had the college teaching job I wanted and a handsome, loving husband who was patient, sensible, and creative. He was teaching in an interesting alternative public high school. Our kids were doing well. We lived in a big comfortable 1920's house in an exciting neighborhood in the city.

Still, even the happiest person knows that life is often sad. Like a purple thread in a white shawl, sadness pulls the eye into itself. There

were nights I couldn't sleep. White nights. *Les nuits blanches*. You turn off the lights but the light stays on.

On one of these nights, at the end of summer, as a hot east wind poured into the valley, I was lying fidgety in bed trying to quit consciousness when, through the open window, I heard a frail, mournful voice calling: "Help me." Then it called again. I went outside but could see no one. I walked to the curb and peered up and down the dark street. No one. The call was not repeated. The city was quiet except for far-off sounds of traffic. Someone's Siamese cat wearing a green bejeweled collar stared at me from the lawn, then darted into the bushes. I called 911. A police car appeared and circled the block but found no one.

I returned to bed and dozed briefly, then woke with a sad feeling I couldn't justify. "Help me." I wasn't even sure whether it had been a man's or woman's voice. Trying not to wake anyone, I pulled on shorts and a T-shirt and went to sit on the dark porch. The wind was hot and silky, palpable, a wind from eastern Oregon's high desert. Pouring through the gap in the Cascade Mountains that is the Columbia Gorge, it moved downriver, through the dark streets of Portland, across the west hills, out into the Tualatin Valley and toward the sea.

The movement of air against my skin suggested something physical yet indifferent, like the movements of fingerling trout against your legs in a mountain stream. I remembered floating in such streams as a child, looking down into water pierced by green and golden bars of light, and doing the "dead man's float," lying face down in a creek and watching the minnows nose my arms or tug at my drifting hair. This was like that.

It was three a.m., the hour of sorrowful hearts. The hour of second thoughts. The hour of the foraging opossum and the raccoon. I listened again for the call. "Help me." But I heard nothing. As I sat there, I imagined that the wind was full of swimming ghost fish. Dry leaves fluttered and cast fish-like shadows in the light from the street lamp.

The longer I sat there feeling the wind's passage, the more I was drawn into my fantasy. I felt the flutter of fins on my forehead, tails fluttering along my bare arms. The city was quiet except for the sound of spirit fish swimming to sea. In Ireland, the Gaelic name for wind—

Sidhe (pronounced “shee”)—also is the name for the fairy people that ride the winds. In Oregon, our winds could well be streams of air ridden by ghost fish: the Chinook, the Steelhead, the Rainbow.

Bill and I had hiked in the Coast Range that weekend, following an attractive trail uphill through dense trees, only to find, after a quarter of a mile, acres of clear-cut land and a group of teenaged boys riding motorcycles up and down the eroded logging road. I felt angry and disgusted. Then one of the boys grinned and waved, looking not like a delinquent and monster, but like someone’s little brother. As Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” By nature, most wild animals hide themselves from us human beings with our stinking machines and self-centered habits. What if the natural world somehow withdrew and left us in a world populated only by human beings in a manufactured landscape? “Help me.” Heat lightning crackled over the mountains to the east, but in the city it didn’t rain.

The screen door opened. “Is everything all right?” Bill whispered, stepping out into the dark.

“I was thinking about salmon,” I said. “When I was little, when the fall rains came, there were so many in the river. I remember seeing them up above Bonneville so thick you couldn’t walk across without stepping on them.”

“I remember that.”

He sat in the chair next to me. After a pause he said, “Maybe we should move down the valley.” He knew what I was thinking. It was almost time for school to start. I wasn’t looking forward to the long daily drive. I was teaching at a small private college about forty miles south of Portland. It took me an hour each way—two hours a day spent driving. I liked my job, but I didn’t like the long commute. There was something deadly about spending all that time in a car.

“We could look at places, just for fun. We wouldn’t have to actually do anything this year,” I murmured. Seven of our eight kids were using the house as home base out of a variety of needs. Five of them were in college and came home only during vacations, or lived there part of the time and attended college in the city. Two still were in high school, but it

wouldn't be long before they were all out of the house, either in college or on their own.

School started. I began my daily drive, one hour each way, and settled into a work routine that didn't allow for nights spent swimming with ghost salmon. The first twenty minutes of my commute were always the worst. Leaving our quiet city neighborhood, I would enter the freeway by way of a long ramp that hurled me into four lanes of traffic moving at top speed. I felt like an astronaut struggling to escape the earth's atmosphere. Or perhaps a fish in a dam-clogged stream. "Help me."

It was my fourth year of commuting. By Christmas break, I was fed up with the drive—and the school year was only half over. I like looking at land, whether I'm buying or not. There's something engaging about going to a new place and fantasizing living there, making it home. Some properties are enticing and stir the imagination toward a new locus, a new life. Some are terrible disappointments, nothing at all like their descriptions in the realtor's big book.

"Just for the fun of it," we began to explore the Willamette Valley for something closer to work that looked like home. We visited a five-acre piece with a stream, no house. The owner pointed us vaguely in the direction of a faint trail and said we could walk it on our own. The land turned out to be on the northern side of a mountain, an almost vertical, wildly overgrown site, with a plunging stream down the middle, and undergrowth of almost pure poison oak. It was beautiful and appealed to my child-adventurer side, as we scrambled down the mountain with brambles in our faces, heavy moss signaling the dankness of that northern exposure. At the bottom of the ravine where the land appeared to clear out slightly we came upon the startling sight of someone's hunting camp. A dozen rabbit skins were tacked to dry on rough boards, and the discarded rabbit heads were piled nearby under a patch of sword fern. The place could have been beautiful, with a Frank Lloyd Wright house perched on its rough slopes overlooking the ravine; it was beautiful in itself, in fact, but there was no grazing land, no sun, and the poison oak, the incline, and the rabbit heads, like some ill omen, put us off. I broke out with a blistering case of poison oak a day or so later.

And so we went from place to place, finding a nice old farmhouse at the bottom of a trash-filled gully, a beautiful piece of land with a beat-up mobile home and a derelict metal barn, an attractive riverside house and ten-acre pasture with a view of a steel-rolling mill, and so on. Always, in our price range, some crucial fault.

On one of these forays to see a different place we passed a tangled spot where the "For Sale" sign was so overgrown we barely noticed it. We stopped, backed up, peered through the bushes. Far back from the road and through a screen of oaks we saw a modest white house, an old red barn, an overgrown pasture. We didn't drive in, but I copied down the realtor's name and number from the weathered sign. The place was ideally situated, about twenty minutes from my job via a pleasant country road, and still not more than forty miles from the city.

Of course the place turned out to be for sale because it had so many problems, at least half of which didn't come to light until we'd lived there a while. The owners had paid too much at inflated interest and had neither the will nor the cash to deal with it all. The wife hated living in the country and declared, mournfully, she just wanted to live somewhere she could walk to a mall with the baby stroller. We wandered through waist-high pasture grass and gazed at the rolling foothills and the blue profile of the Coast Range to the west. A grove of ancient oak trees shaded the little house. Another slope led down through an overgrown, barely started vineyard to hedges of wild rose and blackberry vines, apple trees, and plum trees. Seeing all of this, we said: *this is glorious*.

We hadn't really meant to buy a place for a while, but somehow there we were filling out loan forms. The bank looked at the place and didn't agree on the price of its glory, but we kept at it and came up with a larger down payment. The owners agreed to sell for considerably less than they had paid, and finally the loan was approved. In July, we found ourselves moving in. We decided we would scale back so that Bill could quit teaching and work on the place. "Three years," we told ourselves. "We'll have it all fixed up in three years."

Ten years later, I'm almost afraid to itemize what we've done, all that we've spent, putting in a new foundation, a new septic system, a

reservoir for the well, two new barns, new siding for the house, fencing—it goes on.

The house was an amateur's exercise, a poorly planned box to which various other boxes had been attached over its fifty-plus years of existence. We were about to become the most recent amateurs. The "vineyard" consisted of the two acres of rooted cuttings the previous owner had abandoned to blackberry vines. The red barn was so picturesque it would fall down in a windstorm three years after we moved to the place. No doubt we were out of our minds, but clearly we were buying not only house and land but light and angles and vista, sunrise over Chehalem Ridge and sunset over the Coast Range. The oaks were magnificent. Even the oak that fell on our car one winter and totally demolished it, along with two other cars in the driveway, was magnificent for a while.

Sometimes I have misgivings, thinking about our house in the city. I'd like that house on this piece of land. Sometimes I wonder, with all the repairs and work we've done on this place, perhaps we should have torn the house down and built a new one to start with. But the process reminds me of an old movie with Tarzan and Jane swinging vine to vine—you can't look too far ahead, but when you reach for the next handhold, thank God it's there. Money that went into making the necessary improvements seemed to come when it was needed—teaching an extra class, getting a good royalty payment, Bill's unexpected small inheritance, my share of another house sold in a long-delayed payment of a divorce settlement, a tax refund. And when it didn't come, we didn't spend it. It would have been difficult to convince any bank, based on our visible income, that providence would treat us this well, but step by step, things improved.

Having lived here for ten magical years I feel it is time to take account. Ten years. More than enough time for all the cells in the human body to regenerate—which means I'm not the same woman who moved out here. What wakes me in the night is not a call for help but the yipping of coyotes or an almost telepathic awareness of a ewe delivering a lamb. Besides the openness, the landscape and the light, one of the happiest aspects of living in the country has been the animals—even the fox who

stole one of our chickens last year. In the city, charted by private lawns and laced by the predatory tracks of automobiles, animals don't really belong. Cats get along in the city, but it's hard to clean up after dogs and they really need more exercise. Poultry is forbidden, particularly noisy roosters. Goats, sheep, and other barnyard animals also are forbidden, even if you have enough space to graze one or two. Even raising bees is against the law in the city, though of course city people expect their fruit to be pollinated. In the city, wildlife exists in the form of finches at garden feeders, or raccoons and possums snitching cat food or garbage off the back porch, but clearly a life connected to animals is not the reason people live in cities. People live in cities to be near lots of people. "Help me."

In the country it's different. Where we live, an elk herd wanders across the hills and deer pass through our yard daily. One of the first things we did when we bought the Lilac Hill farm was to get a dog. Then we got another. Jack and Mollie. Two, it seemed, was the right number.

I don't remember the sheep or the border collie we left behind when I was two and my parents said good-bye to Kansas. I remember only the western end of the trip—palm trees in California, the Oregon surf, a mountain stream with tiny fish in it. Nevertheless, some old imprinted desire has been telling me for years I not only wanted dogs, I wanted to raise sheep. We bought three ewes and a ram and started our flock.

Because the disenchanted previous owners left their chickens behind, we found a surplus of good brown eggs. My daughter and I made our trip into the hills and bought the starter hive from the venerable beekeeper. I raised the geese, who then raised eight goslings. Bill cleared the blackberry brambles and found the vineyard still alive. He nursed it into recovery and three years later we were making wonderful wine. We struggled with drought, a fallen barn, and the problems of a poorly built house. We spent summer and autumn evenings with our chairs lined up facing west, sipping our own pinot noir, as if the sunset in the Coast Range were a splendidly arranged show just for our benefit. We cut rough trails through the woods, to better be able to appreciate the spring

fawn lilies, the bright, leathery green and olive-tinted winter growths of lungwort on the trunks of the scrub oaks, the banks of sword fern and wild geranium. A meadowlark sings in our walnut grove all spring. Mourning doves coo in the upper woods and the red tail hawks return. Swans and Canada geese winter in the area, and some mornings we awake to find them in passage, skimming the air just above the house, filling the mists with their ancient cries.

I still drive to work every day, but it's a short drive. The way I go is a slow, winding country road with a pleasant rural character. I pass several plant nurseries and go through two tiny towns with extravagantly expressed "Welcome" signs. When we first moved out here, a series of Burma Shave-style signs along the highway complained in forced meter about the lack of attention to this road from the state highway department: "When asked about potholes, the state's head it did scratch; their only answer, just one more patch." All but one of the signs have fallen into the brush over the years, leaving the enigmatic line, "it did scratch." Someone recently tacked up another sign nearby, "Believe on the Lord," and it makes an odd juxtaposition. Farther down the road, someone else has "brown eggs, 75 cents per doz." Someone else parks a pickup full of scrap wood by the road with a sign: "Free kinlin." However they are expressed, these are signs of life.

At no time do I have to change lanes and often I have the road to myself, although during planting and harvest I allow time for getting stuck behind some plodding piece of farm machinery.

A major change that has come with my country life is the company of animals. It's fun. Someone recently asked me, in a spirit of contemplation, what *is* fun? They were responding to an ad on television about something that was supposed to be big fun—driving your four-wheel-drive pickup at high speed through mud on a mountain, or drinking beer with six guys in a rowboat. Whatever it was, it wasn't my idea of fun, so I wasn't paying much attention, but I did think about the idea of fun. When you're a child, there are prospects that delight so much you can't wait for them to happen: opening Christmas presents, going to camp, having a birthday party. Those are fun. As an adult, I sometimes have

those same explosively happy feelings about certain events (returning to visit Greece after thirty years, for instance), but much of the time, adult happiness is a calmer business. Visiting with friends, hiking at Cape Blanco, reading a new Patrick O'Brian novel, listening to our CD of Elly Amling singing Schubert lieder, finding that the St. Cecelia rose has bloomed—these are all things that make me happy. I think of particular moments, such as the feeling of the dog's head lying across my lap as he persuades me by telepathy and subtle pressure to go out and take a walk through the woods. These things are deeply satisfying, but somehow the word "fun" seems too much like nervous excitement to describe adult happiness.

What is happiness? That's a more difficult question. Am I happy? If happiness is the deep down sense of doing what is right, of being in the right place, of going to sleep at night with some confidence that you will wake up in the morning to a world in which nothing too immediate has gone wrong, the feeling that your work is satisfying and worthwhile, that those you love are similarly okay, and that beauty is all around you, then I am surely happy. But I am going to try to pinpoint a particular time when happiness, when peace is the crux of the moment, when well-being is so intense and beautiful that one wants nothing more except to share the feeling with the world.

Many, of course, will find my idea of happiness dull and perplexing, but I am going to try to describe it, a moment of pure happiness which belongs to this place, to this life I am leading here.

I love shaking wild apples down for the sheep in the fall. In October, their wool has grown out from their February shearing. The pasture grass is dry after months of hot weather and the sheep enjoy the juicy wild apples, beautiful in their varied shapes, sizes, and colors, some of them sweet, some of them so bitter I'm amazed that the sheep gobble them so fast.

I go into the pasture. It is the first day of September. The air smells smoky from a field burn somewhere down the valley. The pasture is a pale wheat color but it is only straw, the leftovers of the sheep's grazing. This is the end of a typical Oregon summer and we haven't had rain for

weeks. The sheep nibble dry grass, little tufts of green in the shady spots, and the leaves of underbrush. We supplement their grazing with alfalfa and grain, but they like fresh stuff if they can find it. When the rain starts, the grass will green up again. The mild winters of the Willamette Valley encourage green pastures, often even in January. I am of a divided mind, loving the hot hazy days of late summer but looking forward to damp, fresh air. Rain is forecast for this weekend, and all up and down the valley, farmers are anticipating the moisture by plowing and planting the winter wheat. Dust rises in clouds over the rolling farmland.

I go down the pasture and call the sheep. I call by loudly singing out “Sheep, sheep, sheep . . .” in chanting tones I learned from church when I was a child. They know what this means and come streaming from all directions—twenty-eight of them, for we still have some of this year’s lambs—out of the woods, from the lower pasture, from the barn where they have been scrounging for alfalfa stems left in the feeder from the night before. As they come, they start to baa in answer to my calling. I go to a broad, low-growing, wild tree at the bottom of the ravine. Its branches are packed with small, yellow apples the size of golf balls, thousands of them. I grab a branch and shake. Apples rain down and bounce into the dry cavity of the winter pond. The sheep start to run and then they are all around me, gray, black, brown, white, crunching up the apples.

I walk on to the next tree. The apples here are dark red, with a stark white meat. I taste one. Pretty good, but there are plenty to go around. I shake a branch and apples tumble. I duck back out of the way and sheep rush forward to crunch the best ones. I walk on and up the hill. This tree is covered with purplish-pink, small apples on wire-like stems, some wild variation on a crab apple, and this tree too is loaded. I taste one—unbelievably sour! But like lemon juice, fresh and clean. I shake a branch. Some of the sheep are sticking with the earlier choices, but many of the lambs and a few of the mothers rush up. They like these small apples. They can get their mouths around them.

It is getting late, almost dusk. The bright apples glow in the late evening light. I go on to a tree filled with large, crisp, green apples. Good

for pies and sauce. I'll save them for us, but to comfort the small band of sheep still following me, I toss down a dozen or so. They pick up the apples with their soft, mobile lips and tip their heads back to get a grip. As they crush the apples with their strong back teeth, the juice foams and runs back out of the corners of their mouths. They look so pleased, I go on, from tree to tree, tasting and shaking down apples. Another tree full of red apples looks promising, but the fruit is bitter beyond belief. I shake it anyway. The sheep eat more. Crunch, snuffle, crunch.

They are excited by this whole process. Now that many of them have had their fill, they just run along for the excitement, nosing the apples and then leaving them to follow me to the next tree. I shake branches full of apples the color of ripe bananas, dusty rose apples, russet apples, and yellow apples with red stripes.

A group of sheep breaks off and forms a loose line going back up the hill. The mountains are purple now—the light makes a golden halo behind them. Where the sun goes down, the sky is red. The sheep's wool takes on a lavender cast from the cooling light as they follow the path up the hill to the barn. They feel the darkness coming and they go toward the barnyard light. A couple of the rams, enormous woolly animals with big, black palooka faces, nudge my hands and turn their chins up for more apples. I shake down some that are red-orange. There are plums too, wild relatives of the hazy blue Italian prunes growing closer to the house. The rams toss the plums in their mouths and spit out the seeds. Once in a while one will crunch up the pits. Their mouths foam with fruit juice.

The sheep. The light. The good, deep smells of oily wool, crushed apples, and drying grass. The dogs snuffling the hedge where they flushed a pheasant earlier today. The chickens settling on their roost in the henhouse. An owl drops out of the woods and soars across the pasture. The cats trill their greetings and twine around the pasture fence posts. The warm light beckons from the barn on the hill. Being in it, with it. This is happiness. There is beauty everywhere and for the moment I am part of it.

Spirit of the Siskiyou

The Journals of a Mountain Naturalist

MARY PAETZEL (1998)

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“Mary Paetzel demonstrates the way in which the larger literature of the land is built upon the lovingly recorded lifeways of the true, self-trained, and self-motivated observer. It is a grand tradition, and this is one of the best of the species.” —Robert Michael Pyle

Mary Paetzel was almost eighty when OSU Press published these selections from her journals. She moved to southern Oregon in 1945, and started exploring the Siskiyou Mountains in her old VW bus. Her journals cover twenty-five years, and come alive with descriptions and drawings of wildflowers, birds, butterflies, bees, and wasps, as well as her determination that the fragile beauty of these mountains should be protected.

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FAIRY BELLS ON THE WINTER AIR

White mist has descended to the tops of the trees and a soft grey rain slants across my quiet fields. The hill is a study in muted greys and greens, and beneath last autumn’s rotting leaves, spring queens (*Snythyris reniformis*), shooting stars, and lamb’s tongues are stirring. Even now, catkins of the hazel brush are inches long and soon will be shedding their pollen on the damp winter breeze.

Somewhere beneath the bark on an old log, a mourning cloak—a kind of tortoise shell butterfly—is waiting patiently for a brief sunny hour, to be on the wing in the first warm moments of the New Year. But for now, the rain streams relentlessly down and the white mist drops lower among the tree tops. Rain will soon turn to snow, for this is the month of cold, ice, freezing fog, and that strange hybrid that is neither rain nor snow, but the worst of both.

Sometimes, though (once in a decade perhaps), snow comes before the rain. White and soft and dry, it dances among the trees and over fields light and gentle as thistledown. Then all the magic of a winter wonderland casts its spell for a brief time over this wet, foggy, rainy country.

There have been a few such times in all the years this place has been mine. If the day is especially blessed and the sun should chance to shine, it creates an experience so memorable it will never be forgotten.

The new snow gleams and sparkles like a thousand, thousand diamonds, and the clearing sky takes on that unbelievable cerulean blue reserved for winter skies of the high mountain meadows.

Once there was a span of days like this, one after another, with clear skies and brilliant sun, followed by frigid arctic nights. Each day the snow melted slightly, then fused in the cold of night into beautiful patterns of long, delicate crystals—crystals that even the slightest breath of air shattered into a million tinkling fragments. It was a never-to-be-repeated experience to stand quietly among the trees on the hillside and see these myriad tiny structures falling in luminescent strands from the branches, and to hear their musical tintinnabulation like so many fairy chimes on the winter air.

Each January, I wait expectantly when the snow begins to fall, but never again have conditions been just right to repeat the experience, and it is with a vague sense of regret that I turn the calendar to the month of February.

January 15, 1969

BEES AND CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Sitting among the cherry blossoms this green and gold morning in spring, I think what a pleasant job I have—I'm taking a "bee census."

The April sun is warm, but a chill wind blows from the north and I think of alpine meadows at timberline. But I'm content—for once—and the buzz of the bees and flash of their myriad tiny wings is all I desire for this spring day.

Each kind of bee fly, and even butterfly, has its own song. Some higher, some lower, and I know who each little worker is by the sound she makes. Even the little crescent-spot butterfly tells me who she is as she flutters in the branch behind my ear.

But I think *Bombylus*, the bee fly, has the most pleasant tune of all. As she hovers in the air before a blossom she's hardly audible, but when she revs her tiny propellers to dart away she produces a high-pitched whine that only the bee flies are capable of.

But most of all, I love to hear them in the heat of summer when two (probably a pair) dance in mid-air, and, facing each other a few inches apart, converse by altering the sound of their wings. First a whine almost too high for my ears to catch, then a lower droning hum, then a series of middle notes, sustained like a lingering chord on the violin. All done without changing position in the air in the slightest. But this performance is for later, and usually done best by the small, black-and-white- or yellow-striped *Eristctlis* hover flies.

Today the bees work, and I listen, and I know the tiny things are as glad as I that the snows and cold of winter have departed and the warm suns and blue skies and white clouds of spring are here at last.

April 25, 1969

THIRTY DAYS HATH SEPTEMBER

Thirty golden days washed with sparkling skies and billowing clouds—days without time—when the killdeer calls and little brown birds twitter and scold in the brambles, restless, never still, eager to be gone. Now

the sea bird's cry is more plaintive than before, and purple asters beckon from the sea meadows among the dunes.

Thirty days to spend recklessly among the treasures of dying summer, to watch and listen beside the tidal pool, to lie dreaming on a sunlit hill, to feel the first raindrops of autumn. And beyond the horizon, to hear, with the ears of the mind, the first restless honking of the geese, impatient to leave their summer homes for the windswept tules of autumn and the leaden skies of October.

In September comes the first restless call of the wild to all creatures of earth and sky. The monarch flies with an urgent wing-beat that was lacking only a week before, the sparrow moves with a haste and purpose the lazy days of summer never knew, the scolding of the grey squirrel sounds through the woods with a greater insistence, and the fitful killdeer circle and call the night through.

Now comes the equinox and the wild storms sired in the meeting of summer's heat and winter's cold. Thunder—and clouds piled high, wind—and slashing rain. Then the calm sunny days and once again the bright flowers toss in soft breezes, and purple grapes grow fragrant in the golden light. Once more the cricket sings loud in evening shadows and a yellow harvest moon gently lays its brilliance over woods and field.

The wild goose dreams—and I would dream with it, for I would know what the wild goose knows—I would go where the wild goose goes. Then one day soon, on October's red hill I'll watch the geese and hear their cries. They will go, and I will stay—for I know, as I've always known—autumn's voice is meant for ears other than mine.

September 1, 1972

A REJOICING OF ROBINS

On this dark December day, my hill and the surrounding area are alive with a rejoicing of robins. Two hundred, five hundred, or more—flying, caroling, chirping, scolding, and singing—making the gloomy woods

come alive with their invasion. They have come for the annual feast of the madrone berries, and no matter how dark the day, how cold, how miserable, they seem to be in the happiest of moods, a carnival spirit of feasting and good fellowship.

Always the number of birds is in proportion to the amount of the brilliant red berries. This year the trees produced the largest crop of recent years, and the birds are so numerous the din of their chatter can be heard in all surrounding valleys.

I walked up the old logging road to the top of the hill to watch their comings and goings. They ebb and flow like the tide, first on one hillside, then down in a valley, then to a nearby rise, and back again to my trees. For a while I seemed to be in the midst of them, and the round red berries were dropping all about like hail. After the main flock passes on, a few birds remain, and in the quiet after the tumult one or two will begin to sing: a rather hesitant, trial-like song—a sort of practice session for the coming joyous carols of spring.

Often I've seen flocks on the hill above the river where the top of the ridge is covered with madrone. And, a few times, as I've been resting in a long, sloping meadow on the north side of the river, the whole group would alight among the new grass and forage for insects. It's quite a sight to see a hundred or so red-breasted birds dotting the green expanse of an open hillside—and always, the old song comes to mind—"a red, red robin just a-bob-bob-bobbing along."

I had never seen robins in large numbers until we came to Oregon. It seems they winter in all the inland valleys of the state—Willamette, Umpqua, and Rogue. But I've never been able to find out whether these birds go inland to the mountain states in summer, or whether they are more or less resident to the coastal areas.

At home, in Colorado, we never saw more than a few pairs nesting in the orchards or near the river. And if as many as a hundred had ever appeared all at once, I'm sure everyone for miles around would have come to look at them!

The robin: celebrated in song and poetry as the cheerful messenger of spring. Still, to really appreciate just how lilting and uplifting is

the song of this red-breasted bird, one should hear it on a dark day in December, while standing on a lonely hill, beneath a lowering sky, with evening shadows gathering in the valleys below.

December 26, 1978

North Bank

Claiming a Place
on the Rogue

ROBIN CAREY (1998)

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“Reading *North Bank* is almost as much fun as fishing. Carey reports the things so many outdoor writers miss—the things that, when noticed, give fishing joy and meaning and that, when ignored, render it just a ‘sport,’ like bowling.” —Ted Williams, *Audubon Magazine*

“Learning the territory is a process I don’t fully understand, but one that tugs at me with a feeling like necessity,” writes Robin Carey. That process, of creating home ground in a new place, is the subject of his book, a rich and poignant look at fly fishing, favorite rivers, and the power of familiar landscapes.

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HOME RIVER

In the study of the North Bank cabin hang two black-and-white photographs. One shows our long-deceased Labrador, Nipper, lying beside propped shotgun and boots, light glinting off the tip of her nose, in the doorway of a deserted cabin. The other, titled “Christmas Day, 1979,” shows a similar old cabin, weathered, bleached, and sagging, my daughter looking out one paneless window frame of it, one hand up over her eyes to shade them, my son looking out the other window frame, a dark, empty doorway between them, and snow on the hills of Grizzly Mountain, behind. Both of these pictured places lie over in Bear Creek Valley, a drainage of the upper Rogue.

Abandoned cabins and fallen farmhouses are the stuff of photographic cliché, of course; but that fact doesn't much matter to me. Art is not the point of these photos. The point is to remember those places and how I once knew them, how I hiked out to them, wallowed around in their nostalgia, moved some mental furniture through the sagging door frames, and restructured the past. The point is to remember those yellowed newspapers on the walls, and how I dug around through the mouse turds and broken glass, kicked over some boards, and watched the sow bugs scatter. At those fallen homesteads there's a nice open view across the front hillsides, and an outhouse in back as bleached as the bones of a winterkill. The photographs hanging in the North Bank cabin remind me of those Bear Creek inland valleys and those cabins I once found there.

The pair of boots in the picture with Nipper was an extra pair I packed out to the one cabin and tossed on the stoop. That's tampering with reality, of course, not tried-and-true documentary style. I told Nipper to lie down in the doorway, leaned my Model 12 Winchester against the door frame, and set up the camera tripod. After some meter readings of light and some figuring of the zones, I shot brackets. Now, when I look at this picture, finished and framed, I feel like I'm inside that cabin on the bedsprings taking a snooze after a hard morning of chasing pheasants. It's a pleasure to lie there as inert as a fallen timber and to have off those heavy boots. Nipper stands guard in the doorway to scare off wandering porcupines or any of those brazen flickers that favor the place. Breezes blow across my chest and feet and tug at the ghost curtains. This place is mine, I've arranged it, I own it, it's been willed to me by an imagined grandfather, his moustache drooping down to his chin. He crossed the plains in a Conestoga wagon and probably found some gold up the rocky back draw to the east.

In the truth of things, though, one grandfather never got further west than Oklahoma Territory, and jumped around down there so much, from town to town, that even the relatives called him "fiddlefooted." The other grandfather, the one I favor, never got west either, but raised a family on Mississippi river bottom, farmed the richness of it, and found

his forty acres of Illinois a steady and sustaining place. When Catharine and I took the kids for outings on Grizzly Mountain, old-cabin country, one valley or another, we found those valleys and their cabins steady and sustaining places, too, in their own ways. We could even call those places ours since a lot of that land, the higher part, falls in public domain, that rocky hilltop land that nobody much ever wanted and that defaulted to BLM scrub. Certainly the badgers and the bobcats didn't appear to worry much about survey stakes on those hillsides, and in our imagining we could take what we wanted of that land any day of the week.

Knowing exactly where the home place abides takes some mental adjustments sometimes, because home can be someplace to leave, or someplace you can't go back to because it's gone, or it's changed, or you've changed. I got melancholy for half an hour or so one night in front of the old family house in Milwaukee, before I realized it was the wrong house, remodeled to look more like the right house than the right house itself. An ash tree added the final confusion. The ash I remembered in our front yard was no longer there, and the neighbor's ash had grown up to about the right dimensions. The wrong house looked right; the right house wasn't home anymore. It was a shell game, and all that shell game of memory only goes to make true home-feelings the more valuable where I find them, even on BLM scrub.

The home river is an easier concept, or I choose to make it easier. Under the river's surface, as Bernoulli explained, flows a laminar slow-down of some complexity. But you don't need to go that deep. With rivers you can bounce your gaze off the surface, like light, and the reflection feels natural and sufficient. One of the Psalms says that the river of God is filled with water. So is the home river filled with water. The gaze might wander, the light might fade, but the water is there.

Not too far north of Ashland ran the North Umpqua River. Its summer-run steelhead arrived sporadically in late June, then more heavily in July and on through November. They stacked up in a thirty mile stretch of river designated fly-fishing only. The stretch held then, and still holds, balmy fishing most summer days, up until the first freezing mornings of October. The North Umpqua was the first river I claimed

in any enduring way, set the heart's flag in midstream and rocked it solid.

I took myself pretty seriously as a fly-fisher on the North Umpqua, struck a few classic poses for the roadside tourists with their binoculars, tried to fish the far side of the river more than necessary, in love with the long cast. The mirror of the river always flowed at my feet. I tend to remember the North Umpqua that way—posed and formal.

But North Umpqua times were good times. There was an honesty and clarity to the Umpqua and its codes. Frank Moore's Steamboat Inn, even when the "Yes, We're Closed" sign was in the window, always had the back door open. People came in, made coffee, picked up some flies, or a flyline, or a pair of waders, and wrote down what they took, or left money under the counter. They told the truth about what they took, and, mostly, about what they caught.

This was pretty much catch-and-release fly-fishing. Unlike meat-fishing, which jumps firmly on a certain logic, catch-and-release fishing, like religion, works out into realms of faith. To the North Umpqua came fly-fishers of many sorts, greater and lesser sorts, subordinate to the river. They spoke quietly. They got up early. They stood in the river like pilgrims in the Ganges. When the sun reached the water, and the mist lifted, they moved to a shady bend or canyon for midmorning fishing, or went back to the Inn, or to some campground, and had coffee.

The river's codes, like Roman law, had a certain civilizing influence. Most fly-fishers learned a kind of parental regard for the steelhead runs, and a lot of fly-fishers, myself included, put in some time planting trees along the tributaries, or building gabions to collect spawning gravel, and in the process got themselves personally invested in steelhead survival. Proprietary feelings are home feelings, I realize. I'll need to do some investing like that along the North Bank of the Rogue if this splicing of allegiances is going to work.

My initial fishing skills never posed much challenge to the North Umpqua runs. I put in a year thrashing the river with a four-piece pack rod and catching nothing. My first Umpqua hook-up happened one day when Frank Moore saw me along the road, pulled over in his pickup,

his wire-haired mutt Mokey whining in back. Frank looked me over, evidently decided I had done enough hard-time in the trenches of ignorance, and said, "Climb down over there. Stay low. Wade in *behind* that boulder, not *on* it. Cast just past the tip of that next boulder."

He drove away, and the steelhead he had steered me to took my fly with a startling enthusiasm. She ran deep into the reel's backing before she jumped, and I saw the distant airborne streak of her below the Fall Creek rapids. Rumor had it that each season Frank jogged up and down the riverbanks climbing trees, peering down into the pools, charting the steelhead lies of the river. Part of it all was knowing where they lay.

My regular fishing partner took a summer job at Steamboat Inn, got trained in as a part-time guide, passed his information on to me, this in exchange for some bird hunting savvy. We'd drive along the river, and Mike would be pointing here and there.

"Frank says they hold over there against that far bank. It's a long cast."

"That's a place Frank fishes in winter. It's no good in low water." "Frank says you can catch them here right up in that white water, way up high."

The talk went on like that, along mile after mile of river. Thirty miles holds a lot of chutes and lies to remember. There still are strange places on the North Umpqua for me, and other places that take some hard remembering. Most of them, too, you can only learn by fishing; they fish different than they look. Being shown a few places at the beginning teaches what to look for, gives a feel for that steady, silky, bubbly drift of current that steelhead favor. But I never much liked being guided, and all those tips about just where to fish, and how to fish there, I tended to forget.

Certainly the North Umpqua gave me perspective on my fishing compulsion. Mine was no great compulsion at all, comparatively speaking. I never slept all night on the island rocks of The Station, just to be the first one on it come morning, and never raced anyone down the road to Wright Creek where the hatchery fish stacked up. I was only one of those who headed out before dawn, one of those ghostly cruising drivers

out in the moonless fog, thinking maybe to be the first one to Upper Archie, or to The Ledges, or to Fairview. I was seldom the earliest of this breed, either, and another fly-fisher would be at my chosen spot before me, car parked dark in the pull-off, maybe a cigarette glowing behind the windshield. And code was code, fair was fair, first was always first. I'd head on down to the next lie on my mental list—Split Rock or Coleman or Rattlesnake. Others did the same for me.

On the North Umpqua it was easy to find the pull-offs, the well-beaten paths down through the timber. Most North Umpqua fly-fishers wore cleats of some kind, too, and you could tell the favored casting places by the scratches on the rocks. Sometimes you could even trace your way out a tricky wade to some ledge or island by following scratch-paths on the underwater boulders. Probably because these places were so open to discovery, the better fly-fishers favored hard-casting, hard-wading lies where the river disposed of apprentices. I always liked those places where someone had cut a swath of brush behind to make room for backcasting. I figured the cutting work meant fish out front somewhere, always a comforting nostrum.

Or there were ways to fish the easy lies that caught the hard fish—like Fairview, a long white ledge along the shore, two easy lies high up, one easy lie low down, and a last place way across and down that few fly-fishers touched. Of course, so that the fish didn't spot you on the riverbank and spook, you first had to follow the path through the culvert under the road.

September was my favorite month on the North Umpqua, and late September the time of a ritual last trip before fall-term teaching began. Mike Baughman, Jim Dean, and I would head up to the river, camp at Bogus Creek, or Island, sometimes at Canton Creek, sometimes at the old Williams Creek campground, and fish with that sharp and hungry edge of last outings. We sat around such a camp fire one night when an old gentleman came in, "hello'd the fire," sat a fireside log, and told us he'd fished the river way back, way back before the new road went in, said he used to cross the river and climb the big rock above Fairview and fish down from the far side. He had a gray beard and small blue eyes,

was alone, and had driven up from California just to see the river one more time. I remember him very well. We were young, full of the present moment. He was old, full of past times.

Now it's myself experiencing what that old gentleman experienced by the camp fire, looking backward at this river, loving it, wanting to keep it. It feels like the memory of a bright steelhead. I hold it for a moment. I hold the river like a bright silver body, momentarily touched, fingers around the tail, under the belly, feeling that sinuous flesh full of life, vigor, and deep-sea memory. Then I turn it loose.

I turn it loose, but remember it, and that memory stays with me here on the North Bank affecting the ways I wade and cast, the ways I think, the ways I feel about these local rivers, and the way I feel about our North Bank house that stands overlooking the Rogue's shore. The codes and the values of the North Umpqua stay with me. So does the idea of how a river should feel and look. That's probably why I drive all the way up to Agnes and beyond sometimes, to find those bedrock ledges, and the tricky wading there that feels familiar.

At the present moment, here on the North Bank, I am watching gulls that have moved inland over the Rogue. They soar and beat and dip in the thermals, hundreds of them. Smaller birds, swallows probably, fly with them, all of them feeding on some hatch or other. I refocus my eyes to a closer dimension, trying to discover what the hatch might be, but all I can make out over the front yard are a couple of fluttering termites, what the locals call "red ants."

In the same way I look to the birds in the highest thermals, it is always tempting, when I think of famous rivers like the North Umpqua and the Rogue, to remember the distant dimension, the heroics of the legendary fly-fishers—those impossible wades, those incredible casts, those reservoirs of lore. But sometimes it's good to squint, to check out the close-up. A nice quality of the North Bank consists of the congenial ghosts just to the south, not an apple core's toss from our North Bank cabin's stoop, there at the now-vanished fishing camp of Rogue legend Glen Wooldridge. It's known locally that one time, when Wooldridge got around to washing out his underwear, he rather carelessly tossed

it on a fence to dry, and one Mabel, who found it there and thought it discarded, cut off all the buttons to use in her sewing.

I knew Glen Wooldridge a little in his last years, and it's too bad I didn't know this story then about his underwear, because it would have been fun to kid him about it, and to hear what phrase he'd put to the event. He had a way with phrases that I liked, and I remember that when he spoke of his pioneering first run of the Fraser River Canyon, he did not say it was "difficult," or "dangerous," or "challenging," but said, instead, that it was "pretty snappy."

I like, too, that on this North Bank place we have an older cabin, a little like those abandoned ones on Grizzly Mountain. I don't mean our house itself, although it too is old and I often call it a cabin. This cabin I refer to is older yet, and out back behind the garage, with an apple tree on its west side, another apple tree on the east side, their branches meeting over the green-mossed cabin shingles. Only one original cabin wall still stands, with four eight-paned windows set into it. The roof rests on corner posts, shored up by the last owner who had a dog pen up there. There's a lot of slump to this old backyard cabin. The foundation posts and support timbers are pretty much gone.

Most everybody who has set eyes on that old cabin has asked me when I'm going to be tearing it down. But the fact is that I borrowed two big hydraulic jacks from Gerald Barton, who operates Barton's Body Shop over in Nesika Beach, and started jacking the place up. I did this with some care, listening to the timbers groan, then rolled around in the dirt under the corners poking at timbers with an ice pick. I'd never really seen the work of termites, or of dust beetles before, inside-out workers digesting the heartwood core of things.

Gerald Barton's father had lived in a trailer just down the hill from this place, and Gerald knew this old cabin from years back, when "Doc" somebody lived here and kept his collectibles in the old place—a dentist's chair, for one thing, and an old potbellied stove from a railroad car. While I jacked up the corners and ripped out the rotten wood, I thought of that old dentist's chair and how it would have looked. I wondered if Doc had come up and sat in it sometimes, looked out the eight-paned

windows at far-off Kimball Bend of the Rogue, and recalled the teeth he'd pulled from one human jaw and another.

I cut new support posts from some discarded guardrail timbers, pried around the old concrete piers and leveled them out, used some more rough-cut lumber I found in the garage for cross supports, cut a couple new risers and built some stairs, glazed a few new windowpanes, patched up the cedar siding of that one wall, slapped on some paint, and the old cabin stands. The slant rain blows through it still, of course. But it's a good enough place yet to stack firewood. I like the homestead feel it adds to the North Bank, the flavor of early-times Rogue.

So the Rogue feels more like the home river, like marked territory, with each new foundation post under the old cabin, and with each new board of tongue-and-groove knotty pine that stands vertically into paneling in the back bedroom of the house, and with each new path discovered down a ferny bank to a riffle of the river and to a cluster of boulders where the otter climb around with their whiskers twitching.

I haven't fished the North Umpqua in three years. If I get up there this March, as I hope, I wonder if it still will seem anything at all like the home river. It's hard to think so with so many things changed, with so many details forgotten, with so many impressions of these coastal streams more fresh in my mind. It all makes me feel sometimes like a strayed steelhead half-pounder, nosed up the wrong river mouth, a little confused, pushing up past Elephant Rock to Johns Hole. The local steelhead do stray a lot, and it's not unusual at all to catch a Rogue-clipped steelhead in Pistol River or in Hunter Creek, say. I imagine, when that happens, those strays must rearrange their landscapes in a process somewhat like my own.

At any rate, those cabin pictures in my study hang there to remind me of all this. I suppose whoever lived in those sagging cabins, on the slopes of Grizzly Mountain, might feel the same confusion if they returned, might misremember the windows, the chimney stone, might forget just whoever it was that sat in that oak chair now three-legged in the side yard. Or if "Doc" came back to the North Bank, he'd not find that dentist's chair of his swiveling north to south along the view

line of the distant Rogue. He wouldn't find three walls of his cabin, either.

Home ground or home water, they're both tenuous and fragile places, but I like to think we can take some of their essence with us, the way I dug some jonquil bulbs once from beside a cabin wall on Grizzly Mountain, carried those bulbs away with me in my backpack, and planted them elsewhere, or the way I cut buds off an old homestead apple tree not long back, up by Dunkleberger Riffle, and grafted them to a tree here on the North Bank. Those buds, a couple of them anyway, have swelled, bloomed, and grown sweet apples. Those splices of old wood to new wood are so smooth that the bark hardly ripples where the stocks meet.

I walked down to the Snag Patch this morning and looked at the brown flow of the Rogue. Two inches of rain fell yesterday, more the day before, more this afternoon, more coming tomorrow. The deadfall in midstream, my depth gauge, looks completely covered, invisible to the eye, not even a ripple to mark its underwater presence. There'll be a steelhead run or two come up the rivers with this water-surge; that's a fact. And the hard part will be figuring just where to fish, and when to get there, because these winter-run fish don't stay long.

Like some of the rest of us, they move on through, snuffing for some home-scent, for some feeling that is right, primitive, youthful, remembered dimly, all but lost, and needful to be found again before the water changes.

Empty Nets

Indians, Dams,
and the Columbia River

ROBERTA ULRICH (1999)

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“An important and powerful book that stands as a metaphor for our continued injustices to Indians and must shame us all. It is a stirring human document for these times, and I recommend it heartily.” —Alvin M. Josephy, Jr.

In 1939, the U.S. government promised to provide Columbia River Indians with replacements for traditional fishing sites flooded by the Bonneville Dam. Empty Nets is the disturbing history of the Indians’ struggle, in the courts and on the river, to persuade the government to keep its promise.

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THE DAM

For I say to you that our health is from the fish; our strength is from the fish; our very life is from the fish.
—Yakama Indian fisherman George Meninock to
Washington State Supreme Court, 1921

Nelson Wallulatum was there at the beginning of the struggle. The year was 1934, and Nelson was eight years old, a lively child already learning his tribe’s centuries-old fishing ways. His grandmother took him to the bank of the Columbia River near the family’s south shore fishing camp, and pointed across to the north shore, another traditional fishing site. White men were working there. They were building a dam, his

grandmother said. It would stop the flow of the Columbia and maybe the salmon too. For the people of Nelson's Wasco Indian Tribe that was a threat to their livelihood and their way of life. Even an eight-year-old could sense the danger.

Nelson lived with his grandmother, Susan Palmer, moving with the seasons from the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in Central Oregon to the shore of the Columbia River and back again. Already he was joining the men as they dipped their nets into the swirling Columbia and pulled out salmon weighing up to a hundred pounds apiece. To Nelson, learning to fish was like learning to speak his tribe's Wasco language. It was second nature. He learned to make nets and to mend nets, how to bend wood from river-bank trees into a strong wooden hoop to hold his net. As soon as a boy could understand the safety rules he was allowed to go with the men, who stood on rocks or wooden platforms jutting over the turbulent river, waiting for fish fighting their way upstream. He learned to imitate the way the men held their long-handled dip nets and the way they pulled them quickly from the water and flipped the shimmering fish onto the rocks.

If he caught a salmon, Nelson might carry it up the bank to his grandmother. She and the other women hung the fish to dry or pounded them into a meal to be mixed with berries and dried deer or elk meat for winter food. More often, like the men, he left the hauling to the women and girls. That was women's work. The men needed to stay on the platforms, catching as many fish as they could to make sure their families did not go hungry through the long winters on the cold, dry reservation. Winter was always on their minds. The Wasco men caught more salmon than their families could eat, then traded the surplus for other foods that also made up their traditional diet—elk and deer meat, roots and berries. They traded for other things too, clothing and baskets. By the time Nelson was growing up, in the 1930s, they also sold a few fish for money to buy things they had adopted from white men's society—sugar, coffee, salt, wood to build their traditional plank houses. Indian children had little time to play during fishing season, except perhaps a few foot races at the end of a

long day. Winter, back at Warm Springs, was the time for stories and dancing and play.

There was little thought then that the fishermen would catch too many Columbia River salmon. Indians had fed themselves for centuries without depleting the fish runs. When white men first arrived on the Columbia River, they described salmon so numerous a person could walk across the river on their wriggling backs. In the 1930s, after decades of whites' use of fish wheels, fish traps, gill nets and ocean purse seines, the number of salmon in the Columbia had dropped. But there still seemed to be plenty for everyone. Some Indians lived along the river and fished all year around. Others, like Nelson's Wasco family, spent winters at Warm Springs or on the Yakama Reservation in Washington state. In the spring, the Warm Springs Wasco took a circuitous one hundred-mile route from the reservation's dry high prairie to the forested banks of the Columbia. Traveling in a caravan of cars, they went by way of Estacada, Oregon, on the western foothills of the Cascades, stopped two or three weeks to fish along the Willamette River, then moved up the Columbia. Nelson Wallulatum's family built its summer base at Eagle Creek, near the present site of Bonneville Dam. They stayed on the river, following the various runs upstream into the fall until the fish had passed or they had enough to last until the next April's first salmon ceremony.

Salmon were the center of life for the Wasco tribe and for the other Indians along the river. More than food, the fish were vital to the Indians' religion, nourishment for the spirit as well as the body. So important were the fish that in three 1855 treaties tribes gave up an area larger than Tennessee in exchange for a guarantee that they could forever fish, hunt, and gather roots and berries in their usual and accustomed places. They were about to lose more than two dozen of those usual and accustomed fishing places as Bonneville Dam rose across the narrow tumultuous Cascades of the Columbia forty miles east of Portland, Oregon. The Army Corps of Engineers, builder of the dam, agreed that the Indians were entitled to compensation for the lost sites. It said it would replace them with six new sites totaling four hundred acres along the lake behind the dam. That was in 1939.

Nelson Wallulatam is a tribal elder now, for forty years the elected chief of the Wasco Tribe. He stands erect, an imposing figure in fringed and beaded buckskin and an eagle feather headdress that sweeps to the floor. Dignity adds inches to his 5-foot-6 height. His gray/black hair falls straight to his shoulders. His stern visage seems chiseled from Columbia Gorge basalt. Away from solemn ceremonies, his deeply-lined face lights with a charming smile. His hazel eyes twinkle. As fisherman, tribal councilman and chief, he has spent much of his adult life trying to push the Army into fulfilling its 1939 promise. He hopes now to see it done by 2004—seventy years after his first view of the men at work.

Chief Wallulatam is only one among countless tribal leaders and fishing people from the river and from the Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakama reservations who have spent six decades prodding the government to make good on its word. Fifty years after the promise was made, the Army had supplied five sites totaling forty acres, one-tenth the promised land. Ten years later the Army had added a few more small sites but was still working on its reduced goal of something over three hundred acres. To the Indians, the issue always has been simple: The government destroyed their fishing sites. It owed them replacements. To the government, there was always something else: War. Appropriations. Disputes over locations. Procedures. Changing federal policies. More pressing issues, such as recreational parks.

Through all the years, the Indians had other battles to fight as well, both in court and on the river. Oregon, Washington, and sometimes the federal government tried continuously to restrict Indian fishing. Railroads and other property owners barred them from reaching their treaty-guaranteed fishing grounds. White fishermen, barges and, later, sailboarders, destroyed or tangled their fishing gear. To many Indians, the delay in providing the fishing sites is part of a 150-year effort to get them off the river and leave the salmon to white fishermen. If the government has not broken the 1855 treaties, it has bent them severely. Thousands of Indian people stretching over four generations saw their lives disrupted by the government's failure to keep its promise. So long has the struggle continued that only the elders remember its beginning,

and they only dimly from their childhoods. But they carried on the battle their parents began, and their children and grandchildren persist. This is their story.

When the Indians tell their history, they begin, "From time immemorial . . ." It is a fitting phrase. Archaeologists have found evidence of riverbank settlements along the Columbia River dating back 10,000 years or more. Then, as now, fish were central to the peoples' lives. And the Columbia, that mightiest of Western rivers, was their lifeline. The Indians who live along the river call themselves the "People of the Salmon." Salmon are anadromous fish: that is, they hatch in the upper reaches of streams, swim to the ocean, spend several years there, then swim back to their birthplace to spawn and die.

Abundant and nutritious, salmon provided the Indians with a comfortable livelihood, as food and as a commodity to sell or trade. Although their diet included deer, elk, sometimes bear and other animal meats along with roots and berries, salmon was part of every day's fare—fresh, smoked, dried, or pounded into a mixture with meat and berries called pemmican. Some middle-aged Indians remember when they ate salmon at every meal, and say they never grew tired of it. Even now, the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce people eat nine times as much fish as the national average. More important, salmon are a key element of the native religion, the food given by the Creator to sustain the people. They honor the fish as they take them from the river, and as they consume them. For traditional people, religion and life cannot be separated; religion is the thread that weaves through every activity. The Salmon People regulated their lives to the upstream migration of the various species. Their year began with a "first salmon ceremony" welcoming the fish's return and thanking the Creator for sending him. Salmon were an integral part of every religious ceremony, from announcing a baby's name to bidding the dead farewell. Few lives are regulated by the salmon runs now, but the ceremonies and the salmon remain a vital part of tribal life. First salmon ceremonies still mark the spring chinook's return. Continuing their tradition of hospitality, the Indian people of Celilo still invite the public to share their fish, although sometimes in recent years

the fishermen have been hard pressed to catch enough to go around. Salmon feasts still accompany name-givings, weekly Washat religious services, funerals, and ceremonies marking special events. The fishing people's struggle for the in-lieu sites was, and remains, a battle for their culture and dignity more than a battle for food and livelihood. For them the separation from the activity of fishing, as well as from the fish, was a major disruption of their lives. They have found the indifference of bureaucracy incomprehensible.

Two Wheels North

Bicycling the West Coast in 1909

EVELYN McDANIEL GIBB (2000)

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“A delightful reminder of how simple goals and youthful exuberance can overcome obstacles.

It’s also an intriguing and nostalgic travel guide to what the back roads of this country once offered.” —*The Bloomsbury Review*

The bold adventures of two young men who pedaled, pushed, and walked their bikes a thousand miles north for 54 days, from Santa Rosa, California, to the great 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle. Evelyn Gibb, daughter of one of the cyclists, has drawn on her father’s recollections to tell this incredible story in his voice. Winner of the Pacific Northwest Writers Association Nonfiction Book Award.

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On account of the poor roads we did not reach Salem until afternoon . . . Visited the state capitol . . . rode on to the fair grounds, which are two miles from the city . . . Among the stock exhibits we saw herds of cattle from California.

—From their letter to the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*

The sun barely two hands above the Cascades saw us pedaling through the little town of Jefferson, where a few men hurried along the dusty main street in the direction of the mill, lard buckets swinging at their sides. “Mornin’,” they’d say, but I fancied they had their opinions about two lunks pleasuring around on bicycles instead of working like respectable folks.

Just outside town we hit corduroy. Logs were whole in places, but rotted out in more. We got off and walked, bikes bouncing along as we avoided the rot holes, some big as milk cans. North of a little hamlet called Marion, Ray stopped at a crest and leaned on the handlebars to puzzle out the road ahead. "Looks like planks," he said as I pulled up. Sure enough, the road was thick dust over wide boards fixed close together. It was slow but level; we stayed mounted. "Planks must put a spook in the teams come winter." Ray's words thudded to the pound of his wheels on the boards. I said, "Dust turned to fulsome mud would grease these planks like a griddle. Bring a horse down in a mighty hurry."

Soon our miles were mostly on foot. This low land was given to planked roads, and beneath the dust, too often rotten. After crossing a shallow creek where the bridge was out, we stood aside for a stage coming up fast. The span never broke gait through the water and out. Churning past, animals and wheels shot mud and water all ways. The driver yelled, "Sorry men. Making up time." Hours later, after puffing up a long grade, we stopped at the summit. In front of us, couched in soft, rolling country, lay the city of Salem, its streets heavy with trees.

We rode straight to the Capitol building, which was more than grand. Its copper dome shone like a fresh-minted Lincoln penny high above the Greek-columned entry. Worlds larger than Santa Rosa's courthouse, the big one built after the quake, this was, after all, the capitol building for a state. Folks didn't seem to mind walking around us as we stood there gawking, appreciating their fine capitol.

Ray said, "Salem had itself a big do last February. That's when Oregon was fifty years a state."

"You hear about it at home?"

"In the paper," he said. I imagined he was disappointed I could never talk with him about what he knew from his readings, so I didn't ask more about the big do, though I would have liked to.

By the time we made it out to their fairgrounds it was coming on twilight, too dark to see much. At the office we learned the fair was about to close anyway, but the man said we'd still have time for a quick look at the stock exhibits. In the splendid barns we pushed our wheels along in

the sawdust between row after row of scrubbed, well-conformed cattle. A sign in front of the last barn bragged that inside was an exhibit herd from California, so we had to give a look. The animals favored all the others, far as we could tell, but now we'd have a true morsel for the paper.

Outside was close to dark, but the road let us stay mounted for the four miles to a creek near Brooks where oak trees gave shelter enough to bed down.

I sniffed something bittery as I came awake next morning and yelled, "You smell hop flowers?" Ray squatted by the fire and flipped the sticks that held breakfast. "Likely left over from those dreams you couldn't let loose of, 'bout Rose maybe? And hops." His chin was tacked to his chest to hide his for-sure smile. "Got a few dreams of your own, I wager." It ruffled me he could see into my thoughts, but now he probed at my dreams.

Less than half an hour later saw us pedaling north. Out of Brooks, able to stay mounted on the side verge, I yahooped, "Ex-posit-ion!" Behind me Ray belted, "I'll—meet you—in—Se—attle," coming close to the tune of the song that started out that way.

"Want to take in the dancers at that Oriental Village on the Pay Streak?" A chuckhole put emphasis on my "Pay." I added, "Girls come near to wearing nothing at all, I heard." "Sure," Ray agreed. "But we'll write Santa Rosa about walking along the Gay Way, and the rides on the Tickler or the Joy Wheel or the Vacuum Tube, say how we saw the battle of the *Merrimac* and the *Monitor* and came out holding our ears from the canons and coughing from the smoke." "You're a trusty chum, Ray," I hollered, filled with the knowing of it.

In Hubbard, a few houses and a store, we bought two roast beef sandwiches from the wife of the keeper. She took our twenty cents and moved to the onion barrel to help a little girl pick out two sweet onions. We stood at the counter dividing our remaining money and sniffing the tidy odor of freshly-oiled floor boards. Ray said, "Don't see many of these anymore," and dropped the three dollar gold piece in his purse, plunking after it the two two-bit pieces and two dimes a coin at a time. I stuffed the three silver dollars and the seventy-five cents down my

rucksack, as though I were used to carrying money any which place.

I had suggested the split earlier. "Portland's a big place," I told him. "If we get separated, we should each of us have money." But in a cranny of my mind lived the hope that in Portland, while Ray busied himself oiling the bikes, I might just take a look at what an open town could offer. I saw mention in Eugene City's *Anybody's Magazine* of Portland's more than five hundred saloons, one of them sporting the longest bar in the world, in the shape of a horseshoe. Now with the extra nickel over our halves in my sack, I might just buy myself a drink of their beer at that horseshoe bar and taste what Oregon hops could do.

Back on the wheels, we picked up speed at the edge of town on a road lately graded. Passing a vast hop field, I suffered the stab of my loss of sweet Rose. Truth be known, as more time and distance was put between us, the greater her sweetness became, until Rose now seemed like the girl I had waited for these long years, and I wondered if I might be in love.

At Oregon City we stopped at the town park that appeared to be the grounds of a fine house. A heavy woman with her gray hair pulled back in a tight bun like my Aunt Nora's came up to us and said we looked the age of her grandsons. When we asked about the fine house, she told us a Dr. McLoughlin built it in 1845. "The father of Oregon," she told us. "Used to be the Pacific Coast head of the Hudson's Bay Company." Her bright blue eyes sparkled, and I saw my Aunt Nora. We thanked her and told her we hoped her grandsons came to visit often.

Just north of town we had a choice of roads heading to Portland. The west road crossed a suspension bridge, then appeared to follow the river, now a whopping lot wider and more powerful than when we first met it farther south. Until the town of Oswego we were pleased with our choice. We could stay mounted, and the river was broad enough for interesting traffic: good-sized workboats and barges, a procession of skiffs and dories. But after a rail crossing and bridge, we left the river. In dust nearly to our calves we dismounted. The road took off sharply up a steep, narrow grade through dense timber.

"Think we should roll up? Take the grade tomorrow?" I asked. The sun had slipped behind the hills.

“Same grade’s going to be there in the morning, Vic.”

Through dust puppy-deep, between black walls of trees, we pushed up the steep incline that sharpened near the summit to maybe fifteen percent. Panting and puffing, we plodded between the ruts. Sweat beaded my forehead even in the cool air; our wheels were heavy and balky in the mattress of dust. At last, glad for the crest, we stopped and found our breath.

We’d hoped for our first look at the lay of the big city, but near hills were too much in the way. Still, in the distance, against the green-gray of lowering dusk and above the dark, forested horizon, more than a few buildings picked up the last of the sun’s rays very near the winding glint of a far river. “Portland,” we murmured together.

Linus Pauling

Scientist and Peacemaker

CLIFFORD MEAD & THOMAS

HAGER, EDITORS (2001)

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“A stunning tapestry of Pauling’s life and work . . . [that] brings into focus the life of a scientist passionately dedicated to using the results of his scientific endeavors to bring out the best in the human spirit.” —*Publishers Weekly*

This volume, a unique compilation of Linus Pauling’s words and those of his contemporaries and students, draws a vivid portrait of a remarkable man—scientist, humanist, and activist—highlighting his larger-than-life personality and his singular achievements. The following essay relates how he received a particular epiphany which would cause him to change his working habits for the rest of his life.

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AN EPISODE THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

In 1945 there occurred an episode that changed my life. It consisted of a remark made to me by my wife after I had given a public lecture.

I studied chemical engineering in Oregon Agricultural College, and in 1922 began graduate work, which led to my Ph.D. in chemistry, with minors in physics and mathematics. My life had in fact been changed, very much for the better, when on June 17, 1923, Ava Helen Miller and I were married in Salem, Oregon.

Ava Helen Miller had studied chemistry, and it is clear that she had great interest in the family—her own family, consisting of her mother and her eleven brothers and sisters, several of whom were married, and

her new family, which at first consisted of her and me, and later included our four children. She was interested in the work that I was doing, as an advanced student of chemistry, and then a teacher of chemistry and a scientific researcher in the California Institute of Technology. She strove to take as many burdens as possible from my shoulders, in order that I could devote myself to my scientific and educational work as effectively as possible.

During the Second World War, I continued my teaching, but also was engaged in many investigations of scientific and medical problems relating to the war effort, including work on explosives. I had been asked by Robert Oppenheimer to join him in the work on the atomic bomb at Los Alamos, but had decided not to do that, and instead to continue the work that I was doing in the California Institute of Technology and as a member of war research committees in Washington D.C. In August 1945 atomic bombs were exploded by the United States over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. Each of these bombs, involving only a few pounds of nuclear explosive, had explosive power equal to 15,000 or 20,000 tons of TNT. The nuclear explosive, plutonium or uranium 235, has twenty million times the explosive power of the same weight of TNT or dynamite. These two small bombs destroyed the cities and killed about 250,000 people.

Someone who knew that I was an effective lecturer about chemical subjects invited me to speak at a luncheon before the members of the Rotary Club in Hollywood, to tell them about the nature of this tremendously powerful new explosive, involving fission of the nuclei of the atoms. I did not have any classified information about the atomic bombs, and so I was free to speak. My presentation was essentially a scientific one, about the structure of atomic nuclei and the nature of the process of nuclear fission, and also about the Einstein relation between mass and energy, which explains why the splitting of atomic nuclei can result in the release of a tremendous amount of energy, far, far greater than can be released by any chemical reaction, as in the detonation of TNT. Later I gave a similar talk before another group, in which I discussed not only the nature of nuclear fission but also the change that

had occurred in the nature of war, through the development of atomic bombs. I quoted Albert Einstein, who had said that the existence of these bombs, so powerful that a single bomb, lobbed over by a rocket, could destroy a whole city, required that we give up war as the means for settling disputes between the great nations, and instead develop a system of world law to settle these disputes. I also quoted statements by various politicians and students of international relations. After this lecture, when my wife and I had come home, she made the following statement to me: "I think that you should stop giving lectures about atomic bombs, war, and peace. When you talk about a scientific subject, you speak very effectively and convincingly. It is evident that you are a master of the subject that you are talking about. But when you talk about the nature of war and the need for peace, you are not convincing, because you give the audience the impression that you are not sure about what you are saying and that you are relying on other authorities."

These sentences changed my life. I thought, "What shall I do? I am convinced that scientists should speak to their fellow human beings not only about science, but also about atomic bombs, the nature of war, the need to change international relations, the need to achieve peace in the world. But my wife says that I should not give talks of this sort because I am not able to speak authoritatively. Either I should stop, or I should learn to speak authoritatively."

I had by this time begun to feel so strongly about these matters that I decided that I should devote half my time, over a period that has turned out to be nearly four decades, to learning about international relations, international law, treaties, histories, the peace movement, and other subjects relating to the whole question of how to abolish war from the world and to achieve the goal of a peaceful world, in which the resources of the world are used for the benefit of human beings, and not for preparation for death and destruction.

During the next years I gave hundreds of lectures about nuclear weapons, the need for world peace, and, from 1957 on for several years, the damage to the pool of human germ plasm and to the health of living people by the radioactive fallout from the atmospheric testing of atomic

bombs. My life, ever since that day nearly forty years ago, no longer involved my whole-hearted efforts in teaching science and carrying on scientific research. Instead, half of my energy was devoted to that work, and the other half to working for world peace.

On 10 October 1963 I was notified that I had received the Nobel Peace Prize. Reporters asked me which of the two Nobel prizes I valued the more: the Nobel Peace Prize, or the prize in chemistry, which I had received in 1954. My reply was that the Nobel Prize in Chemistry pleased me immensely, but that it was given to me for enjoying myself—for carrying out researches in chemistry that I enjoyed carrying out. On the other hand, I felt that the Nobel Peace Prize was an indication to me that I had done my duty as a human being—my duty to my fellow human beings.

I think that my wife was pleased that I had taken her remark seriously enough to cause me to decide to devote myself, at least half of my efforts, to world peace and world problems generally. I was not alone in this effort; she was also very active in the peace movement, served as an officer of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Women Strike for Peace, and gave a great many lectures about world peace, during the remainder of the nearly fifty-nine years of our marriage.

Gathering Moss

A Natural and Cultural
History of Mosses

ROBIN WALL KIMMERER (2003)

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“It takes a certain kind of courage and passion to write an entire book on mosses . . . Kimmerer admirably rises to the challenge in her first book, *Gathering Moss*, opening up a world of rich surprises in the process. What we learn about mosses is breathtaking.”—*Orion*

An engaging mix of science and personal reflection, Gathering Moss invites readers to explore and learn from the elegantly simple lives of mosses. Drawing on her Potawatomi heritage and her experiences as a scientist, mother, and teacher, Kimmerer shows how mosses live and how their lives intersect with ours. Winner of the John Burroughs Medal for Natural History Writing.

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THE FOREST GIVES THANKS TO THE MOSSES

From the windswept silence of Marys Peak, you can see the struggle unfolding. The land that stretches to the ocean, sparkling seventy miles distant, is broken into fragments. Patches of red earth, smooth blue green slopes, polygons of bright yellow green and amorphous dark green ribbons sit uneasily side by side. The Oregon Coast Range is a patchwork of clear-cuts and the second and third generations of Douglas-fir coming back with a vengeance. The landscape mosaic also includes a few scattered remnants of the original forest, the old growth that once stretched from the Willamette Valley to the sea. The landscape spread

out before me looks more like ragged scraps than a patterned quilt. It looks like indecision as to what we want our forests to be.

The conifer forests of the Northwest are renowned for their abundance of moisture. The temperate rain forests of western Oregon receive as much as 120 inches of rain a year. The mild rainy winters let trees grow all year round and, with them, their mosses. Every surface in a temperate rain forest is covered with moss. Stumps and logs, the entire forest floor is greened with wildly tangled turfs of *Rhytidiadelphus* and translucent clumps of *Plagiomnium*. The tree trunks are feathered with plumes of *Dendroalsia* like the breast of a great green parrot. Vine maple shrubs arch over under the weight of curtains of *Neckera* and *Isoetecium* two feet long. I can't help it, my heart beats faster when I come into these woods. Perhaps there is some intoxicating element in moss-breathed air, transmuted in its passage through glistening leaves.

Indigenous people of these forests, and all over the world, offer traditional prayers of thanksgiving which acknowledge the roles of fish and trees, sun and rain, in the well-being of the world. Each being with whom our lives are intertwined is named and thanked. When I say my morning thanks, I listen a moment for a reply. I've often wondered if the land any longer has reason to return gratitude toward humans. If forests did offer prayers, I suspect they would send thanks to the mosses.

The beauty of mosses in these forests is much more than visual. They are integral to the function of the forest. Mosses not only flourish in the humidity of a temperate rain forest, they play a vital role in creating it. When rainfall meets a forest canopy, its potential routes to the ground below are many. Very little precipitation actually falls directly to the forest floor. I've stood in a forest during a downpour and been as dry as if I had been holding an umbrella. The raindrops are intercepted by the leaves, where they slide off toward the twigs. At a junction, two drips meet and then two more, forming tiny rivulets at the confluence of branches. Like tributaries of an arboreal river, all flow toward the stream running down the trunk of the tree. Foresters call this water coursing down the tree "stemflow." "Throughfall" is the name for water which drips from branches and leaves.

I like to pull up my hood and stand close to a tree trunk in a rain-storm and watch the progress of the flood. The first droplets sink into the bark like rain into thirsty soil, the corky layers absorbing moisture. Then the gullies of the bark are filled to overflowing, until the water leaves their banks and sheets over the entire surface. Miniature Niagaras form over ledges in the bark, sweeping bits of lichen and helpless mites in the torrent. Passing over twig and branch it picks up sediment along the way. Dust, insect frass, microscopic debris, all are swept along, dissolving in the water so that stemflow is far richer in nutrients than the pure rainwater from which it began. In effect, the rain washes the trees and carries the bathwater straight to the waiting roots. This recycling of nutrients from the rinsed bark to the soil keeps the valuable nutrients in the tree and prevents their loss from the forest floor. The soil gives thanks to the mosses.

Like pillowy sandbags set in the way of a river, the clumps of moss also slow the passage of rain down the trunk of a tree. As water flows over mosses, much of it is absorbed into the tiny capillary spaces of the clump. Water is held in tapered leaf tips, funnelled into tiny drain pipes to the concave basins at the base of every leaf. Even the dead portions of the colony, the old leaves and tangled rhizoids, can trap moisture. The amount of rain held in Oregon mosses has never been measured, but in a mossy cloud forest in Costa Rica the mosses absorbed 50,000 liters of water per hectare of forest in a single rainfall. It's easy to see how flooding follows quickly on the heels of deforestation. Long after the rain has gone the mossy tree trunks remain saturated and slowly release last week's rain. When a shaft of light comes through the canopy and focuses on a clump of moss, you can watch the steam rise. Clouds give thanks to the mosses.

Mist rolls in each evening from the sea. High in the canopy, the mosses are poised to gather it like silver berries. The intricate surface of a moss colony becomes beaded with moisture as hair-like leaf points and delicate branches invite the condensation of fog droplets. In addition, the cell walls of mosses are rich in pectin, the same water-binding compound that thickens strawberries into jam. The pectin enables mosses to

absorb water vapor directly from the atmosphere. Even without rainfall, the canopy mosses collect water and slowly drip it to the ground, keeping the soil moist for the growth of trees, which in turn sustain the mosses.

I like paper. I like it a lot—its weightless strength, its inviting blankness. I like how it waits, the clean white rectangle framed by the smooth oak of my desk. The oak grain ripples and catches the light like no petroleum byproduct ever could. I like the pine paneling in my cabin and the smell of woodsmoke on an autumn night. But despite my love affair with forest products, a log truck going by on the highway makes me sad, especially on a rainy day when clumps of moss still cling to the trunks, watered by the dirty spray of passing semis. Just days ago, when those logs were still trees, these same mosses were full of forest moisture and not the diesel wash thrown up by tires on I-5.

I can't help but poke at my own inconsistency, like a tongue probing at a loose tooth. I surround myself with real forest products, yet rail against the clear-cuts my desires create. In Oregon, clear-cuts are the "working forest," the blue-collar trees that yield my neat stack of paper and the roof of my house. I'm caught in the same conflict that we see on the fragmented landscape. I decided that I needed to confront my ignorance and go visit a clear-cut.

One bright Saturday morning my friend Jeff and I set out to drive to a Coast Range clear-cut. It isn't hard to find one. Uncut buffer strips are required between public thoroughfares and the cuts, protecting the public's view by federal mandate. Loggers complain about the trees left unharvested, but those thin, concealing walls of forest may serve the industry well, creating the roadside illusion of intact forest and stifling public objections. We turn down a new logging road, past the gate and warning signs. Here there is no concealing screen between you and the land. We nearly have to turn back. I rationalize my nausea as vertigo from the precipitous roads, the cold sweat as anxiety about oncoming log trucks. But I knew it was fear and the presence of violence around every turn. And grief, grief that rises up from the stumps and soaks into our skin.

It's a scene we all want to turn away from, but we had better look at the consequences of what we choose. Jeff and I lace up our hiking boots and start off across the slope. I'm looking hard for signs of remnant mosses, signs of incipient recovery. But all I see is a wasteland of stumps and tattered plants frizzled to a rusty brown in the intense glare of the sun. The luxuriant forest floor has been replaced by windrows of chips. The smell of damp earth is replaced by the fragrance of pitch oozing from cut stumps. It is hard to believe that the same amount of good clean rain falls on a clear-cut as on the adjacent patch of old-growth forest. The land is as dry as sawdust. All that water doesn't do much good without a forest to hold it. Streams draining clear-cut watersheds carry much more water than a stream running through a forest. And without the mossy forest to hold it, the water runs brown with soil, silting up salmon streams as it carries the land to the sea. Rivers give thanks to mosses.

This raw cut on the land will be replanted with Douglas-fir seedlings, a high-performance monoculture. But trees alone don't make a forest and many organisms have a tough time ever recolonizing the cut-over land. Mosses and lichens, so vital to forest function, disperse very slowly into a recovering forest. Forest scientists have made efforts at finding management practices which will encourage the return of forest biodiversity. Old logs must be left behind to provide habitat for mycorrhizae and salamanders, dead trees for woodpeckers. In a good-faith effort to speed the regrowth of epiphytes, forest policies now dictate that a few old trees must be left standing as refuges for the mosses that will colonize the new forest. It's a hopeful thought, that the coming monoculture of Doug fir will be seeded with mosses spreading from the few trees left behind. But first the remnant mosses, like desert islands in a sea of stumps, must survive the loss of the forest around them.

Far down the hillside, I see a lone survivor. A ribbon of striped flagging flutters in the hot wind. It's a marker for the logging crew that this individual was to be left standing to meet the obligation of law and to reseed the forest. I skid down the slope toward it, dodging a tangle of cut limbs. The rains have washed a gully down the hillside. I jump over and

dust rises where I land. The survivor stands alone like the last person on earth. There's no joy in being spared the saw when everyone else is gone, riding down the highway to the mills at Roseburg.

I'd expected a pool of shade beneath the survivor, but its branches are so high up that any shadow is thrown way out among the stumps. Looking up into the canopy I can see that whoever marked this tree had chosen well. It is a prime example of the lush tree-top community that is the signature of an old forest. The trunk and branches are laden with the skeletons of mosses. The sun has bleached away their green and the brown mats are peeling away. Withered carcasses of fern rhizomes are exposed beneath the moss. The wind works at the loose edge of an *Antitrichia* mat, rustling. We stand there, wordless.

The poikilohydric nature of mosses allows many species to dry and then recover whenever water is available. But the species here, accustomed to the sweet and steady moisture of the forest, have been pushed beyond their limits of tolerance. Sunbaked and desiccated, they're unlikely to endure until the next forest returns. I'm encouraged that the makers of forest policy gave thought to the mosses and their presence in the future forest. But mosses are intertwined with the fabric of a forest and can't exist alone. If mosses are to take their place in the recovering forest, they must be granted a refuge that will sustain them. If given a voice, I think they would advocate for patches large enough to hold moisture, shady enough to nurture their entire community. What is good for mosses is also good for salamanders, waterbears, and wood thrushes.

There is a positive feedback loop created between mosses and humidity. The more mosses there are, the greater the humidity. More humidity leads inexorably to more mosses. The continual exhalation of mosses gives the temperate rain forest much of its essential character, from bird song to banana slugs. Without a saturated atmosphere, small creatures would dry out too quickly, due to their extravagantly high surface area to volume ratio. As the air dries, so do they. So without the mosses, there would be fewer insects and stepwise up the food chain, a deficit of thrushes.

The insects find shelter in the moss mat, but only rarely are the moss shoots actually eaten. Birds and mammals likewise avoid consuming them, with the exception of some large sporophytes which are high in protein. The almost total lack of herbivory on mosses may be due to the high concentration of phenolic compounds in the leaves, or perhaps their low nutritional value makes it unprofitable to eat them. The toughness of moss cell walls also makes them rather indigestible. Animals that do ingest mosses often pass them out again nearly intact. The indigestible fiber of mosses has been reported from a surprising location—the anal plug of hibernating bears. Apparently, just before entering the winter den, bears may eat a large quantity of moss, which so binds up their digestive system that it blocks defecation through the long winter sleep.

A whole array of insects spend their larval phases inching their way through moss mats, unseen until the moment of metamorphosis. Wiggling out of old skins, they venture out on new wings into the moss-moistened air, free. They feed, they mate, and days later deposit their eggs in a mossy cushion and fly off. To be eaten by a hermit thrush, whose eggs lie cradled in a nest lined with mosses.

Soft and pliable, mosses are woven into birds' nests of many species, from the velvety cup of a winter wren to the hanging basket of a vireo. They find their greatest use in the bottom of the nest, to cushion the fragile eggs and to provide an insulating layer. I once found a hummingbird nest where trailing mosses decorated the rim of the tiny nest like fluttering Tibetan prayer flags. Birds giving thanks for mosses. They aren't the only ones who rely on mosses for nesting material; flying squirrels, voles, chipmunks, and many others line their burrows with bryophytes. Even bears.

The marbled murrelet is a coastal bird which feeds on the wealth of marine life along the Pacific shore. For decades, its numbers have been dwindling and it is now listed as an endangered species. The cause of its decline was unknown. Other coastal birds nest along the shore where food is plentiful, forming rookeries on rocky cliffs and seamounts. But murrelets never joined them. Their nesting sites were thought to be

hidden since none had ever been seen. In fact, murrelets nest at the tops of old trees, far from their coastal feeding grounds. Every day the birds fly as much as fifty miles inland, to the old-growth forests of the Coast Range. Their disappearance was due primarily to the disappearance of the old growth. Researchers found that most murrelet eggs were laid in a nest made of *Antitrichia curtipendula*, a luxuriant golden green moss endemic to the Pacific Northwest. This pair, moss and murrelet, are both reliant on the old growth.

It seems as if the entire forest is stitched together with threads of moss. Sometimes as a subtle background weave and sometimes with a striking ribbon of color, a brilliant fern green. The ferns which decorate the trunks and branches of the old-growth trees are never rooted in bare bark, always in moss. Ferns give thanks for mosses. Licorice fern runs rhizomes beneath the moss, anchored in the accretion of organic soil.

Towering trees and tiny mosses have an enduring relationship that starts at birth. Moss mats often serve as nurseries for infant trees. A pine seed falling to the bare ground might find itself pummeled by heavy raindrops or carried off by a scavenging ant. The emerging rootlet may dry in the sun. But a seed falling on a bed of moss finds itself safely nestled among leafy shoots which can hold water longer than the bare soil and give it a head start on life. The interaction between seed and moss is not universally positive; tree seedlings may be inhibited if the seed is small and the moss is large. But often mosses facilitate the establishment of trees. Mossy logs are often referred to as "nurse logs." The remnants of that nurture can be seen in the straight lines of hemlocks sometimes found in the forest, a legacy of seedlings who shared a beginning on a moist log. Trees give thanks for mosses.

Moisture begets moss and moss begets slugs. The banana slug must be the unofficial mascot of the Pacific Northwest rain forests, gliding over mossy logs and surprising hikers with six inches of dappled yellow mollusk stretched across a trail. The slugs feed on the many inhabitants of a moss turf, and even on the moss itself. A biologist friend of mine, interested in all things small, once scooped up some slug feces while waiting for a bus and brought them home for a look under the

microscope. Sure enough, they were full of tiny moss fragments, and he happily phoned me to report the good news. Slugs eat mosses and disperse them in return. Biologists may make unsuitable dinner conversation, but we are seldom bored.

Banana slugs are most abundant in the morning, when their slime trails still glisten on the logs. They seem to disappear by the time the dew has dried. But where do they go? I discovered their hideaway one afternoon when I was looking at the flora of decaying logs. Peeling away a layer of *Eurhynchium* from a massive log, I exposed what seemed to be a whole dormitory of banana slugs. Lying in individual rooms of spongy wood, each was nestled between the cool moist wood and the blanket of moss. I hastily covered them up, before the sun could catch them sleeping. Slugs give thanks to the mosses.

The logs of the forest floor shelter more than slugs and bugs, playing an integral role in the nutrient cycle of the ecosystem. The fungi responsible for decay reside there and their survival is highly dependent upon constant moisture in the log. The coating of mosses insulates the log from drying, providing an environment where the fungal mycelium can flourish. The thread-like mycelium is the hidden part of the fungus, the working equipment of decomposition. A wide variety of fungi are found only on deep mats of moss. The beautiful mushrooms are but the tip of the iceberg, the showy reproductive phase which sprouts up from logs like a tiny flower garden. Fungi give thanks to the mosses.

A specialized class of fungi, essential to forest function, also resides beneath the moss carpet of the soil. On the surface, scraggly turfs of *Rhytidiadelphus* and mops of *Leucolepis* cover the forest floor. Beneath them in the humus live the mycorrhizae, a group of fungi which live symbiotically with the roots of trees. The term literally means fungus (myco-) root (-rhizae). The trees host these fungi, feeding them the sugars of photosynthesis. In return, the fungi extend their filamentous mycelium out into the soil to scavenge nutrients for the tree. The vigor of many trees is completely dependent on this congenial relationship. It has recently been discovered that the density of mycorrhizae is significantly higher under a layer of mosses. Bare soil is far less hospitable to

this partnership. The association of moss and mycorrhizae may be due to the even moisture and nutrient reservoir beneath the moss carpet.

Studying the interactions that happen belowground, among microscopic beings, is notoriously difficult, but a group of researchers has untangled an intricate three-way connection. Tracing the flow of phosphorous through a forest, they followed its footprints in a convoluted path that started with the rain. Throughfall washed phosphorous from the spruce needles onto the mosses below, where it was stored until mycorrhizal fungi insinuated their filaments into the moss turf. Their thread-like hyphae and extracellular enzymes absorbed phosphorous from the dead tissue of mosses. These very same fungi with hyphae in the moss also had hyphae in the roots of the spruce, forming a bridge between moss and tree. This web of reciprocity ensures that phosphorous is endlessly recycled, nothing wasted.

The patterns of reciprocity by which mosses bind together a forest community offer us a vision of what could be. They take only the little that they need and give back in abundance. Their presence supports the lives of rivers and clouds, trees, birds, algae, and salamanders, while ours puts them at risk. Human-designed systems are a far cry from this ongoing creation of ecosystem health, taking without giving back. Clear-cuts may meet the short-term desires of one species, but at the sacrifice of the equally legitimate needs of mosses and murrelets, salmon and spruce. I hold tight to the vision that someday soon we will find the courage of self-restraint, the humility to live like mosses. On that day, when we rise to give thanks to the forest, we may hear the echo in return, the forest giving thanks to the people.

New Era

Reflections on the
Human and Natural History
of Central Oregon

JAROLD RAMSEY (2003)

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“A wonderful essay collection. Unforgettable characters populate Central Oregon’s reservations and ranches, cities and schoolhouses. Here are rich harvests and severe breakdowns, good stories and bad medicine, memorable adventures and forlorn mishaps. Jarold Ramsey offers a graceful and heartfelt gift to those who love Oregon and the West.” —Craig Lesley

Jarold Ramsey was born in Central Oregon and grew up on his family’s ranch there. He left to attend college, and became an award-winning essayist and poet, as well as a respected authority on American Indian literature. In 2000, he moved back to the family ranch, north of Madras. New Era is an engaging collection of his writings about the Oregon High Desert, its people and the land.

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GROWING UP EAST OF THE CASCADES

East of the Cascades and many long years ago (at the rate the world is changing now), before we had enough water for shade trees and electricity for yard-lights, I could look out of our upstairs bedroom windows at night and count on two hands the other dryland families who lived on Agency Plains with us. Friendly yellow lights, Aladdins and Colemans like ours, beaconing through the living-room windows of the Evicks, the Greens, the Linkses, the Luellings, Joe Burns, the other Ramseys; and if I

looked out after ten o'clock, no house lights were visible under the starry sky. I sometimes wondered, when did the Indians go to bed, when they lived around here?

In the daylight, I was always impressed by the fact that Agency Plains is a kind of mesa, maybe twelve miles long and wide, a flat little world ringed with basalt cliffs and cut off from the general lay of the land on all sides: by the deep canyon of the Deschutes River on the west and north sides, by the dry valley of Paxton and Gateway to the east, and by Willow Creek and the town of Madras on the south. "Agency," because the western rims overlook the Warm Springs Indian Agency across the river, where bands of Wascos, Wishrams, and Teninos were settled by the Indian Treaty of 1855, to be joined later by several bands of Northern Paiutes.

When my grandparents and their kinfolks arrived from Missouri in 1902 to take up their homestead claims on those western rims, a Wasco leader named Jim Jackson crossed the river and climbed up to see what kind of people they were, these newcomers. He returned and reported to his sons, including Charlie (who told me the story as an old man a few years ago), that they seemed to be decent folks, but didn't know much of anything about the country and would probably need a lot of help. So Jim Jackson became a regular visitor and field hand, and his son Charlie and my uncle Stub grew up as agemates and pals, and one of Charlie's sons, Zane, and my cousin Leslie were buddies and rivals in high school, and another of Charlie's boys, Vern, and I were friendly in college together, and now our two families are into the fourth generation of friendship. When Vern got his college degree (the first of his people to do so), he returned to Warm Springs and began to make news as a far-sighted, progressive tribal secretary.

In the local newspaper, *The Madras Pioneer*, our community was celebrated weekly in a column titled "Agency Plains-Mud Springs Items," as reported by a refined old lady who was paid for her news gathering by the inch. Consequently her coverage was wonderfully thorough, right down to the births of puppies and the deaths of old dogs, letters from distant relatives and former neighbors, and weekly trips to town ("So-and-so

motored to town on business on Friday, and took in a movie"). Every week the reporter would call my mother to ask for news, and if there wasn't anything to report from our household, she would invariably ask about the "doings" of other families on the Plains. My mother would always decline this invitation to serve as "an unnamed but reputable source"—a restraint on her part that disappointed not only the columnist but also my older brother and me.

As a matter of fact, gossip ran in a much swifter and freer channel than the newspaper, anyway. All the families on the Plains subscribed to a party-line telephone service, with hand-cranked battery-powered wall telephones, and wire that ran on poles, fence-posts, rooftops, abandoned farm machinery, and, inevitably, the ground. Each family had its own signal, generated by short and long turns of the crank. Ours was a *long* and a *short*. When someone called a number, *everybody's* phone rang, and we assumed that any conversation would begin with at least two or three silent listeners. This deplorable but universal practice was known as "rubbering." Some families seemed to be the subject of rubbering more than others; that was the price they had to pay, we reckoned, for living more colorful and conspicuous lives. Really extreme cases of eavesdropping could result in such a drain on the current as to render the conversation virtually inaudible for all parties, a clear case of sin betraying itself.

A dedicated rubberer could even determine the identity of a caller by the distinctive way he or she rang numbers. And of course any call that went through "Central" in Madras was *ipso facto* worth checking out, because it might be an Emergency, or even Long Distance. There was a special General Emergency number—five *longs*, I believe—which everybody was supposed to answer (like the bell in a New England village), but I don't recall that this extreme measure was ever used, not even on the day World War Two ended. We were a restrained community, and anyway, rubbering made it unnecessary.

When my older brother grew old enough to call up girls, and be called by them, the inherent tensions of such communications were magnified by the likelihood that love's shy intimacies would be shared by an invisible, uninvited, but appreciative audience. So he devised the

following deterrent. He rang a girl's number one night after supper, and after all the intruding receivers had clicked on in his ear, he suavely announced like Don Ameche on the radio, "Good evening, and welcome to the Agency Plains Listening Club! We have an exciting conversation for you tonight . . ." and then he named in welcome four or five of our most notorious rubberers. The effect, he later reported, was like startled frogs jumping back into the pond—click after embarrassed click until the line between him and his girlfriend was free and private.

Our house sat by its lonesome at the head of a canyon leading west into the chasm of the Deschutes River; nowadays Highway 26 from Portland bends due south in front of the place. By local legend it was the site of an Indian camp; Indian friends of my father's like Charlie Jackson and Wesley Smith said so. Whenever we plowed up the garden or the hayfields south and east of the house, jasper and obsidian arrowheads and hand-sized grinding stones would emerge. Although I endorse the federal protection of Indian sites and artifacts, to this day I am unable to walk across a plowed field or even a vacant lot without looking for arrowheads—one of life's great innocent mindless pleasures, as Thoreau knew. The best arrowpoint hunter amongst us was our one-eyed cousin Billy, who could find points virtually at will, by a sixth sense he had. We all had boxes of artifacts, to be hauled out and shown to visitors from the city, and then put back. The real pleasure, as with so many things, was in the finding.

Our house was built in the early homestead years, around 1917 I believe, out of lumber made from trees that had been floated down the Metolius and Deschutes rivers to the mill at Cowles Orchard, a few miles down the canyon from our place. We were the third family (all connected by marriage) to move into it, in 1938, the year after I was born. Like most of the other houses on the Plains, it was tall, gaunt, and paintless. Seen from a distance by an outlander, it must have cried aloud for trees, and paint, and side-rooms to break up its stark lines, but such refinements were years to come. There were various outbuildings close by: a little wash-house, a garage, and a tin-roofed shop, which concealed a two-hole privy on its back side. My parents added a large chicken house, and we

celebrated its fragrant newness in a world of weathered buildings by hosting a memorable dance in it. The next day we laid down straw and installed the chickens: no more dances after that.

North of the house, right on the edge of the canyon, for drainage, were the barn, granaries, and a rickety corral. Generally we kept two cows, one to milk and one to freshen; in winter, whenever it was my turn, I milked by lantern-light morning and night, teetering on a T-shaped stool and feeling heroically abused. What a medley of smells—pure essence of cow, odors of fresh and sour milk, stink of bag-balm, and redeeming it all, the mild summery scent of the hay in the mow, where no one had ever yet broken a neck jumping from the rafters.

It was much the same on every other farm thereabouts. Like most western farm communities, ours was almost tribally homogeneous; there was a Way, and we all lived it. For one thing, these families, now in their third generations, had all arrived here at the same time (my father's next oldest sister, Leda, was the first white child born on the Plains, a major article of Ramsey pride). And many of them came from English and German farm communities in northern Missouri. But why in the world did they come?

A few years ago, I visited that rich hill-and-river country around Moberly, Missouri, and went away more puzzled than ever about the motives of Grandpa Billy Ramsey and his fellow emigrés. There, the soil is black and apparently bottomless; here, it is gray, mineral, parched, and so thin over the rimrocks you'd have to anchor cornstalks with guywires—but we never tried to raise field-corn as a paying crop. Back there, the growing season is both long and intense, almost violent; out here, it is short and uncertain, with frost possible every month, withering winds likely every afternoon, and fifteen inches of moisture constituting a good wet year. Grandpa Billy cut his first crop of seed wheat with a hand-scythe, and Grandma gathered it with a garden rake. What did they think about their great move, as they worked through that pitiful first harvest? Grandpa Billy was already fifty-one years old; Grandma, his second wife, was in her thirties. Well, this was no paradise they'd come to, and taking dominion over all that sagebrush, juniper, and rock under

that relentless sky would be the work of generations. "So be it," I imagine my grandparents and their yeoman neighbors saying, Missouri-style. "If a man can't do the job in ten years, why then let him take thirty, and raise some sons and daughters to help."

Why did they come out to the Oregon desert? For people who seemed so dour and pragmatic to me as a child forty years later, the probable answer is surprisingly romantic. Those Missouri farmers had been hearing for a decade that the great American frontier was closed—no more virgin land—and no doubt they shrugged the news off with apparent indifference, being already landed if not gentry. But when word came back at the turn of the century that the frontier was re-opening a crack, with lands in the central plateaus of Oregon open to quarter-section homestead claims, the unexpected chance to west and pioneer must have been irresistible. They sold out and went, and learned a new life.

No doubt the late reports from the Promised Land were extravagant, after their kind. If this was one of the last regions in western America to be homesteaded, they found out *why* that was so soon enough, in terms of soil and climate. But they had to come, I think. And if I can only speculate as to why they came, I know in the bones of my heart why they stayed, through drought and homesickness and crop failures and the Great Depression. They stayed because the land—so bleak and austere that even the Indians had only lived here seasonally—claimed them body and soul.

The autumn before my father died, I took him and my mother and my own family on a little trip through Vermont and New Hampshire, as far as the White Mountains. Above the lovely old town of Plymouth, surveying the hills in their gold and scarlet and enduring green, and smelling the smoke of autumn in the air, he said, "Well, if I *couldn't* live in central Oregon, I guess this wouldn't be bad." He was being polite, in his gruff way, to our New Hampshire host; but what he meant, having watched the setting sun backtracking each night along the south slopes of Mt. Jefferson every October of his life, was that he knew something better for himself.

Up All Night

MARTHA GIES (2004)

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“A stirring collection of night shift stories . . . this medley of night vignettes offers a rare, intriguing look into the idiosyncratic lives of workers tucked away in the city’s dark and often forgotten corners.” —*Publishers Weekly*

Night owl Martha Gies guides readers on a nocturnal tour of Portland, offering a rare insider’s look at the unseen workers who keep our cities running after dark. One of the great unsung books about Portland.

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NIGHT BUS

At 10:06 on a Tuesday night, Gerhard Blaser leaves 6th and Salmon downtown, northbound, driving the #5 Interstate.

There are fourteen passengers on his bus. A heavy-set man in a suede billed cap carries a *Good News Bible*; a woman with a star tattooed on the back of her neck reads Charles Dickens in Signet Classic paperback, three cellophane-wrapped bouquets of flowers on the seat next to her; and in the seat behind the driver, a girl with multiple gold posts in her ears works the crossword puzzle from a newspaper folded in quarters.

At the Rose Quarter Transit Center, Gary drops one passenger and picks up three more, including a young man wired to a walkman, carrying a Double Gulp. The bus is quiet. People are reading or looking out the windows. Two women are dozing, one with her hand over her eyes.

Through the windows of the bus, the street signs are hard to read in the dark. As he heads northbound on Interstate, Gary calls the stops:

“Thompson.” “Russell.” Though a large man, he has a soft voice. “Kaiser,” he calls, then stops there to pick up three more passengers.

“For me it’s easier to drive at night because there’s less traffic and you’re not dealing with all the screaming kids. Not that I can’t handle that; I can handle that just fine, but I prefer not to.”

Gary can handle most things. He’s been a weight lifter since he was eighteen; now, at forty-two, he’s pink-cheeked, youthful, balding, and weighs 290 pounds.

There are advantages to having his days free, Gary points out, peering intently through gold-rimmed glasses. “I may get my son to school, then go out and play golf. I can do whatever I want because everybody else is working. I wouldn’t take a day job now if they gave it to me.”

Every quarter there’s a new “sign-up,” and Gary gets an opportunity to bid a different route. “All of them are pretty much the same to me,” he says. “I have a preference in line, don’t get me wrong, but what is more important to me is the time frame. If I can get a run that starts at 3:30 and gets off at 12:30, that’s nine hours, but it pays nine and a half.

“Money’s never been a problem. I mean, I don’t have a lot of it, but I have plenty to get by. I’m better off, I would say, than probably 50 to 60 percent of the population of this country.”

Portland’s transit system slows down after midnight. “A couple of buses are coming back to the garage as late as 1:30, quarter to two, but they’re traveling from a long ways out. If they’re coming in from Gresham, they’re driving for twenty or thirty minutes back to the garage. But as far as actually being in service, I think the last bus leaves downtown about 1:30.

“They want the buses off the road when the bars close. It’s one heck of a liability for Tri-Met to have to be on the road while the drunks are getting out. They want us in the yard so we don’t get hurt.”

At Alberta, he drops two passengers. At Killingsworth, the *Good News Bible* man gets off. “Thank you very much,” he says to the driver as he lumbers down the front steps. Three more passengers get on.

What Gary likes least about driving the bus are “the idiots in their cars that don’t know how to drive. What I like best is the people,” he says. “I think you should treat people the way you want to be treated and

better. There's only one reason God put me on this earth, and that was for me to help other people."

At 10:36, Gary arrives at the 7th Street Transit Center in Vancouver, Washington, the north end of his run. He has a twenty-minute break. Tonight, instead of walking, he secures the bus, then goes across the street to Personalities, which is a club for recovering alcoholics. Gary's never had an alcohol problem, but this is the only place open at this time of night. He buys a soft drink and the "bartender" asks him how it's going. On stage, a young woman in jeans and a frayed sweatshirt is at the mike, attempting to sing "Smile." Gary listens politely for a moment while he drinks his soda.

Back across the street, three men are waiting to get on the parked bus: one wears a security officer's uniform, one a suit and tie, and a third reads from a fat textbook titled *Science and Health*. Gary knows two of the men: the security officer just got off shift, and the man in the suit is headed downtown to work the security desk at one of the big office buildings.

"The people I'll pick up now, most of them will be getting off the swing shift." Gary points out that, since there's no bus service late at night, people will drive their own car if graveyard looks as if it might be a short shift. "Day shift and swing shift use Tri-Met a lot more," he says.

Downtown again, Gary has a fifteen-minute layover.

"My natural mother and father are both German," he says. "We started in Worms, on the Rhine River, where Blue Nun wine started out. There's a lot of wine castles in that area. Martin Luther started the Protestant religion in my home town back in the fourteenth century. The last place we were at was in Nürnberg.

"My stepdad was from Oregon City and he was in the military. He adopted me. We came to Portland in May 1976, when I was nineteen years old." Although Gary still uses German with his mother, he speaks English with no accent.

"We used to spend a lot of time out in Sherwood, where my dad's best friend lived. Every weekend we would go out there and play pinochle. They had cows and a tractor that I could drive. Their car was a

'64 Chevy Nova station wagon, and I took it out on their land and drove it through the grass. As long as I didn't go into the creek, they were happy. That's how I learned to drive.

"In 1977 my dad got on at Tri-Met. He had left the [job at a] nursing home to go to Tri-Met, and he told the nursing home about me. So I went to the nursing home in March of '77. I stayed there and worked. The administrator and the owner both loved me. The owner's mom was really, really old and she was about to expire. She wasn't eating anymore. She couldn't have weighed more than seventy pounds. She would get excited when I was in the room, so the nurse asked me, 'Would you mind spending time with her and see if you could get her to eat?' Sure enough, I paid attention to her and she started eating and getting some meat on her bones. At lunch time, as soon as the first tray would come out, I would take it to her and feed her."

Gary left the nursing home job in 1978, then went to Precision Castparts, where he stayed for thirteen years.

"Then I went to another company called Wood Exchange and worked there as a manager, but I wasn't happy. I started thinking about what I really wanted to do. Every job I had, I was always driving as much as I could. Even at Precision, where I was a supervisor, I would drive the forklift. So finally I went and applied at Tri-Met. But they said I couldn't have the job because I needed two years of customer service experience."

He was, however, eligible to drive one of the vans in the Lift Program, which is a shared-ride service for the disabled. "I went there, got my two years, and on October 17 of 1994 I started at Tri-Met.

"I love driving a bus," Gary says. "I wouldn't trade this job for any other job, even if it paid more money. You know how many decisions I make an hour? Estimated? Fifteen hundred! There's a lot going on in a driver's head." He laughs.

Gary's wife works days at Precision Castparts. "Every morning, when she gets up to go to work, I see her for about two minutes. But I talk to her on the phone a couple of times a day. The big night for us is Friday. That's family night."

They are raising a daughter, seventeen, and a son, nine. "I want to stay where I'm at right now, because we don't have to worry about the kids if they get sick. Somebody's always there."

On his last northbound run, he leaves downtown at 11:36 with fifteen passengers, one of them a squalling infant. Two are pale, thin boys with an extra eighteen inches of fabric on the bottom of their jeans. Another man, thin and jaundiced, looks as if he hasn't seen daylight in some years.

At the Rose Quarter, Gary drops one and picks up four. "Russell," he calls softly, a few minutes later. An older woman, well dressed, rings the bell to get off on the dark street under the freeway overpass, and Gary waits until she is safely in her car with the door locked before he pulls away from the curb.

He calls out the names of the major cross streets as he approaches them: "Going . . . Killingsworth . . . Portland . . . Lombard."

In Vancouver there is no layover because the run is over. It's 12:05 in the morning. Gary pulls onto I-5 and heads south toward the Center Garage, where this particular bus will be cleaned and serviced overnight.

As Gary pulls the bus into the yard at SE 17th and Holgate, a man hurries out of the spotter shack, a small structure that looks like a toll booth. He jumps onto the bus, removes the change box, replaces it with an empty box, drops a work order card onto the dashboard, and tells Gary on which of the fifty-one tracks he's supposed to park the bus. Tonight he tries some pleasant conversation, but Gary answers perfunctorily. "I don't like to get into a conversation with him," Gary says, "cause it holds up the other drivers behind me."

At this time of night, most of the drivers are already in. Gary parks the bus, closes all the windows, then goes to administration—called by some the "bull pen"—and punches out. But rather than go home, Gary gets a cup of coffee and hurries over to begin his workout. Each of the three Tri-Met yards has a gym for employees; the largest, with an indoor track, is here at Center above the maintenance shop.

"I change my clothes, put on my sweats, go into that gym, and I'm lifting weights for an hour. I keep my heart rate between 135 and 145,

to make it an aerobic workout. I don't need to look like Charles Atlas because I don't have nobody to impress but God. He's working on me and He's working on everybody else."

Gary's bus, the #5 Interstate, is one of 250 buses that spend the night at Center Street. The entire fleet is spread across the yard, sometimes as many as six deep. There's very little clearance at certain places in the yard, so safety is a big issue.

Tonight the last bus in will be the #14 Hawthorne, which arrives at 2:25 a.m. "Actually," says Geoff Winn, who is servicing supervisor for the yard, "there are only about ninety minutes when all buses are in. Our goal is to get them ready for the a.m. pull-out, which is about 3:45. We put out a clean bus, that has fuel, that's ready for the public.

"It has a great flow to it when it works right," he says, surveying the sea of buses from a high platform above the fuel lanes. "It's basically a bus ballet."

Below, Winn's crew is "shagging" buses around the yard, parking each one where it needs to be for its particular job order, often a regularly scheduled inspection. If there are no additional work order cards on the bus, a shagger drives it through the fuel lanes where, two at a time, the buses get simultaneously fueled with diesel and vacuumed with a two-story vacuum cleaner, called a cyclone. Then a shagger drives the bus through the car wash. Once a week, the entire fleet gets mopped—more often if there is a mess to clean up.

"We've got a geometry to this yard that really confuses new people right off the bat," Winn says. "People can blow circuits trying to learn this. If a spotter doesn't card a bus, or a shagger doesn't remember a card, or if a card gets sucked up by the cyclone. Or if a shagger mis-parks. It's like a great big mobile jigsaw puzzle. There's a lot of ways it can go wrong; the only way it can go right is for everybody to do their job right."

By 2:15 in the morning, Gerhard Blaser has finished his workout, had a shower, and is ready to drive home.

By 2:30 or 3:00, all the buses have been cleaned and fueled, and the yard is finally quiet. The morning sign-out clerk has already walked

through the yard with a map, making sure everything is ready for 3:45, when the a.m. pull-out will begin.

Shortly after three o'clock, the first day-shift driver comes onto the yard. He enters the warm lit administration building, where he picks up the pouch containing the day's transfers, and writes his name on the big sign-in sheet. Then he makes his way down the shadowy alleys between the long ranks of parked buses, in search of the 3301. He inspects the outside of the bus, then the inside, where he logs on electronically and sets his route number on the overhead console. He turns on the ignition and tests the lift apparatus and the brakes. He pulls the first batch of transfers out of his pouch, punches them with today's code, and readies them in the metal holder. He fills the overhead rack with schedules, then pulls the bus forward and waits. Behind him, two more drivers are warming up their buses.

At 3:45 exactly, the #33 McLoughlin purrs through the bus yard gates and onto SE 17th Avenue, headed toward the deep southeast, while somewhere, in morning's darkest corner, Gerhard Blaser lies in bed and dreams.

Now Go Home

Wilderness, Belonging,
and the Crosscut Saw

ANA MARIA SPAGNA (2004)

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“Ana Maria Spagna’s essays are as stubborn, compact, and densely grained as a whitebarked pine at timberline. Each achieves its wholeness honestly, earning every twig and needle. No excess growth, no easy resolutions. The best will firmly root themselves in the literature of the Pacific Northwest.” —John Daniel

The story of how a quintessential California girl ended up earning her living with a crosscut saw. With candor, wit, and hard-earned wisdom, Ana Maria Spagna reflects on the journey that took her from the suburbs of L.A. to a trail crew in the North Cascades, where she falls in love with a place and, unexpectedly, with a woman. Named a Best Book of 2004 by the Seattle Times.

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NOW GO HOME

We loved that song. We learned it in our size 6X bikinis, our bare feet blistering on the concrete deck of Susie Beckwith’s built-in pool: *I wish they all could be . . .* Oh, we were. We were. And how we relished it, diving off the edge, splashing, submerging, and springing high off the very bottom of the deep end. Over and over. Then dancing together in rehearsed bikini formation: *I wish they all could be . . .* Comparing our Coppertone buns as a matter of pride during a childhood in paradise. *California Girls*.

And Susie Beckwith was my very best friend: the tallest, the smartest, and of course, the prettiest. Even though I weighed less: fifty-four

instead of fifty-eight. We weighed ourselves daily, then lay out in the sun with the transistor radio between us. Every twenty minutes, the DJ told us to turn. And we did. We rode two-wheelers out into the field, the open weedy block between our cul de sac and the Catholic school, rode over the hard-packed jumps and trails while the sun set fiery red behind silhouetted palms. We played awash in the last of the light, blond reflecting orange, and dry grass rustling in the wind, crushing like crepe paper under our bike tires. When the streetlights came on, we collapsed in the den at her house or mine. And on TV, the sun set fiery red behind the palms at the Bradys' house too.

Sunset in the Pacific Northwest is far less flamboyant. Either clouds or mountains obscure it. I sit bundled in three muddy shirts and workboots drinking Schmidt's, the animal beer, in the Spar Tree, a backwoods tavern eighty miles northeast of Seattle. The Spar Tree is an anomaly, a bikers' bar in a loggers' town, a place where outsiders can fit in. It was the only place where my trail crew, all men besides me, felt comfortable enough to watch the NBA playoffs, and I came along for the company. But as day seeps into night without drama, the guys start reminiscing about their childhoods, and I avoid the conversation. I glance, by instinct, around the bar and shift uncomfortably on my stool. It is not paranoia. It's just the truth. There are things you don't do in a tavern up here, even the Spar Tree: You don't wear sandals. You don't cheer for the Jazz. You don't admit, ever, that one day not long-enough ago, you climbed in the passenger seat of an Oldsmobile and moved north. From that other state.

Later came the other song. *Plenty of room at the Hotel* . . . Yes, that too. Plenty. Subdivisions sprouting pell-mell; new floor plans leveling jumps and trails; sprinkler systems soaking the hard-pack. As if me and Susie could care. We preferred the beach and pestered our parents to drive us to Laguna, forty-five minutes or three hours from home, depending on traffic.

We loved the lifeguard, Mike Murphy. He told us his name and slipped us his phone number. Oh God, was he cute. We played this game: Jump over the waves. Jump over the waves. We drifted out into

wide spiraling riptides that dragged us out further, past where our parents could see. And we only had one rule: never never never turn back. One day, Mike Murphy had to rescue us three times.

Truth is, I don't give a damn about basketball. I am tired and sore from a day of early-season tree-planting work—stepping and sliding down a steep clear-cut littered with the sooty slash from last fall's burn. The unit has been cut too often, so this time we were told not to plant a new crop for harvest, just some willows to hold the hillside from sliding down into the river below. We spent the day grubbing out narrow trenches, shoving cuttings into the slop, and tromping back to the top for more. I am growing happily inebriated and increasingly distracted. Above the diveted slab of fir that serves as the bar, the Spar Tree sports a red and white banner: "Snohomish County's Number Two Vender of Schmidt's." Number Two? I turn the icy can, a twenty-two ounce, in my palm. When in Rome. And I turn my attention to the growing crowd that seems to have caught the contagious expectancy of the big game. They are well dressed in fresh leather and shiny boots, and fidgety. Mostly, they are numerous. Every few minutes another bike roars into the lot.

"Check her out." Kevin, my normally reserved foreman, has forgotten the mixed company long enough to ogle the girl in a beer commercial.

It's fifty degrees outside, and it's been raining on and off for about six months, and on the big screen a nearly naked blond is playing beach volleyball. The guys, quite apparently, are aroused. Me, I'm trying to be disgusted, but it comes out homesick. This is what gets to me, and it's common enough, I know. You can't go home again. Not you, not me, not anyone. But my betrayal was worse, I convince myself, because it's my own, of course, and because it feels so much like a general conspiracy. The Bradys, the Beach Boys, Mike Murphy, tanned and sculpted to impish extremes, they conspired to make us believe that we Californians were the chosen ones, living at the center of the universe. Only over time, and in varying amounts, did we realize that our home was not paradise and that our loyalty, like that of the too-eager freshmen at a pep rally, was naive and laughable.

“Find the quiet place in your heart where Jesus lives,” whispered our high school religion teacher to the class. A former nun with a cereal-bowl haircut and sensible sandals, she was a caricature so familiar to us, the children of the seventies, that we could not even bear to ridicule her. “Share with Him your innermost feelings,” she said. And we obeyed.

Reagan was president, too. The same dilemma. Aging and so obviously ignorant, he seemed beyond reproach, a too-easy target. We groaned when we watched him, like we groaned when we watched scratchy films in religion class where earnest unshaven types rocked to the sounds of guitar Mass hymns. We were embarrassed, sure, but we were well behaved, and rather than attack the icons we inherited, we immersed ourselves in pop culture, the only security we knew. Boys wore ties to school by choice. Girls wore tartan plaid. Thick soupy air poisoned the palm fronds while everyone listened on Walkmen to super-coiffed British bands like Flock of Seagulls, like Duran Duran. The betrayal dawned on me slowly, amidst the clatter of lockers and the mumbled offers of cocaine: I was done dreamin’ about my home state.

In my deepest heart, where Jesus lived temporarily, I began to long for trees as escape. Not trees themselves—I’d seen too few to know—but the idea of trees, like the idea of the big city to a small-town kid. It was a seventies dream recast, the back-to-nature bit. Too many Mountain Dew commercials for me. Too much John Denver. There was a picture book of the Northwest I read to my goddaughters, the toddlers of close family friends, that showed radiant green rolling hills. That’s where I was headed. I doodled fir trees on my Pee Chee folders and ran cross-country through orange groves, the only trees I could find. I ran slowly, horribly, losing every race.

Susie submerged more easily. She moved lithely through the thick smog, tried out for cheerleading, drove an orange Super Beetle with specialized tags: “SUZYSOJ.” She was elected Miss Moreno Valley, a crime-drenched suburb of our suburb. I went to the contest wearing blocky pumps and pearls, brought flowers even. I might have wished to rebel, to wear a punk-rock T-shirt, maybe, and roll my eyes, had I ever seen anyone do such a thing. Or maybe just to laugh. But these were not options.

Sex was, of course, an option. I had my first orgasm in Moreno Valley, which used to be called Sunnymead, but which me and Susie called Scummymead before she became Queen. They built Scummymead up with model homes like movie sets, like they were supposed to be real. Shoddy, I guess you'd say, but huge. They built a multiplex theater and a Kings Table restaurant beside the interstate. I never understood why people would stop there after racing across the Mohave. Hollywood was just a little further west, then the Pacific. Moreno Valley was nothing, I thought at the time. It was on the way to something, maybe, but it was nothing.

But I'm one to talk. I stopped in Scummymead every afternoon in senior year to romp around with our history teacher, a too-skinny and shameless man fifteen years older than me. The chosen day arrived months before I graduated to his first name. I lay waiting, anxious and bored, on the floor while he adjusted the needle on the turntable and rechecked the drapes. He had bought a 45 for the occasion, an REO Speedwagon single: *I can't fight this feeling*. He lay down beside me and pulled me against him so tightly that the knot of his loosened tie dug into my breastbone. He had, he must have figured, three minutes to get the job done, but I was sturdy and patient, blinded by a single-minded greedy curiosity. We had to restart the music three or four times.

In the sweaty relief that followed, Mr. History pulled off his fogged eyeglasses, and I saw in his eyes the same rich blue of giddy possibility that I sometimes imagined seeing on the smogless horizons of winter. I buried my face snugly into the hollow below his collarbone, and let myself sink into a love more fierce and inevitable, perhaps, than my California dreams had ever been. He held me there for a long time.

"It used to be paradise."

Back at the Spar Tree, Kevin is bemoaning the fact that a new brew pub is going up in Everett, thirty miles to the west. It's a common complaint, how we gotta find a new place. The wait for the ferries across to the Olympic peninsula grows longer every day: forty-five minutes or three hours, depending on traffic. Quik Lubes and coffee carts creep

over farmlands. Housing prices skyrocket. Taxes soar. Kevin is passionate on the subject. He claims he will not continue to live in a county once it has a brew pub.

"Maybe Montana?" someone suggests.

I understand their frustration. It's not that we can't go home again, they say, but that we can run as far as we want and there we are. Every Starbucks the same. Every cereal aisle a Xerox copy. Every tavern complaint exactly like the rest. Even mine.

The circumstance was common enough. Precocious girl. Predatory man. But even now that I am the age that he was then, I cannot so easily un muddy my own story. I was headed to the University of Oregon, only months from leaving, and I was separating myself by measure from loyalties that had the power to paralyze me. I didn't know I was using him. I fell headlong and shifted my passion a half step from a place I'd never seen to a man I'd never know. When, sometime in the middle of summer, Mr. History decided to follow me north, the two passions wed. For long enough.

We drove through endless tall dark firs, tracking the highway signs to the university. Finally having arrived, we pulled up beside a late model Jeep Cherokee with a popular bumper sticker: "Welcome to Oregon: Now Go Home." I laughed. I had dreamed of making the place home for so long. And I knew the rule: never never never turn back. I forced Mr. History to pull over and snap a photo of me beside the Cherokee, while I pretended to be Mary Tyler Moore, spinning with glee and tossing my hat into the air.

Mr. History did not laugh. The rain, the bumper sticker, the whole situation oppressed him, I think. He cowered in the two-bedroom apartment he rented, in part, on advances from my scholarship money, convinced that no one would hire him. He bought pillow-sized bags of bright yellow popcorn and six-packs of Coke and watched Laker games on TV with pathetic longing. I rode my bike to and from school and returned in the rain to nuzzle his stubbled whiskers, to circle the want ads, to burn fish sticks for dinner. I stared, sometimes, from across

the room into the darkened lenses of his new light-sensitive eyeglasses, wishing for a glimpse of blue. Then I'd give up and try to talk him into going out, anywhere. But he would not leave his ratty Goodwill recliner.

Eventually, he turned back. He pocketed a hefty chunk of the scholarship cash and drove south on a gloomy Superbowl Sunday. I watched the Oldsmobile taillights trail off past the Now Go Home Cherokee parked in the same place where it had been when we arrived, parked in the same place always. Then I wandered across campus to leave a post-it note on a professor's desk explaining that I had to go back home to California.

The professor, a no-nonsense woman who had already gone to great lengths to encourage my lackluster studies, caught me sneaking through the dank hallway and dragged me by the arm to her office.

"Four seconds," she announced. She slammed the office door.

I stood confused, gazing out in my sad puppy trance across the main campus square, a deep brooding green. Not radiant at all.

"That's the longest an orgasm can last. Four seconds." She had an unwavering glare. "Get over it," she said.

"How'd you know it was because of . . .?"

"It always is," she said. "Now, get over it."

I wouldn't show my shock. I sank more deeply into the puppy gaze, offended vaguely and embarrassed certainly, playing the innocent Catholic schoolgirl. Outside, the eternal drizzle turned silently and miraculously into something else. It was the first time I'd seen such a thing. Snow on the ground, sure. Snow that you drive to the mountains to see. But never coming down.

"OK," I said. "OK."

She marched out of the office, and I stood alone for a moment watching big feathery flakes crisscross the gray. Then I left and jogged circles through the snowy streets in my too-thin sweatshirt, stumbling home finally to the empty apartment.

I continued to run, growing stronger over months, years, following trails of sawdust among dormant blackberry vines along the Willamette.

Even bought a rainjacket. Still too thin. When I grew tired, I collapsed in the soggy grass to stare up into the sky. Drizzle splattered off my cheeks, soaked through my jacket. On the Walkman, Cat Stevens goaded me on: *If you want to be free, be free.* Oh, I was. I was.

And I learned to lie. In taverns and elsewhere. Where are you from? Just say Eugene. Skip the high-school section on the job application. It's a dead giveaway. Avoid conversations about family vacations or anything further back than, say, three years, then five, then ten. Measure the distance and nurture the disdain.

"Or Idaho? Or maybe northwestern Colorado?" an old-timer, a local postman, leans in closer, to make room for even more bikers, and to help Kevin navigate memory and fantasy in search of a home. I scoot my own stool a few inches down the bar, feeling downright claustrophobic. I have downed too many Schmidts, and I am growing annoyed by this migration angst. If growth is inevitable, then how much, and when to stop, and when to move on? It's all so very mucky. It seems to me that the Northwest today, like the California of my youth, is, well, youthful: indestructible, full of itself, blinded by a greedy curiosity. Four seconds. That's the longest it can last.

"Get over it," I interrupt. It's the first thing I've said all night.

Kevin turns toward me, silent and angry. He knows my secret and he's about to use it like a weapon, I know. Tell me how I've Californicated the place. And I will tell him I didn't Californicate anybody. Maybe myself, I'll say. But no one else. Just as he calculates if and how best to respond to me, the jukebox in the back room blares loudly enough to drown us out.

Goodbye, Norma Jean, though I never knew you at all.

It's not Elton John. That's for sure. Kevin and I turn in unison to see a biker, leather adorned and sentimental, repeating what few lyrics he can recall, mostly the opening line, over and over, into a microphone.

Goodbye, Norma Jean . . .

Karaoke night at the Spar Tree. Later the story will be exaggerated to mythic around-the-campfire proportions. But there's a moment, a

very brief moment, before we succumb to hysterics, when the Spar Tree falls still, and we're all listening.

Uh, Goodbye . . .

The biker's voice might be slurry, and his song cloying, but there's not a person who doesn't know how he feels. For the first time in years, I remember my history teacher with something like affection. Goodbye is, I realize, as poignant as it is common. And even disdain can pass.

These days I drive home more often. The place has changed. Banners drape across the garage doors of Spanish-style homes. Call 525-REPO. Car models hover in the early nineties, not shiny enough.

On my last trip, I piled Mom's collection of pop cans into the back of my pickup; this is our environmental truce, that she'll save the cans if I'll take them down to the Lucky supermarket and stuff them in the Cash for Cans machine that crunches them one at a very slow time. I stood alone in the Lucky parking lot, soaking in the dry heat rising off the pavement like a remedy. Cash for Cans wouldn't take crushed cans, inexplicably wouldn't take others. A scratched bar code? An off-brand? No saying. In the distance the San Bernardino Mountains hid behind the familiar cloak of what Mom insistently calls haze. The machine added two and a half pennies for each can it accepted. Shove and reposition. Sugar flies and god knows what on my hands. Forty minutes later Cash for Cans coughed up a slip for one dollar eighty, redeemable at the checkstand, to cover about half the cost, I figured, of a six-pack of Chihuahua, Mexico's cheapest.

Inside Lucky, no deli, no espresso stand, only the jolt of refrigerated air, the heady familiar smell of cleanser and Pop Tarts.

The store was crowded. Sundresses and flip flops. Cutoff shorts. I was a minority, the white girl, shamefully aware of it after too long in the great white north. At the checkstand, the clerk studied me carefully, making me unreasonably nervous, certain that she was judging my expensive river sandals as if to say: Trader Joe's is across town.

"ID?" she monotoned.

I pulled out my driver's license.

"Washington," she said, changing her tone. "The state? Oh, I've heard it's beautiful. I want to move up there with my six-year-old."

No, no. I wanted to say. Stay put, can't we? California, for all its Scummymeads is as real, as authentic, as any place else.

"It rains a lot," I said.

"Oh," she said, retreating into surly silence.

"But you'd love it." I forced a smile, reined in hard on my Now Go Home attitude. "You ought to go," I said. "You really ought to go."

Late spring morning. The Jazz victorious again. I stand with my burlap sack ready to descend into the clear-cut again. Coming home, I think, is complicated. Susie writes sitcoms now, I hear. She's moved to Hollywood, people say, or to the beach. Mr. History is just that. My goddaughters are in high school, nearly out, not yet considering colleges near or far. They are submergers, homecoming princesses, and I am relieved for them. Wendell Berry, the literary conscience of those of us in river sandals, the last-best-place crowd, says to sink your roots and nurture them. And how we long to . . . if only we could figure out where. Easy enough, perhaps, if your family gives you a headstart, a hearty taproot several generations deep. Harder if your four grandparents left immigrant parents from four different nations in search of paradise—New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, Missouri, California—only to find it a moving target. I'm a California girl, sure, once and forever, but movement is my inheritance. Hope, my birthright. From above me, I can hear the guys debating basketball and the worth of their mutual funds. From below, I hear the river churning tumultuously, brimming with overripe snow, charging westward toward the Puget Sound, and farther along, to the Pacific. A light misty film coats my wool shirt as I work steadily, burning with a sometimes selfish passion for what I do, for where I live, brew pub or none. For now. I reach into my sack for the cuttings lopped from living willows last week, and I bend again, over and over, to tuck new trees-to-be into the muddy earth.

Child of Steens Mountain

EILEEN O'KEEFFE McVICKER
with BARBARA J. SCOT (2008)

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“Reading *Child of Steens Mountain*, I felt as if I was holding a rare gift in my hands—a window into a way of life that although not far in the past has now almost entirely disappeared from our world; and equally, a story of a young girl’s coming of age, and the bonds of family, written simply and beautifully, chiming with all our familiar human concerns. I was completely taken with this book from page one.” —Molly Gloss

For Eileen O’Keeffe McVicker, born in 1927 to an Irish immigrant sheep rancher and a schoolteacher, growing up on a homestead made for “a hard, happy life with layers of riches.” Her memoir of a childhood spent on the southern slope of Steens Mountain offers an appealing, personal account of eastern Oregon history.

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STEENS MOUNTAIN

I was an outdoor child all my life. Our home was in a very remote area: high rugged sagebrush and juniper tree country. We lived at the southern end of Steens Mountain and had a wonderful view of the Pueblo Mountain range. The big mountain had snow on the top all year round in those days and the air made it look blue. In the morning we children would wake early and walk a mile or two up high just to see down in the valley.

There would be deer feeding quietly in the rim of big rocks; lichen in many colors, which we could see if we looked closely; stones to gather

for our pockets; and wildflowers that grew in abundance in the shade of the rimrock where it was cool and moist. My mother knew the names of many of the flowers but when we found a new variety, we named it ourselves. We gathered the flowers in armfuls and when we took them to our mother, she filled the galvanized washtub with water for us to put them in. This was during the Great Depression when nobody had any money.

With a mother who had banished the word can't from our language and a father who recited poetry while herding his sheep, we didn't dare dwell on the negative. For one thing, we just didn't have time. My dad could walk faster than a horse, a well-known fact on Steens Mountain, and my mom firmly believed that you could do anything you set your mind to if you just got busy and did it. Not every day, however, of that time that people call the good old days was good. Certainly not a day when you'd had a run-in with a rabid coyote.

We didn't have modern conveniences like running water at the homestead. My dad's plan to siphon off a stream from a spring just up the hill came to naught when the flow turned out to be seasonal. I'm not exactly sure when that fact became apparent, but the folks were so in love with the view from the site they had chosen for the house that they wouldn't have changed the location anyway, certainly not for a minor inconvenience like carrying water.

A more reliable, year-round spring came out of the mountain about a quarter of a mile from the house. That meant we carried our buckets up and down the hills and around the draws in a regular bucket brigade. We used pails that the lard came in and old cream cans that fit in a little wooden wagon Dad made my brother for Christmas one year. He painted it pale green as that was the only color paint that was available. Mom or Dad would pull the little wagon; sometimes they had to have a push from behind. I always carried two of the buckets. This was our entire water supply until we ran out and it was time to go again.

We made that trip almost every day and for the most part, it was an

uneventful stroll or a family chore we did together, so it didn't seem a chore at all. And it certainly never occurred to us that it was a hardship. No one we knew had running water, not in the little town of Fields, nor did our cousins near Burns who had wells that were closer to their houses. But Dad always came right back from the spring when he went alone so we should have known right away that something was wrong when he took so long. Mom was inside cooking dinner and my little brother Johnny and I were feeding the bummer lambs.

Bummer lambs are lambs that have lost their mothers, or maybe the mother had twins that year and not enough milk to feed them both. We were using a nanny goat that Dad had borrowed because she had so much milk and we had so many lambs. She would let her own kid suck but she didn't like sharing her milk with the lambs. Johnny had to hold her by the chin whiskers so she wouldn't bite the lambs while I held the lambs in place to suck. We had just come in from our chores when Mom asked us if we had seen Dad anywhere as she had dinner ready.

She sent us back outside to look for him, but he wasn't on the path. Suddenly we heard him hollering, and there he was way up on the side of the hill where he had gone to get rocks to throw because he didn't have any other weapon with him. "Get the gun, get the gun!" he was yelling. He still carried the galvanized buckets of water.

Johnny and I knew that this was a bad situation. We started hollering for Mom and she came running out of the house to see what was wrong. At first we didn't see the coyote but then it came into view from behind a big bush of sagebrush, awfully close behind Dad. It was weaving from side to side and its head was swaying. Mom knew at once what was happening because she had seen rabid animals before this one. "You kids get inside and stay there," she said, so we ran into the house and watched from the window. Then Mom tore out with the rifle.

Now Mom could shoot a gun, but she was a long way from the coyote, and maybe she didn't know how many bullets she had or maybe she was afraid she'd miss the coyote—I don't know. This was a shot that had to be straight and true. Johnny went back out on the porch so he could see more and Mom yelled at me to make him go back in the house, so I

did. We'd all heard tales of men who had been bitten by rabid animals. There was no sure cure for rabies then, and even if there had been, the closest hospital to give the series of painful shots was in Winnemucca, Nevada. Without treatment the person would die a horrible death and in the meantime would be dangerous to others. Later I heard a terrible story of people in Oklahoma and Texas that had rabies and were tied to trees until they died. My little sister stood on the sofa and watched from the window.

Dad set down the pails of water and Mom stopped in the path. You could see they were figuring out what to do but they had to figure it out fast. The coyote swayed closer and when it realized that Dad had stopped, it lunged forward. That's when Dad threw a rock that glanced off the coyote's shoulder and bounced down the hill. The coyote was close enough now that even we kids could see the white at its mouth and the frantic, bewildered shake of its head. Momentarily it was completely confused by the rock, and then it whirled and chased it down the hill, biting and biting in its uneven run.

Mom and Dad ran toward each other and Dad grabbed for the gun. We kids were all pressed against the window and none of us said a single word. When the sick animal turned again to find him, Dad shot it between the eyes and it dropped right down on the ground as if grateful to stop. Mom grabbed at Dad, then, and we could see that she was shaking.

After Dad was sure the coyote was dead, they each picked up a pail of water, which had not even spilled, and started back toward the house. After dinner we all went to look at the dead coyote. A rabid coyote has a black tongue, and this coyote had a black tongue, all right; we saw that when the folks dug a hole and buried it.

With Grit and By Grace

Breaking Trails in Politics
and Law, A Memoir

BETTY ROBERTS

with GAIL WELLS (2008)

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“Betty Roberts has captured the true nature of strong women in this compelling personal history . . . [It] will inspire its readers, both women and men, to move forward together to work for equality for all members of society.”

—Sarah Weddington (professor, legislator, and lawyer who at age 26 argued and won the landmark Supreme Court case, *Roe v. Wade*)

With Grit and By Grace follows Betty Roberts’ rise from a Depression-era childhood on the Texas plains to become a teacher, lawyer, state legislator, candidate for governor, and eventually Oregon’s first woman Supreme Court Justice.

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ON BEING A JUSTICE AND DOING JUSTLY

The news of the appointment of the first woman to the Oregon Supreme Court in the 124-year history of the state spread in a hurry. The *Oregon Journal* quoted the governor: “I wanted to appoint a woman, and I have found one who is eminently qualified.” And the *Corvallis Gazette-Times* observed, “Atiyeh’s appointment of Roberts is significant for Oregon women, who until recently had little impact on the court system.”

I had previously worked with all but one of the men I’d be joining on the court. Chief Justice Arno Denecke was regularly at the Legislature to

testify on bills that would affect the judiciary, and he'd been there often in the 1977 session when the bill expanding the Court of Appeals was going through committees on which I served. Berkeley (Bud) Lent had been my long-time legislative colleague. He had been the first to tell me he thought I could beat Senator Tom Mahoney way back in 1968, and he'd been the Democratic caucus candidate for president of the Senate in 1971 when we made our hopeful attempt to end the coalition that had controlled the Senate for so long.

Hans Linde, a former law professor at the University of Oregon, had been my teacher in a course on politics and law when I was working on a master's degree, and I'd known him through Democratic Party activities. Jake Tanzer and J. R. "Doc" Campbell had been my colleagues on the Court of Appeals. The one person I didn't know was Edwin Peterson, but I was told he would be good to work with—a huge understatement, as I would learn early on.

The Friday before the swearing-in on Monday, February 8, 1982, was my fifty-ninth birthday and my last day at the Court of Appeals. On Monday, the family was in my office for pictures before the ceremony. It was a lively scene, with five little grandchildren running around and the office bustling with people. Keith turned to me and said, "This will go well, Queenie. Just relax." As he walked out the door to join the rest of the family he murmured, "Just so you know, I have a little part in the ceremony at the beginning." I looked at him with what he called my "teacher look," and he said, "It's okay—Arno has agreed." And then he was gone.

We judges lined up in the back hallway in order of seniority with the Chief Judge at the head of the line. Then we filed in through the door leading into the courtroom from behind the bench. I was last in line—the junior judge again.

The applause began as soon as Justice Denecke walked through the door and continued until we were all seated and the gavel brought the courtroom to order with a heavy thud. The room was packed with people. They filled all the chairs, stood along the walls, and overflowed out the double doors and covered the staircases as far as I could see. It

was a stunning sight. Then Keith stood up and asked the Chief Justice if he might approach the bench. He walked up and handed me a dozen long-stemmed red roses. Again great applause. I managed to discreetly get them between me and Justice Tongue and lay them carefully on the floor.

Governor Atiyeh read the document just as Governor Straub had done at my swearing-in at the Court of Appeals. This time someone had corrected the statement by removing the word “him” and inserting my name. A minuscule change, but hugely significant nevertheless.

As the governor handed me the document, we shook hands across the bench, and I quietly assured him I appreciated the opportunity he had given me and that I would work very hard to make him proud of the appointment.

Then the magic moment came. Justice Denecke asked me to stand to take the oath of office. I raised my right hand and repeated after him, “I, Betty Roberts, do solemnly swear . . .”

After the final words “. . . so help me God,” the applause was thunderous and sustained. Would it ever stop? I looked at my husband and our combined family of eight children with pride. Gazing at the rows and rows of well-wishers smiling and clapping with all their might, I felt admiration and humility sweep through me for their outpouring of energy and enthusiasm. I vowed I would do good work on the court.

Justice Denecke made no move to intervene with his gavel. I raised my eyes to the beautiful stained-glass dome that dominated the room. It held the Oregon state seal in the center of a large square, framed with mahogany. Four mahogany spokes ran toward each corner of the room, interspersed with a pattern of green and gold stained glass. The dome was still intact after the thunderous applause. Thank goodness. That was a glass ceiling I did not want harmed. The symbolic breaking of a mythical glass ceiling was sufficient for the occasion.

When finally it was my turn to speak, I thanked the governor with heartfelt sincerity. In spite of the politics that went on behind the scenes, the decision was his alone, and I think he finally felt comfortable and proud to name me to the position. My attention then turned to the

man I was replacing. Justice Tongue was a good teacher and lawyer who became a good judge. Then I introduced my family. I couldn't have kept the pride out of my voice even if I'd wanted to. Finally, I recognized the women judges who were present.

After the ceremony and the reception, the court was scheduled to hear arguments. As we gathered in the back hallway, Justice Hans Linde took me aside and told me that one judge had wondered aloud about my taking time to introduce my large family, each by name. "I told him, 'But that was important to her; she *is* a mother, you know.'"

"Thanks, Hans," I said, touched at his remarks. "That's nice." He grinned, and we took our respective places in line. Then this mother marched in last behind six men to take her place as an Oregon Supreme Court Justice.

Pedaling Revolution

How Cyclists Are Changing American Cities

JEFF MAPES (2009)

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“Great ammunition for those of us who would like to see American cities become more bike-friendly.”
—David Byrne, *The New York Times Book Review*

In a world of increasing traffic congestion, a grassroots movement is carving out a niche for bicycles on city streets. An OSU Press bestseller, Pedaling Revolution explores the growing bike culture that is changing the look and feel of cities, suburbs, and small towns across North America.

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PORTLAND BUILT IT AND THEY CAME

For one ridiculous moment, I felt like a teenage girl rummaging through her closet looking for the right top. Should I wear my spandex and enjoy the rush of speed on my feather-light road bike? Or should I go in casual wear on my comfortable hybrid, which I usually ride to work? Nope. I finally settled on a T-shirt, hiking shorts, and my mountain bike. After all, the sucker eats potholes for breakfast and it seemed like the jauntiest way to take a sunny Saturday spin to the Multnomah County Bike Fair.

As I came within a few blocks of Colonel Summers Park in Southeast Portland, the urban ecology started to change. Cyclists, alone and in clumps, approached from all directions. You could see several motorists swivel their heads, suddenly realizing they were going to have to think a bit more while they navigated the narrow streets around the park. I

bounced my bike over the curb and rode over a grass field to a roped-off parking area rapidly filling with bikes of all descriptions. Parents lifted toddlers out of trailers and couples dismounted from tandems. I walked to the fair's entrance, an archway made of old bicycle rims, and strolled along a midway lined with booths. A handful of riders on ludicrously tall bikes made of two or three frames welded together wobbled through the park, like circus clowns on stilts. I stopped to talk to a group of guys who always made me smile every time I saw them: the Belligerantes. They swaggered in their red letterman jackets in good cheer, with beers in hand. This tongue-in-cheek bike gang rides homemade, super-sized versions of that favorite baby boomer bike, the Schwinn Sting-Ray. They were shy about giving their names. One man introduced himself as the "commander." One of his pals rolled his eyes. "Mike always wanted a Sting-Ray when he was a kid and he could never have one," the friend teased. Commander Mike said they like to ride in small-town parades, but that was about the extent of their civic-mindedness. Mostly, he explained, "We're into no helmets and drinking."

Next door, I bought a smoothie. But first I had to ride the stationary bike that powered the blender that made the drink. While I slurped my slush, I watched the bike games on the asphalt playground, lined for the day with bales of hay and temporary metal bleachers. Most amusing was the "eating by bike" competition. Contestants lazily circled the playground while eating noodles, an apple, licorice, a banana, and a paper cup of juice. No putting your foot on the ground allowed. Soon, the arena was a whirling mess of grunge cyclists, splattered food, and a crowd hooting its approval. While the banana peels and other discards were cleaned up, word circulated that the Sprockettes would be up next. "They're like a mini-bike dance team," one awestruck young man told a friend. "I met them at a party last night. They're really cool."

Perhaps it wasn't the slickest entertainment in the world. But you could see it as Portland's answer to the Southern California car cultists of the sixties. In a sense, those "Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake" hot rodders, to borrow a phrase from Tom Wolfe, were experimental artists celebrating a vehicle that was remaking just about all of American life.

Now, Portland's fertile mixture of artists, hipsters, liberal professionals, deep-green ecologists, outdoor recreationists, urban planners, liberal politicians, and various combinations of two or more of the above are creating a new kind of culture surrounding the simple idea of getting around a city by bike. Portland residents use the bike for transportation more than any other large city in America, and the city has gained an international reputation for encouraging bicycling. And you'll be hard-pressed to find any city with as rich and varied a bike culture, from jam-packed cyclocross events at the local raceway to what has become North America's largest annual naked bike ride.

Portland certainly has its oddities. For one thing, most American cities would resist celebrating anything like the Rose City's unofficial logo: "Keep Portland weird." But much of what Portland has done to mainstream bicycling could be easily copied. And unlike Portland's light rail and streetcar systems, which cities around the country are rushing to emulate, a bikeway network is a cheap investment. Even if you throw in the city's trail network and a waterfront esplanade, both of which serve recreation and scenic purposes as much as bike transportation, the cost of building Portland's bike network between 1993 and 2008 clocked in at less than \$100 million. It cost more than that—\$143 million, to be precise—to rebuild just one of the city's freeway interchanges, the Sylvan exit on Highway 26.

Even in Portland, though, bicycling is still very much a subculture. A big majority of trips in the city are by car, and Portland, by population, is only about a third of a much larger metropolitan area dominated by a suburban, auto-oriented lifestyle familiar to most Americans. Many Portlanders share the same disdain for cyclists you'll too often find all over America. But the signs of change here are unmistakable. Ridership over the city's main bridges that are open to cyclists into downtown—one of the best measures of bicycling's popularity in Portland—more than quadrupled in the fifteen years since the city began seriously expanding its bike network in 1993. The U.S. Census' annual American Community Survey found that about 5 percent of the city's commuters traveled by bike in 2007 (and that survey's methodology may actually

underestimate bike usage; the survey asks for the primary mode of transportation commuters used in the last week. So people who ride one or two days a week would not be picked up, nor would people who combine a bike trip with a longer bus, train, or car trip). The Portland city auditor, who also conducts an annual survey, found in 2008 that 8 percent of residents listed the bike as their main means of transportation and another 10 percent said it was a secondary form. In some areas, such as the largely flat, grid-street neighborhoods of the inner east side, more than a quarter of residents say they use their bicycle as a primary or secondary means of transportation. I've noticed that there is literally not a time of day or night, or of any season or in any weather, where I can go for a trip of more than a few blocks without at some point seeing a cyclist. And that includes the last time Portland had a good snowstorm.

In a little more than a decade, Portland tripled the mileage of its bikeways and renovated most of the bridges over the Willamette River—which runs just east of the compact, thriving downtown—to make them safe for cyclists. The city is dotted with directional signs and pavement markings for riders. Downtown signal lights are set at speeds between 12 and 18 mph, slow enough for cyclists to keep up with the flow of traffic, except on the uphill stretches. Some thirty miles of low-traffic bike boulevards provide pleasant cycling through several neighborhoods and an off-street path stretches almost unbroken all the way from the east bank of the Willamette River to Gresham, some twenty miles to the east. TriMet, the region's transit agency, was one of the first in the country to put bike racks on all of its buses. The city launched one of the country's most successful social marketing programs to encourage residents to bike, walk, or take transit instead of driving. On some commercial streets, the city is taking out car parking to put in rows of bike racks—and this is at the request of local store owners who think the bike racks will attract more customers. In early 2008, the League of American Bicyclists designated Portland as only the second platinum city in the country, after Davis.

Just a few weeks later, Portland voters elected Sam Adams—who as a city council member in charge of transportation, was one of the most

aggressively pro-bike officials the city had ever seen—to be mayor. While bicycling wasn't the biggest issue in the race, it was striking that voters didn't seem concerned by criticism that Adams was too apt to favor bicycling and rail transit over the automotive majority. Even Adams' chief opponent, businessman Sho Dozono, said in one televised debate that Portland "ought to be equal" to Amsterdam as a haven for cycling.

Cyclists and other transportation reformers also hold sway on Metro, the elected council in charge of the region's planning. One of the councilors, Rex Burkholder, chairman of a powerful intergovernmental committee that doles out federal transportation money, is a founder of the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, the state's major bike lobby. And the state of Oregon also plays an important role. Long before the "complete streets" movement began to take off nationally, Oregon—in 1971—adopted its own law requiring that at least 1 percent of road money be spent accommodating cyclists and pedestrians. That law continues to be one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of bike activists.

Just as importantly, the region—on the Oregon side of the Columbia River, at least, where the bulk of the population lives—has committed itself to compact development. That has helped make the bicycle a viable transportation tool. The metropolitan region is ringed with an urban growth boundary that limits suburban sprawl, and for years the number of downtown parking spaces was capped to discourage commuters from driving. The area's leaders have largely avoided pushing for massive new highway projects,* to the point that a local Federal Highway Administration official complained in 2007 that Metro's transportation plan failed to "acknowledge that automobiles are the preferred mode of transport by the citizens of Portland."

That's not the first time the region has fought the highway builders. The city tore up a waterfront highway in the 1970s, replacing it

* A big exception is the proposal for a new Interstate 5 bridge over the Columbia River between Portland and Vancouver, Washington. The project, estimated in 2008 to cost \$4.2 billion, has stirred major debate over whether it would ease congestion or encourage more suburban sprawl on the Washington side of the river. Burkholder, who supports the new span, has found himself on the opposite side from many of his old cycling allies. However, all of the proposed bridge plans include state-of-the-art bicycling and pedestrian facilities.

with a park that included a wide bike and pedestrian path. In the same decade, local officials killed a big freeway project that would have cut an eight-lane-wide swath through Southeast Portland. Instead, the region diverted nearly \$500 million in federal highway funds into the start of a new light-rail system and dozens of smaller road projects. TriMet now operates one of the country's largest new commuter rail systems—forty-four miles, with more on their way—and the city is expanding its own streetcar line that promotes dense multi-family housing. Portland has been celebrated in urban planning circles and routinely lands at the top of various rankings of livability, walkability, and environmental sustainability. *Bicycling* magazine has repeatedly rated it the best bicycle city in North America.

Portland's livability has made it one of the most sought-after destinations in the country for college-educated people in their twenties. This "creative class" transformed Portland's art, music, theater, and restaurant scene, and many of these young people, not surprisingly, liked getting around by bike as well. Alone among the major West Coast cities, Portland was a place that offered relatively cheap rent and decent transportation alternatives. I frequently meet people like Trish Kimbell, who moved here in 2006 at the age of twenty-six after touring with a children's theater company for four years. She could live anywhere, she said, "but I wanted to have a simple lifestyle where I could get around without needing a car. The way Portland is organized, you can do that." She mostly bikes the four miles between her apartment and her call-center job downtown, hopping on the bus in bad weather and, on occasion, tagging along with friends who do have cars. Perhaps most importantly, in Portland, she doesn't feel like she's a misfit or in danger because she relies so much on a bike. "I like the fact there is a bike community," she said. "I will be riding to work and there is a caravan of five or six bikes. There's something about strength in numbers."

Afield

Forty Years of Birding
the American West

ALAN CONTRERAS (2009)

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“This is a beautiful and moving piece of writing. Alan Contreras has an extraordinary keen eye for nature in all its subtle detail, and writes about what he has seen and heard and felt with a sure hand.” —John Fitchen

Alan Contreras is author, editor, or co-editor of five OSU Press books, including Birds of Oregon: A General Reference, the definitive source for Oregon ornithology. A chronicle of his bird-watching experiences over four decades, Afield is also a love story that reaffirms the practice of unhurried observation of nature.

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1970: THE GREAT PILGRIMAGE

There is no place like it. The ultimate pilgrimage for Oregon birders and one that is immensely satisfying for anyone interested in the natural world, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge lies at four thousand feet in the high desert at the northern end of the Great Basin. It is shaped like a giant “T,” the Donner and Blitzen River (usually just called the Blitzen) flowing north through the column of the T to join Malheur Lake at the headquarters near the junction. Harney Lake comprises the bulk of the left arm of the T while Malheur Lake forms the right arm.

The Great Basin is sometimes thought of as an empty place, even a sterile place. The desert is neither empty nor sterile, indeed it is full of life adapted to its requirements. A place like Malheur, though, provides

that crucial factor, that astonishing change agent, *water*. In some years there isn't much, in other years there is too much. Sir Stephen Spender described his life in the early twentieth century in an autobiography entitled *World Within World*. That title could as well describe the consequence of water in the desert.

I first saw Malheur in the late summer of 1970. Having survived the experience of working as a field hand around Nyssa, I had used my entire earnings, some three hundred dollars, to buy a camera. A real camera, that is, a Hanimex Praktica, a kind of poor boy's Pentax that would take telephoto lenses if I could afford any. I could not, though a 2x doubler gave me some nominal telephotic capacity. Nonetheless, it was a huge step up from my Kodak Instamatic and I wanted to take bird pictures with it.

There was just one problem: the birds around Nyssa in August are not easy to find or photograph if you are fourteen and have a 100-mm lens. My teacher Irl Nolen had taken me to see stilts and avocets at Fort Boise in southwestern Idaho, but those birds were a bit skittish and I really did want to see Malheur. I needed to find some big obvious birds that would hold still. Malheur has lots of small birds that are hard to see, but it also has some big obvious birds that are, if not quite fixed in place, at least reasonably languid and willing to remain close enough to the car to allow themselves to be photographed. Thus we went off with the Linegar family to visit fabled Malheur.

Fabled Malheur in August of 1970 was characterized mainly by tall grass behind which even large languid birds could hide, and a disheartening number of mosquitoes, all of which behaved as though they had not eaten for weeks. Nonetheless we visited the northern part of the refuge and such delights as American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, and Sandhill Cranes were photographed after a fashion, as were Black Terns and Willets standing on posts.

In that innocent time, birders (the term was then fairly new) had not yet begun systematically milking the groves of trees at the refuge for eastern vagrants. This tactic became standard procedure by the late 1970s and today it seems that each tree and shrub in the Sacred Grove

at headquarters has its own reputation as ancient as Middle Earth, and an accompanying proper name, e.g. The Morning Trees, The Spruce, The Hedge.

After we moved back to the Willamette Valley late in August 1970 and settled in Cottage Grove for two years, I began going to Malheur on a regular basis. These early trips were memorable less for rafts of rarities than for the companionship of other teenagers who were to become lifelong friends. These were mostly friends from school who more or less became birders over the years.

Sayre Greenfield became an English professor but remains a birder, Mike Patterson became a biology teacher and as of this writing is regional editor for Christmas Bird Counts for the Northwest, Mark Williams is a lawyer who does not bird anymore but delights (preens would not be an overstatement) in surprising co-workers with the occasional flyby identification, Carol Cunningham got her PhD in American history and works as a computer system manager. Dinah Ward has her own design firm. Diane Morey is raising a family in Arizona. These, along with my brother John, were the core group of those trips in the early 1970s. That I am still regularly in touch with Sayre, Mike, Mark, and Carol suggests how some of these shared experiences served to link us in a positive way.

A typical trip involved my mother Lona arranging to take off a day or two from her teaching job so that she could stuff a bunch of us into the station wagon and zoom over to the refuge. She earned a couple of nicknames during these years. One was "Wol" after the larger owl in Farley Mowat's book *Owls in the Family*, which most of us had read. During those years she wore large round glasses that imparted a certain strigid look, though she could spell better than the most famous Wol, from A.A. Milne's stories. Her other name was "Mario" after race driver Mario Andretti, since she loved to drive fast, which came in handy on the long run across the desert to Malheur.

Since most of us sang in school choirs during those years, we often sang songs during the boring stretches of highway, one of which was the infinitely extendable "Funeral Train." My mother no doubt wondered why we on a couple of occasions intentionally stretched the prolonged

sad notes into a sound that resembled nothing so much as a cow giving vent to her deepest displeasure.

In some years we went with Mike's father Pat Patterson, who, it is said, appeared as a child in *Gone with the Wind*. It hardly seemed possible, since he was a towering figure of rough-hewn authority whose even larger station wagon was well suited for a collection of noisy young birders. His experiences as a Boy Scout leader also served him well in keeping a herd of sixteen-year-old ne'er-do-wells in line. The joy of these trips was little marred by "adult problems" such as flat tires or the terminal clank as the transmission arbitrarily terminated its heretofore blissful coitus with the engine and gearcase of Pat's wagon and fell to the ground. We did not have to solve those problems, we could just go birding or climb the butte and hold hands in the gathering dusk while nighthawks dove overhead calling "beernt!" Indeed, the phrase "looking for nighthawks" came to mean going off to hold hands in the dark.

I can recall no joy in birding greater than being at Malheur in those early years with my friends, not having to worry about anything more complicated than getting back to the dorm in time for dinner, or how to identify a Sage Thrasher. Some combination of teenage metabolism, relative freedom from care, the intrinsic glory of Malheur itself, and the nature of friendship combined to crystallize those years forever. My poem "Malheur at Fourteen" ends with the following stanza:

*So I brought you today
to show you the place
that he thought was closest to heaven
in the hope that someday
you'll think of me here
by the waters below the great mountain.*

It is hard to describe the effect of Malheur upon young people, except that it is glorious, and to be encouraged. Go there.

To the Woods

Sinking Roots, Living Lightly,
and Finding True Home

EVELYN SEARLE HESS (2010)

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“Evelyn Hess’s enterprise, it seems to me, is one of Thoreauvian simplicity. She and her husband, at considerable age, with humility and pluck, lived many years in a way that shows us possibilities we haven’t imagined for ourselves.” —John Daniel

In her late fifties, Evelyn Hess walked away from the world of modern conveniences to build a new life. Since 1992, she and her husband David have camped on their twenty-one wooded acres in the Coast Range foothills outside of Eugene.

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I stumble groggily to the propane heater, thatch box in hand, twist open the tank valve, and depress the red button to the count of thirty. I scrape a match across the box and poke its flame into the small hole leading to the gas jet. Phoom! Push up the lever to adjust the roar and carefully carry the burning stick five paces to light the gas for the lantern and the Coleman stove. I shove the tea kettle onto the burner and blow out the remaining flame before it reaches my finger. Yay! I made it. All three on one match!

Generally David has the chill off the house before I’m up, but today he’s in town for a breakfast meeting, giving me the opportunity to test my match-saving prowess. I squeeze out yesterday’s green-tea bag, rubbing its soothing coolness on my bleary eyes before popping a fresh bag into my cup. Often I linger over the newspaper with my morning cup of

tea but this morning I'm in a hurry. I want to settle into a favorite spot in the woods while the sun is still low in the eastern sky.

I sit halfway up the steep northeast slope of our woods, where Douglas firs with moss-draped limbs tower above me. Directly in front of me is a three-foot-diameter tree—perhaps a hundred years old—with a double top. Stubbed off long ago by lightning, maybe. I suppose that double top is what spared it from the chainsaw. Oceanspray and filbert make a lacy layer beneath the firs, and under that, scattered snowberry, herbaceous plants and moss. Even this deep in the woods the morning sun spins the moss to gold on the bottoms of dark-shrouded branches.

Thin, silvery silk lines shimmer between the trees, seeming suspended in space, their connections to the trees indiscernible. One spider's web looks like an old 45 record: an outer circle with threads so closely spaced it seems solid, and an open inner circle whose diameter is about the width of the outer band. Someone is home in the spindle-hole, but she's up too high for me to see well. Sunshine hits the top surfaces of deciduous leaves, turning on flat spots of light in the dark forest. Fir trunks appear extra dark in contrast to the sun-gold needles, moss, and leaves around them. Nearby a winter wren trills his long tinkling song.

Recently a friend asked if I believe in heaven. Sitting here, I wonder how I could not. I'm there!

It's still hard to believe this woods is ours—or at least ours to be a part of as long as we're around. In 1986 my husband, David, and I bought the land to accommodate a plant nursery, which was to be our retirement project. David had an active architecture practice and I was at the university, running the biology research and teaching greenhouses and teaching an occasional class. But we were looking ahead, and clearly there wasn't space on our city lot for a nursery.

Twenty-one acres we found. Twenty-one wooded acres wrapping around the north, east, and south sides of a hill, giving us elevations from six hundred to nine hundred feet. With all these different exposures, I knew I would be able to grow any plant I might ever want to try. The

north side is shady and cool, rising abruptly, and carpeted with sword ferns that grow through several kinds of moss. Douglas fir trunks, fuzzy with moss and painted with splotches of silvery lichens, emerge from the fern cover, but to see their tops you have to tip your head till you crink your neck. Here and there at their feet are the decaying remains of their ancestors' stumps.

Between the sword ferns and the fifty-year-old firs are branches of filbert and osoberry, long known as Indian plum. These two are the trumpets to spring. They awaken in February when most of their companions are still asleep. The filbert's male flowers, rows of spun-honey exclamation points, become glowing chains with the sun behind them. If you look closely, you're rewarded with startling tiny, dark red, female flowers, gleaming like embers. Osoberry, the second player in the pre-spring fanfare, is the first forest shrub to leaf out. The new leaves perch along the stems like apple-green butterflies, wings held vertically over their backs. The equally early flowers are long clusters of pale yellow to greenish-white bells.

David's first change to the property was to reconfigure the driveway. At our initial visit, it shot straight up the middle of the northern meadow, continuing its unswerving path along the hill's east face until it turned abruptly at the south side of the hill, perching on a narrow terrace on the precipitous south slope. David immediately saw that if we entered instead at the base of the hill another fifty yards up the main road, the drive could follow the hill's form, providing a soft, welcoming entrance molded by the topography and leaving the meadow in one piece.

Walking the new driveway from the entrance off the main road, you have the steep north-facing slope to the right and a fairly level woodland to the left, mostly half-century-old firs mixed with filbert and a few Oregon white oaks. This flatter area opens to the meadow where we have sited our small nursery. The drive then curves to the base of the hill's east slope. Here the east and south sun warms the nursery, while the hill protects the plants from too much late afternoon heat.

As the drive begins to bend toward the south side of the hill, the flora changes. Oceanspray, red-flowering currant, blue elderberry, and

grand fir join a quarter-acre patch of oaks as the land plunges sharply downward. Leathery lung-lichen falls from the oaks in the winter and garlands of silvery-gray lichen festoon the trees year-round.

From there you turn on to the south slope and—pow! You blast into a different country—bright and hot. The hillside was clear-cut a few years before we bought the property and replanted—much too densely—in Douglas firs intended to be Christmas trees, now thirty-foot-tall poles with feathery hats. The hill drops away to oaks, sarvisberry, cascara, and the ubiquitous Douglas fir that this property, like most of western Oregon, grows so well.

I'm sure I set my mouth and clamped my jaw when I wrote "sarvisberry." That's the name I always heard when I was growing up. In later years when I began reading "serviceberry" I felt defensive of the old familiar name and of my attachment to it. To me it implied that "sarvis" was a mispronunciation or corruption of "service." But my mother used words with care. She never used slang; she had impeccable grammar and diction. If she said *sarvisberry*, that's what it was. Or so I thought. But in fact, the name was what she in turn had grown up with, and therein lies the problem with common names.

The common names of plants change from place to place and from one decade to another. Some arouse your curiosity (Johnny-jump-up, Johnny-kiss-me-under-the-garden-gate,—kind of makes you wonder about Johnny, doesn't it?—love-in-the-mist, love-lies-bleeding, mourning widow—possibly it was her partner bleeding in the mist?) but tell little about the plant being named. Sometimes two different plants have the same common name and a single plant with several common names is not unusual. So I feel justified in sticking with sarvisberry, or if I want to ensure understanding—at least with folks speaking Botanese—the universally accepted *Amelanchier*.

Some writers proclaim naming itself to be a mistake. The argument, if I understand it, is that to name, and therefore to classify or categorize, claims ownership, and takes away from the essence of the item named, diminishing the mystery and wonder. I can't buy it. Would I love my children more, appreciate their uniqueness more, if they were child one

and child two rather than Erika and Jeffrey? Or girl child and boy child? Or simply “human”? I will continue to learn the names of plants and animals and any other elements of this earth that I can cram into my brain. I feel more related to what I can call by name.

Back at the sunny hillside where sarvisberry grows along with cascara, oak, and Douglas fir, there are places where the driveway becomes little more than a narrow ledge cut into the slope. But at the full south exposure just above the drive, where we plan eventually to build our house, lies a terrace, the noon sun inviting us to operate on solar energy. Farther along and below the road, rough-skinned newts and water bugs swim in a year-round pond fed by the steep hills above.

It doesn't appear that anyone has ever built a house on this property. Philesta and David Boone Zumwalt arrived in Oregon from Illinois, in the fall of 1853. They filed for and received a 319-acre donation land claim, and the next year built a house and barn that are now on the Historic Registry and sit near the north edge of our hill, off Territorial Road. The Zumwalts had thirteen children but apparently built no other houses on the land. Louis Schaffer, a German immigrant, and his wife Louise came to Lorane around 1905. They bought six hundred acres east and south of us, and later added the Zumwalt place. Their son Charles logged most of the original Zumwalt claim, and then sold nearly three hundred acres to a developer, who subdivided it into approximately twenty-acre lots, one of which is our little piece of woods.

In the early twentieth century, hundreds of acres in the Lorane area and Siuslaw valley were planted to apple and pear orchards, primarily as a real estate venture. The largest orchard was about eighteen hundred acres, to be sold in small parcels to investors in Michigan and Wisconsin. The orchards are long gone but I like to think that the three old apple trees on our property are their progeny, probably planted by a bird or roaming bear.

I wonder sometimes if local tribes might have built one of their big plank and bark winter homes on this piece of the hill. I think it doubtful, though, because from what I read they tended to stay closer to the rivers,

using higher land for hunting and camping rather than for building dwellings. This would have been a good spot for collecting acorns even if they didn't choose to build here.

On a colored map of the United States, most of the western portion is rendered in shades of brown—high deserts and mountains. A thin green fringe lies along the Pacific Coast, and narrow fingers of green reach into the interior valleys of Washington, Oregon, and California. Oregon has the reputation for being a soggy state, but in fact it rains very little outside of those small fringes and fingers, and not even there, to speak of, in the summer. Our property curves around a toe of one of the Coast Range foothills on the west edge of the southern end of the green Willamette Valley. A dead-end road rises through agricultural land until it turns at the corner of our property to parallel the spine of the hill with open land to the north and wooded properties to the south. Our land, like other properties on our side of the road, is long and narrow, the southern portion draping sharply over the south side of the slope.

Rights to a two-family water system came along with the property, helping our decision to buy the land for our nursery, and perhaps someday for a house site. Good wells are not easy to come by around here, with people reporting water containing arsenic or salt as well as simply low flow. Our hill has an underlying basaltic ridge that, in many places, makes access to the water table difficult or impossible. Our well was on a third lot farther up the hill, with pipes to the pumphouse on our neighbors' land, and from there to the borderline between their property and ours. We were glad this was legally sorted out before we bought our land, and relieved to have rights to a good well, even if we did have to share it.

The idea of sharing a well reminded me, with some anxiety, of the history of water wars between western farmers and ranchers when the area was being settled by the early pioneers. "Whiskey is for drinking," they used to say, "and water is for fighting." Water is an essential and precious resource, and disputes are understandable. Is the other guy using

more than his or her share? Is he compromising the quality of my water?

Besides the fact of sharing the water, I am very aware of our droughty summers, and I don't want to waste a drop. I've been teased about that, in this land of abundant winter rain. When I was a child, if anyone left food on her plate, some adult was sure to scold, "Think of the starving Armenians!" I could never understand how eating all my food was going to help the Armenians. It seemed as if it would be more effective for us to eat less, and ship off the extra. But it isn't just the "Armenians" who will be affected by profligate use of water: local wells go dry as well. We try to remember that there is one worldwide supply of water through space and time—the same water that refreshed the dinosaurs waters my perennials—so David and I are committed to frugality.

We decided to dig a pond to irrigate our plants through water-efficient drip tubes. Fortunately, my nephew Jim was working on his master's degree in agricultural engineering and needed a project. He and a friend walked and surveyed the property and he found the perfect contours in a relatively level boomerang shape near the bottom of the south slope. He designed terraces above the road and determined how to direct the run-off from the hillside to fill the pond. The pond was to be eight feet deep, and approximately two hundred feet long. It would hold three and a half acre-feet of water.

So then we began the search for excavators. We got a number of estimates—and were totally devastated. Their figures were more than double our budget. But just when we were about to give up, we talked to a contractor whose estimate was close to what we had hoped. It was his uncle who had built our new entrance drive and we had liked both him and his work. The contractor's price was right, so based on that and liking his uncle, we hired him.

We were living in Eugene, some seventeen miles away, so we missed out on a lot of the work. But anytime we could schedule the commute around our jobs and other activities, we would come watch the backhoe digging, dump trucks hauling—for hours and days and weeks. I'm a bit of a fanatic about soil. With run-off from agriculture and logging, along with natural events, the world is losing soil at twice the rate it is being

created. I certainly wasn't going to let the contractors bury or haul away any of the good topsoil they removed from the pond site, so I asked them to spread it where we would be building our display garden, and over the meadow. They used the remaining excavated material to level a large area below the pond, reaching to the property edge—an ideal location for a future greenhouse, I thought.

The hole for the pond got deeper and deeper, the high cut bank to the north disconcertingly steep. In landscape architecture classes I had learned the importance of honoring the “angle of repose”—the maximum slope taken by a cone of sand without losing grains down the side—to ensure stability of banks. This was clearly steeper than the angle of repose.

And then we discovered why the contractor's estimate had been affordable: it was his first pond, and he really didn't know what the job was going to entail. Before the project's half-way point, he had run through our budget. Our options were to pay him off and end up with a half-finished hole, or to find some more money. So we sold our remaining inherited stock certificates, and he kept digging.

It did give us pause: our entire savings had been wiped out for a huge dry hole. I have a picture of our then two-year-old grandson playing in a pile of dirt in the bottom of the hole, so I guess it had some benefit. But we trusted that winter would bring rain and the pond would fill, and we couldn't water the plants or quench animals' thirst with cash. I appreciated that money was the fuel powering the construction of the pond, but funds themselves had never been my security or my goal. My mother used to quote some lines by James Terry White: “If thou of fortune be bereft / and in thy store there be but left / two loaves—sell one, and with the dole / buy hyacinths to feed thy soul.” My pockets were empty but I looked at that big dry hole and I could almost smell the hyacinths.

Our jobs in town left us little time for the nursery. Still, we tried to come out most weekends, hauling tools, fertilizer, and water. As soon as we could manage the time, we strung about three hundred feet of poly pipe

down the hill from the boundary with our neighbor so we could access our mutual water supply. And we invested in a cheap used single-wide trailer to store supplies. At last we would waste less time loading and unloading, or worse yet, arriving to find we'd left something important at home.

Meanwhile, as days shortened and summer dwindled, the pond excavation presented an opportunity to learn a bit of local geomorphology. The soil substrate here is very old, dating from the middle Eocene (about fifty million years ago.) The soils are said to house fossil remains from when they were under the oceans (although I haven't found any) and include sandy or silty shales and mudstones. The contractor who dug the pond pulled a huge boulder from the hole and left it on the ground near a solitary Douglas fir. The boulder was about four feet in diameter and roughly spherical. On our various explorations of the land, we hadn't come across any rocks, so were pleased we actually had some. But we didn't have this one for long. Mudstone weathers into fine chips and flakes; and out in the air and the rain, our boulder disintegrated almost as we watched.

As it turned out, other such boulders were included in the fill that made the terrace where I had hoped to build a greenhouse. So it shouldn't have been a surprise to see the fill-terrace slump and slide and collapse, finally reaching an irregular grade a good four feet below where it started. Fortunately, even in our impetuous enthusiasm, we hadn't actually built the greenhouse yet.

But the rains that buckled the terrace filled the pond. What a thrill! Water ran down the hill, gurgled in the ditches, coursed through culverts and over more hillsides, where it ran into the pond, just as Jim had planned and we had dreamed.

Our pond would be just the beginning of great things to come. Such plans we had! Such excitement! We exemplified what David called, when contemplating a new building project, the "peeing all over the floor" stage.

Before the pond emptied our bank account we had bought a small Kubota tractor, so we could mow and till when necessary. But with all

that new pond soil, it often wasn't necessary. The fall after digging the pond we bought scads of bulbs—narcissus, hyacinths, and more than three hundred tulips—which we planted at the entrance and in great drifts at the woods' edges. We brought in compost of chopped oak leaves and old sawdust, spread it over the topsoil from the pond, and planted twelve hundred blueberries of six varieties, to bear from early in the season nearly to fall. To the west of the blueberries we plotted beds to field-grow nursery plants, which would demand far less water than would plants in pots. We decided to emphasize Mediterranean plants for their drought tolerance, and planted beds of lavender, rosemary, and various sages. And we started working on the display garden. Inspired by the work of Britain's famous landscape designer Gertrude Jekyll, we decided to build a double border, each bed about ten feet deep and more than thirty feet long, which would make a rainbow of plants. It began with white flowers and gray and silver foliage to rest the eyes and prepare them for the sunset colors to follow. Then came reds, liberally laced with purple to keep the reds from fighting, proceeding to oranges and yellows. Next the colors cooled to blue (with a bit of white added to make the blues bluer), purple, and pink. We were very proud of our accomplishment.

Humus—the part of organic matter that is slowest to break down and that stores nutrients, as it aerates and holds moisture in the soil—is from the same word root as *humility*, and is as essential in the garden as humility is in the gardener, or in anyone else who tinkers with the ecosystem. It's such an illusion to think we can control anything in nature. I am regularly shown how powerless I am. I can't make it rain when my plants need a drink or keep it from raining when I need to weed. I can't dissuade the frosts from nipping new growth or the sun from sizzling it. And I definitely can't convince slugs, voles, and deer not to dine on something I consider precious.

As anyone who has lived in deer country knows, tulips are deer candy. Three hundred-plus tulips gobbled up in one quick lunch! Most of the rest of the bulbs added interesting flavors to the menu or were

quickly dispatched by the squirrels and chipmunks. Narcissus—the daffodil clan—have bulbs that are toxic to many creatures so are considered deer-proof. Our deer agreed about the leaves, but found the flowers quite tasty. I wonder how many people grow daffodils just for the leaves.

I suppose I should have realized that front-end loaders, backhoes, and dump trucks are not exactly precision instruments when I asked to have the topsoil spread in the meadow and the subsoil used as fill beyond the pond, but I was completely unprepared for the results. The precious topsoil I considered so important to save from the pond excavation got lost in the excavated subsoil—a sticky clay all of which buried the good native topsoil on the garden site. Along with the clay came yards and yards (perhaps miles and miles) of chopped Canada thistle root to which I was—for a while—completely oblivious.

A season or two after our big planting binge, thousands of Canada thistles came up where no thistle had been before, throughout the blueberries and the display bed. Ideally we'd have been patient and waited at least a season to plant, but in our fervor, we had had to do it *now*. Or, once we saw the invaders, if we'd been a little bit prudent, we'd have removed all of our fall plantings and gone after the thistle. But we weren't and we didn't.

More than a decade later we are still fighting thistles whose roots are under, around, and in whatever we try to grow. An ag inspector once told me that he had seen thistle rhizomes more than twenty feet long in roadway cut banks. Thistles bud vertically off a long underground rhizome and if you pull one up, you are just breaking it off, not getting rid of it. If you rototill an area with thistles present (which we have done) you chop the roots and rhizomes into little propagules. One becomes one hundred.

The moral to this sad story is, don't ever spread something on the soil if you don't know what it is! Intellectually, I knew that. I've heard countless horror stories covering hundreds of years to the present. I have read how a farmer in Kent, England, plowed into his fields straw bedding that had been used by injured soldiers returning from the Napoleonic wars. Mixed with the straw was thanet cress, a terribly

invasive weed that then spread throughout England, where it remains firmly established.

And the story keeps getting re-told. In the early 2000s in the Pacific Northwest, an organic farmer spread manure-laced straw from his stables onto his fields, as had always been his practice, only to discover that the straw, which he had purchased, had been sprayed with triclopyr, a herbicide that is extremely slow to break down. What seemed to be safe and effective husbandry killed acres of tomato plants.

But herbicide isn't necessary to kill plants. Our next painful discovery was that although our long dry summers do put us in the "Mediterranean climate" category, a typically wet western-Oregon winter soaks up that clayey fill soil, and quickly rots the roots of Mediterranean plants. So we would have to grow in pots after all, and would try a wide variety of herbaceous plants—"everything you need for your perennial border."

We were frustrated by all of our ignorance and missteps, but undaunted. After years of gardening, I had thought I knew what I was doing, but I began to realize that gardening in town—in a human-controlled environment—was a far different thing from trying to impose my ideas on relatively undisturbed ground. And once I did disturb the ground, I'd better either think it out well or be prepared to take the consequences. As immigrants in a new land, we needed to learn the language and the customs, to pay attention, and to think before we acted.

Another Way the River Has

Taut True Tales from
the Northwest

ROBIN CODY (2010)

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“Reading Cody . . . is a homecoming to a place
millions of us share.” —*The Oregonian*

In this collection of his finest nonfiction writings, award-winning author Robin Cody brings the ear of a novelist and the eye of a reporter to the people and places that make the Northwest distinctive. In several of the book’s selections, including the one featured here, Cody takes to the Columbia River in his handmade wooden boat The Turtle.

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HIDEAWAY SLOUGH

Time, on *The Turtle*, ignores the clock. River time is the slow crawl of sun across the arc of early June sky, the sun rising upriver and falling downstream. A day begins with the twitter and quack of the birds announcing the rise of light outside the cabin. A day ends when there is no longer enough light to see the words on a page. Time to eat is when the stomach growls. Time to bathe is a hot afternoon and the river to jump into.

But where time is fluid, space needs definition. I needed a place. I wanted to anchor myself someplace in the maze of islands upstream from Cathlamet, on the Washington side of the river, and Clatskanie, Oregon. The ideal spot would have a sandy beach with a deep enough pitch that *The Turtle* would stay afloat at low tide. Avoid the ship

channel, where the best beaches are. Shelter from the northwest wind would be good, as would a far-reaching view. But shelter and view often preclude one another. I poked around for a few days, trying this place and that, experimenting with various anchorages. None were quite right. But then . . .

Crim's Island is more like an island group, with tiny sloughs threading through. I circumnavigated the whole business. Upstream on the ship-channel side, two miles of white sandy beach held only an abandoned lean-to with a faded American flag on a driftwood pole. Back downstream on the Oregon side, I passed a pair of osprey nests atop log pilings. The Lewis and Clark party had paddled past here and named it Fanny's Island, for Clark's younger sister, Frances. But the name that stuck came from James Crim, who filed his claim on the island sixty-five years later. Nobody lives here now. A lone bald eagle soared flaplessly above cottonwoods. The only trace of human history was a broken farmhouse with blank windows and sagging eaves, slumping at its joints into a meadow.

I poked *The Turtle* into a narrow Crim's Island backwater with jungle-lush shores. A deep-enough anchorage adjoined a grassy dry flat—a little prairie-like plateau. Hmm. Good place, this. A man could get off the boat here and walk around if he took a mind to. Pitch a tent, even. I threw an anchor astern, pitched another onto the grass, and winched the boat into its new place. The opening to Bradbury Slough was just a couple of hundred yards away, near the upstream tip of Crim's Island. I could spit a watermelon seed halfway across this little sluiceway. On the other side were low Russian olive trees and a dead cottonwood, bony and leafless as an X-ray of tree-ness. A ridge of sand, topped with thick woods, shielded me from the ship channel.

The wind came up that first afternoon. It barreled through the treetops with the rush of a freight train, but the brush and grasses at my shore merely swayed in light breeze. *The Turtle* lay as calm as a library.

I had found my place. I'll call this place Hideaway Slough.

At first light, a beaver comes swimming downstream on my side of the slough. Spying the boat, the beaver veers off. She crosses the channel, ducks into a tangle of roots beneath an overhanging willow, and vanishes.

Songbirds herald the planet's roll toward the morning sun. The sky colors in from rose to blue in the time it takes to roust myself from the sleeping bag, pull on clothes, fire up the stove, run hot water through a coffee filter, and sit on the back deck with coffee. At 5:30 (by clock time, in early June), the tops of cottonwoods direct sunlight. In the next hour, Earth's shadow crawls down from the tree tops to the base, like a reverse curtain to the stage. The boat lies at anchor on the shady side. The air is still, the water flat, mirroring the opposite shore of low bushes and the tall dead cottonwood tree. For all the chirping and warbling, I can't see many birds. But among the singers are the soprano goldfinches, an alto redwing blackbird, a tenor owl hooing deep in the woods, and the bass grawk of a passing blue heron. A woodpecker tattoos a hollow cottonwood, for percussion.

If I don't stir—just sit there—the action at Hideaway Slough becomes visible. A male goldfinch, bright lemon against the green background, alights on the tallest cattail near the boat and poses, as if for his Audubon sketch. Swallows swoop along the water collecting bugs. Another little flycatcher flies directly up the slough as he flaps up to height, arcs flapless down to near water like a spent bullet. Fat carp cruise below the surface, now and then scratching the surface with dorsal fins. A kingfisher flies out from the willow bush on my right, hovers in mid-air over the water, makes an arrow of himself and dives—plunk—spearing a fingerling and splash-flapping to a low limb. He points his beak skyward and swallows the fish in one neckstretching gulp. He takes a couple of small bows, as if to say *There, that's how it's done*.

Behind me, across the wide Columbia, sirens wail along Washington's Highway 4, mourning tragedy somewhere, not here.

Air on the water is cold. I wear sweat pants under my jeans and a flannel shirt over sweatshirt, yet my fingertips go numb on the pen. But it won't be cold for long. Gearing up this morning is the dominant weather pattern of a Pacific Northwest summer. Some two hundred

miles from here, east of the Cascades, a wheat rancher is scanning the clear-blue morning sky and thinking, *another scorcher*. While his fields warm to the rising sun, the air, too, will heat and want to rise. Low pressure created by warm air rising off the skillet of Eastern Oregon draws heavier cool air in off the Pacific. This early breeze will be a stiff west wind before noon, roughing the lower Columbia but fluttering Portland flags and cooling the city. By late afternoon the wind will howl through the Columbia River Gorge—windsurfer heaven—and dissipate out east across the irrigated farm country and high desert.

Awakening one morning to rain tapping the roof, I leaned up on an elbow and stared out the window. Rain on unruffled water made tiny blips here and there. Each drop launched circles on the surface that radiated outward and rippled the reflection of the dead cottonwood across the slough. As the raindrops came closer together, their loops interlaced like the Olympics logo gone amok. If you didn't know anything about rain—if you saw rain for the very first time from this low angle—you'd think it's not falling but coming up. Each raindrop was all but invisible compared to the upward *re*-action of river spouting back to the sky. The whole slough began spout-dancing. Some spouts left bubbles that drifted away on the current. The water surface was frosted glass, the color of jade. Swirls marked slower-moving water. The whole arrangement was so beautiful there was nothing to be done about it, no reason at all to get up that morning.

On another misty morning, *The Turtle* lay in the company of eight wood ducks, four males and four females, quietly floating the slough. Shy creatures, these, rarely seen up close. The males—bright red eye, orange beak, with flashy green and blue tail feathers, white throat, brown chest—set me to wondering. What's adaptive about that? Their coloring—their sex appeal so roundly trumping camouflage—must enforce shyness, except toward female wood ducks. These boys were way overdressed for Hideaway Slough, as if lost in a bad neighborhood on their way to the harlequins' ball.

Spiders love a wooden boat. Spiders colonized *The Turtle* the first summer of its launch, and their descendents know no other habitat. They go where I go.

The spiders who live upwards from the port windows were on a roll the other day. The boat lay at anchor with that window to lee. A downdraft off the cabin roof brought gnats into the spider web, parallel to the window, outside. Each incoming gnat put up a struggle and got stuck worse. Gnat frenzy led to intervals of exhaustion, or resignation, and when the web stopped twitching, a spider emerged from a crack between window and frame. Out *sprinted* the spider, along gossamer threads. I've seen Jason Kidd on the fast break. I've seen Baryshnikov on the stage. Katarina Witt on ice. Those were good. But I've never seen more startling quick grace than with this spider tripping eight legs in sequence across the shuddering web. Without a misstep, the spider wrapped its legs around the victim.

I like to place my magnifying glass against the inside of the window and watch the spider's little anus squirt stickum. When it gets too personal, I put the glass down and remember to breathe evenly. Of all possible ways of capturing and socking away food, who would have thought of this?

Two guys in a Duckworth with a trolling motor pattered into Hideaway Slough and toward my boat when I was fixing dinner. They were the first people through here in two weeks. They wore duck-hunting camouflage and had fishing poles in their boat. They cut the motor to talk "Any bass in here?" The talker was a hefty bearded guy. His little buddy was silent at the motor.

I hadn't seen any. I said I wasn't fishing.

The two of them looked at each other. What could I possibly be doing? "Probably too cold yet for bass," the guy said. We shot the bull for a spell. They invited me to dinner at their place, on the ship-channel side. I hadn't known I was sharing Crims Island with others. I had, though, seen a ramshackle lean-to with a frayed American flag on ship-channel side. The American flag on an unpopulated island in America had given me the brief willies, but these guys didn't look like survivalist kooks.

"Come on over," the big guy said. "We got spaghetti on."

I raised my salad bowl and said thanks, but I had chili cooking. He laughed. "We have beautiful women at our place."

Sure you do.

"No, really. Come on over. Half a mile down, you can just walk across the island. Down where the beaver dam was."

I thanked them anyway. The silent partner started their motor again. They slid on down the slough leaving a cloud of blue exhaust on the water. In their wake, over chili, I was thinking *down where the beaver dam was*. I'd seen beaver slides at the slough's narrow outlet. Slick mud chutes led from the vegetation line to water. The February flood must have ripped out their dam. News that beavers had *had* a dam here was worth considering. It would take an audacious creature to try to dam the tidal Columbia River.

On my river chart is a dot labeled "Stella" on the Washington shore. Stella, I thought, might have a store. Groceries and ice. If so, that would be a closer source of re-supply than Clatskanie. Yet I'd never seen a village at that place on the shore. So I pulled anchor and aimed *The Turtle* up the slough and out onto the river. I quartered into the current and crossed the ship channel toward Stella and saw just a small huddle of very old and very new building on pilings at the outlet of Coal Creek Slough. On the deck of a condo facing the Columbia sat two teenage girls in lawn chairs, sunbathing.

I called out. "Is there a store here?"

No response. I was only fifty yards from them. Couldn't they hear me? They faced the river, but did they see me? For a moment I had that feeling—familiar to a man my age—that he no longer registers on the radar of the young. He may not even exist. But how could these young buds not see *The Turtle*?

I cut the motor and called again, louder. "Is there a store here?" The girl on the left was speaking into a cell phone. The other one, I saw now, wore headphones. She saw *The Turtle* and unplugged herself. She nudged her friend, who looked up and saw me but couldn't be both-

ered. Current drifted me slowly downstream. My rope to the world was unraveling, strand by snapping strand. "IS THERE A STORE HERE?"

The two of them conferred. Without moving the receiver from her ear, the cell phone girl called down the river at me: "NO!"

Back at my anchorage, there are more patterns to learn. Visible action dwindles to near nothing as the heat rises. Hideaway Slough falls silent. I fall into the same pattern, napping at mid-day, writing a little, reading some, listening to the Mariners on the radio if they're playing a day game or three time zones away. I am less alert to my surroundings than at the edge between sunlight and darkness.

Beavers appear only at daybreak or after sundown, and the days are getting longer. The beaver who comes into view at 5:12 one morning will appear at 5:04 the next. The kingfisher arrows upstream and reappears at regular ten-minute intervals for an hour or so, perhaps doing laps around Crims Island. The raccoon is nocturnal but governed by tide, pawing along the shore for mud-morsels at low tide. If low tide is full dark, I don't see that raccoon, but I can be sure he is making his rounds.

At dusk each evening a little white-tail doe appears at the margin of the brush across the slough. She nibbles at greens and laps up some river.

These patterns are reassuring. The boat doesn't move, day after day, yet the river is alive with pattern. Without changing my place on the river, I am everywhere on it, like the air or the light. I say the boat doesn't move, but only in the sense that I don't move it. The boat rides up and down on the tide. The biggest pattern other than daylight and dark is this lunar-induced to-ing and fro-ing as the Columbia fights to merge with the sea.

Until I read up on it, I thought the Pacific Ocean tide worked like the water in a very large tub. High tide on the Oregon coast must be answered at the same time by low tide in Japan. But no. High tide here is matched, of course, by high tide across the Pacific. The gravitational pull of moon (and sun) draws the planet into an egg-shaped spheroid with greater diameter in a line running directly through the spinning Earth.

Low tides are at the poles when it's high tide at the equator.

Tides are the planet's largest wave. A lunar day, resulting from the rotation of the Earth on its axis, is about fifty minutes longer than twenty-four hours.

The pull of the sun and that of the moon sometimes partially cancel each other. Other times they boost each other. The moon—because its nearness cancels the sun's huge mass—more than doubles the draw of the sun. Lunar and solar tides will coincide and be fully cumulative only twice each lunar month, when the sun, moon, and Earth are most nearly lined up. At new moon—or full moon—I'll get higher high tides and lower lows.

There's more to it than that, including the declination of Earth on its axis that gives rise to winter or summer.

This far up the river, at this time of year, the tide brings about a five-foot swing from high to low, dropping the boat so that my view out the bank-side window changes from grassy plateau to a close-up of yellow wild iris on glistening brown mud. At high tide I can loosen the anchor line and pull on the bow line and step off the boat for walking laps through the grass. The lifts and drops of tide occur a little each day. I get hungry a little later each day, eating dinner in the dark.

Two mink patrol the black-brown mud at shoreline. They come around, not every morning, after the beaver makes its rounds. These mink are about two feet long, half tail, with stubby legs under a long body no thicker than a big sausage. They burrow narrow holes into the shoreline mud, at varying heights. At least one hole is always above the water surface as the tide goes up and down. Lewis and Clark—those sharp-eyed observers and scrupulous recorders—made no mention of mink. Mink are a legacy of ranchers who did well when mink fur was at the height of chic. Some mink escaped the farms. Others went feral when the fur market went bust. Farmers let them go.

Remember Joe Pesek on mink? Pesek said that farmers bred mink selectively. They came up with tan mink and blond mink to meet evolving fashion.

Never, on the river, have I seen a mink in any other color than deep dark brown. You'd think if lighter-colored mink are out here, they would be easier than the dark ones for me to see. I would have seen one by now. I'll bet when the lighter ones got loose they were easier for bald eagles to see and to nab. Fewer pale mink survived long enough to pass on copies of the gene for altered coloring. The mink I see on the river are the color of the brown-black mud-line they patrol.

Hideaway Slough is too sluggish for a cleansing swim, but a short tromp through alders leads to firm white sands facing the wide blue Columbia. Upstream, in the distance, Mount St. Helens wears a wedding skirt of fresh snow. Here I can swim against the river, finding that place in the water where my strokes cancel current. No need for a swimsuit. Nobody here but me and the wild ones. Still, there's a fearsome vulnerability about sitting naked on a towel to air-dry. Some trickster might burst from the woods and make off with my clothes.

I wished I had that poem of John Daniel's with me. It's not on the boat. His poem reverses a Genesis passage where Adam names the creatures. The animals eye the New One, the walk-upright.

Deer notes the New One's bare skin and says something like, *He'll sleep cold.*

Doesn't see so good, says Eagle.

Clumsy swimmer, says Fish.

Came crashing through the brush, Coyote says. At least we'll know when he's around.

Let's watch him for a while, says Heron.

I do, says Beaver. I watch him. Sits at daybreak and sundown on that green box he sleeps in. His lodge? Both eyes forward on his head. Tiny teeth. Eats twigs and nuts from a blue bowl.

Wild ones agree. The New One will never make it.

What I have over the rest of them, though, is tools. Lacking claws, humans "evolved" pliers and scissors and blades. Lacking fur, I sleep in a down bag and don cotton protection from cold. My feet, poor things, aren't webbed or tough, but I have shoes. Eyesight poor? I have bin-

oculars. *The Turtle* itself is a tool, a mobile shelter. Not here, but from home I could drive a four-wheeled tool across land at a speed greater than deer. I can fly—hello, osprey—across the continent. Humans have leaped ahead of the slow workings of natural selection, and we make do in ways never thought of by the first riverpeople.

We specialize. I don't hunt or gather my own food. Specialists harvested or killed, processed and packaged, every item of food I have on the boat. Same with shelter and clothing. Somebody unknown to me cut the trees for the plywood that got trucked to the lumberyard where Sam got the stuff for this boat. The motor—made in Japan—runs on fuel that successive specialists discovered and drilled and piped and refined and trucked to Clatskanie. I only hosed the gas into the can. Left to my own survival skills, I would die of starvation or winter exposure. I am of a different species, not just from the other survival packages that creep and fly and swim at the slough, but also different from Lewis and Clark.

What we have over the rest of them, too, is language.

OK, the wild ones chatter about for sex or warn vocally of danger. But humans swap complex ideas from one individual to another and from one generation to the next. A pair of bicycle mechanics on the eastern seaboard solves the physics of flight and within a century the improvements lead to intercontinental—interplanetary—transport. One idea leads to another. Natural selection and refinement of the redwing blackbird took millions of years, but the leap of humans into flight happened in an eye-blink. Good ideas get repeated from human brain to brain, and the best of them survive. The brain is to ideas as habitat is to life forms. Only in the recent millennium did we reproduce language in books. I don't know much more about the habits of beavers than beavers can know of mine, but I can go to the library. Or Google it. I can look it up.

At 8:35 p.m. on June 20, the longest day of the year, the sun slips down into the far hilltop like a hot coin into a slot. High in a cottonwood grove, two herons get into a raucous fight or have sex. At 10 p.m., enough

light still spills over the globe for me to distinguish green on the banks, faint pink in a high cloud. Half an hour later a full moon the color of melting butter slides up into the cloudbank between cottonwoods. Coyotes yowl. I hear three distinct calls, all from this Crims Island group. Coyotes howl back and forth for a few minutes before all fall silent. Their yowls seem less to declare territorial rights than to reassure themselves that there are others like them out here.

Crickets and frogs take over. Moonsplashes bathe the boat in cold light. The sky is so deep I could fall out into it.

Heavenly bodies pull on earthbound creatures. A fearsome memory—not just a chemistry—rolls through all living things. The moon climbs higher in the sky, bright enough to write by. I can scratch words onto a page, which sometimes works when I am lost. Stay up and fight through it. Fire up the stove. Put coffee on. The river lips the shore. The river laps against the boat. Pretty soon I am just shy of dead and wishing that time, like the river, felt the pull of moon and went back on itself now and again. Instead, time flows only in one direction and leaves a man wide awake and lovesick, feeling short.

A beaver sounds—ka-PLOOM—and scares me half way to Astoria.

Maybe it's all right to let the river get the upper hand like this. The world is good. It means us no harm. But a mind can wander too far from itself. That's probably as good a reason as any for towns and cities, where people can forget how large the world is. A man wants to stay out here only so long.

Mexicanos in Oregon

Their Stories, Their Lives

ERLINDA V. GONZALES-BERRY
& MARCELA MENDOZA (2010)

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“Gonzales-Berry and Mendoza are methodical in their treatment of the subject matter. The history they offer is comprehensive, whether the time period is the 1950s, 1980s, or today.

Where *Mexicanos* shines is in the personal testimonios, which offer a more intimate view of community organizations, working conditions and family situations.” —*The Oregonian*

Blending scholarly research and personal testimonies—such as this selection by Ricardo Larios—Mexicanos in Oregon sheds new light on why migrants come to Oregon, what their experience are when they settle here, and how they adapt to life in the United States.

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TESTIMONIO, BY RICARDO LARIOS

This testimonio is the product of an essay commissioned by the authors for a book on 1.5 and second generation immigrants. Ricardo had just recently graduated from Oregon State University when he wrote the piece and was studying for his Masters degree at Willamette University in Salem, where he currently is a public school teacher. The essay appears as written by Ricardo.

I sit here typing. At last count, my best words per minute was thirty-four. I can even type without looking at the keyboard. I glance at my hands: they are a walnut color on the backside and chalk white on the

other. They are soft with no visible blemishes. They tell the story of another generation, the transition my parents have always dreamed of. My father, Cipriano, sometimes known as “Sip” in English-speaking circles, comes from a different place, a different time. His hands have not had the same experience as mine. If you were to shake his hands, you would immediately detect the sandpaper quality of his palms. From a distance, his fists reveal a rock-like appearance with ridges cut long ago into the flesh. On his right hand, the tip of his middle finger resembles an awkward seven. A table saw and my father’s middle finger met for a brief and painful moment; bone, cartilage, and skin were no match for the 300 rpm blade. There was no money for doctors, and I imagine his pride prevented from visiting the *médico* as well. “Sip’s” inflexible and determined demeanor matches the description of his caramel-colored hands that I imagine were once soft and tender like mine. They starkly contrast with the smoke black remote as he flips through his sixty-five-plus channels of cable on his thirty-two-inch color TV. With the expansion of media, through networks like Univision, Telemundo, and now Telefutera there is no shortage of visual connection to the homeland.

The word homeland conjures a metaphorical womb that engendered, cared for, and colored the existence of Cipriano Larios. However, my existence would not be possible without the literal womb of my mother, Socorro, once mispronounced as Soraco by a secretary calling to remind my mother of a pending dentist appointment. At her *panadería*, she is simply known as Doña Coco. A survey of her hands reveals a honey glaze pigment. Her nails are expertly taken care of by the Korean nail technicians at Nails Now, whenever her busy schedule permits. On special occasions, fancy jewelry adorns her fingers and wrists. My mother’s grasp is visionary. Her palms are soft but firm. They weren’t always like this, however. When she opened her bakery, the seventeen-hour shifts took a toll on her hands. The skin of her hands looked like wrinkled silk from washing so many dishes. Her nail polish was spotty at best. There was no room for jewelry because there were neither special occasions nor the financial ability to obtain them. Underneath the hardened

epidermis stood the strength to steer an entire family, a business, and a king-like husband.

It is this union of hands, in marriage, in faith, that allow me to sit here and type, the comfort to sit here and type. Twelve years ago a computer in the Larios household would only exist in mail-order catalogs. Twenty-five years ago the Larios household consisted of a single-bedroom house. The front door was the only entrance and exit to the humble home. My grandmother, Chuy, tells me with her root-shaped hands that the floor was cement with a light blue hue. The walls were brick, adorned only with calendars from local businesses and religious icons. It only had one bedroom. The living room and the kitchen were separated by a makeshift wall made out of a curtain strung on a wire. In the far edge, as far away as possible, stood an outhouse made of cardboard and scraps of wood. To wash clothes or the dishes, my family, just like everybody else, relied on a *pila*, a rectangular-shaped open water-storage tank. Running water was and is a luxury in this little *pueblo*. Conservation is key as the water arrives every third day. Built right into the cement structure is a washboard. Many hands have gone down this path, washing clothes, washing babies, and washing dishes.

I say twenty-five years because I am twenty-four. I never experienced the reality of my parents or grandparents. Only my three older siblings, Chinto, Susy, and Coco played in the house on the famous *loma* or hill. They were born in Coalcomán, Michoacán, Mexico. You won't find this town in your local travel agency catalog. It is like a neglected stepchild, forgotten in favor of the modern capitals. The nearest town going east or west is at least an hour and half away. The capital city of Morelia is an eight-hour bus ride. Mexico City, for the majority of Coalcomanenses, exists only by word of mouth. For me however, Coalcomán is a mythical place and is just as important as our nation's capital or even Mexico's. I can remember my parents and relatives speaking so highly of it, dreaming of returning, never realizing that they could not return. I could never quite understand why they had to leave it. Why did they have to leave if it was such a great place? Why was I born in Toppenish, Washington, and my older brothers

and sisters born more than three thousand miles away, three thousand cultures away, three thousand differences away? Why did they get a green card and I didn't? Why was it I did feel different when I went to Washington Elementary School in Sunnyside, Washington? I could only throw my hands up in frustration.

These questions motivated me to graduate from high school and I took them to college. They fueled my desire to understand and re-search myself and family and how we fit into the larger American society. These questions formed a bulwark as I engaged my *Norte*, my journey to and through college. Although I didn't have to be smuggled in a Volkswagen van like my mom and six-month-old sister Coco or have to cross the Otay Mesa near Tijuana like my father, I did encounter my difficulties in what can be considered an alien environment.

I can still remember the day when Ms. Buckle, the high-school career liaison, asked who was planning on attending college. The hands of my classmates shot up like missiles, hitting their intended targets with chilling precision. Most of the hands were a chalk or pale color. I thought to myself, "College is only for white people." I had no intention of going nor could I even imagine myself a college student. The only reason I attended school was to escape. As a small child I remember waking up before the sun spoke to us in the morning, following my parents on the orchard circuit in Central Washington. Years later, I can still remember the day my dad handed me a half-inch size Craftsman wrench and explained to me that I was going to be his new helper. I was only in the second grade. From that day on, my weekday afternoons and Saturdays (Sunday was our day off) were spent, along with my older brother, in our garage helping my dad repair cars in his makeshift auto-repair shop. I dreaded going home because I knew that the steel half-inch size Craftsman wrench was waiting for me. My other classmates in grade school had no such responsibilities; they went home and played. As I sat through Ms. Buckle's lessons I would stare at her face intently. With all the makeup she wore, she might as well have been a clown. This lecture was a joke. The mathematical equation Ricardo plus college was not equal to success. Besides, no one in my family had

even graduated from high school—my older brother dropped out in the tenth grade; my sisters didn't make it past their freshman year.

School was my escape. As the twentieth century came to a close, so did high school. I had made it this far, albeit with poor attendance and even poorer grades. I looked at my hands. There was dirt, sugar, and despair under my fingernails. The Larios family, entrepreneurial at its soul, had opened their very own bakery. It was a family affair, everyone contributed. After school, instead of a half-inch size Craftsman wrench waiting for me, there were some tongs and a cash register. I dreaded going to the *panadería*. My family had worked very hard. My mom especially endured hardships that I will never comprehend. The vows to the family were greater than my distaste as a grocery clerk. A popular bumper sticker that you can see on various cars in Salem reads, "North Salem's Tassel is worth the Hassle." I was excited as I would soon be a proud owner of the coveted symbol conveying the message: High school graduate, non-deviant. A cousin near Modesto, California, and another in Woodburn, Oregon, would also share the same feeling: we did it. Our families' hands applauded in unison. The flight of our tassels was for them as much as it was for us. A crossroad in my yellow brick road was approaching. School or work, at least this was the ultimatum given by my dad. Although honorable, the work of a mechanic or grocery clerk, I could not continue with the day-to-day drudgery. I adopted the latter part of my dad's ultimatum. School would have to do, school was my escape. I decided that college was not only for white people but also for people who looked like me. I had tricked myself; Ms. Buckle wasn't the clown, I was.

So the next phase of my journey had begun. The open door policy of the community college was the only option available and I embraced it. Like many migrants who dream of coming to *el norte*, the idea that I had of college was of a nebulous universe many light years away. I did not know where to begin, only that I had to go north. A compass inside of me born of previous migrant experiences guided me. Everything from parking permits to financing to learning where the bathrooms were was a complete learning experience. Luckily, there would be guiding hands,

angel hands. The traveling had made me hungry; the excitement over the journey had muted my growling stomach.

Tenia hambre, I was hungry. My cultural soul lacked adequate nourishment from years of malnutrition. I was given food that did not align with my foreign palette. Shakespeare, Emerson, Melville, Poe were marvelous foods in their own contexts, but I simply wasn't part of that landscape. This hunger persisted until I came across a size ten font description in the course catalog. It read, "Chicano/a Latino/a Studies, Wednesdays 5-9 p.m." The instructor's name read "Rasca." It didn't overwhelmingly sound "Latino" but I matriculated anyway. That first Wednesday there were over sixty students. The desks were arranged in a circular fashion. A few minutes after five, a short man with spectacles and a tweed jacket walked in. He spent the first ten minutes greeting us with a humble, "Hello, how are you? I am Leo Rasca-Hidalgo." We had two texts that quarter, Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America* and our life experiences. Like a volcano, my excitement was erupting. It was like walking into a buffet, after years of living on scraps. Every morsel was devoured, the plate licked clean. I lived for every Wednesday; it became the highlight of the week, the highlight of learning. A teacher from the heart, Dr. Leo never gave us the answers, he only asked questions. He took us on path of introspection, examining our cultural souls. Like a long-lost jigsaw puzzle piece, we begin to see how we fit into the larger American picture. Learning from an alternative perspective ignited the fire that had long been extinguished by material that I could not relate to. Community college would not do; I would have to pursue learning at the next level. For the next seven quarters, I found myself reaching for new educational heights. I stopped clowning around like I did in high school and dedicated my heart and soul to learning. I vowed never to be hungry again.

By this time my hands had grown confident. They were able to maneuver deftly at the junior college level. My mother's hands had regained some of their silky texture. Her days were not as long and on sunny days they would shine intently. My father's hands remained the same. They still reflect a tough and unbreakable facade. Change for some people

just doesn't happen, but what didn't was the support and commitment of my family to see me succeed. My mother's hands covered my eyes and ears to limit the distractions. Like a giant sponge she absorbed the *preocupaciones*, the worries, and hid them very well under her motherly mask. She worried for me, for all of us.

The burden that my mother's hands carried allowed me to be successful. They freed up my own walnut-colored hands to pursue the university. In January of 2003, my hands knocked on the office of Dr. Gonzales-Berry, the chair of the Ethnic Studies Department at Oregon State University. Her warm *Hola* and soft-speaking hands made me feel right at home. A quick survey of her office revealed a miniature library. There was even a book with her name on it. My hands began trembling. It was at that moment that I knew I was in the right place . . .

We live in a country that prides itself on being able to use our very own hands to lift ourselves up. Yet this very story contradicts this belief, for without other people's hands to lift me up I would not be here.

Mink River

A Novel

BRIAN DOYLE (2010)

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“Doyle writes with an inventive and seductive style that echoes that of ancient storytellers. This lyrical mix of natural history, poetry, and Salish and Celtic lore offers crime, heartaches, celebrations, healing, and death. Readers who appreciate modern classics like Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* or William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* will find much to savor here. Enthusiastically recommended.” —*Library Journal*

Brian Doyle’s stunning fiction debut brings to life an Oregon coastal town through the jumbled lives and braided stories of its people. Winner of the Foreword Reviews’ Editor’s Choice Prize for Fiction.

.....

A town not big not small.

In the hills in Oregon on the coast.

Bounded by four waters: one muscular river, two shy little creeks, one ocean.

End of May—the first salmonberries are *just* ripe.

Not an especially stunning town, stunningtownwise—there are no ancient stone houses perched at impossible angles over eye-popping vistas with little old ladies in black shawls selling goat cheese in the piazza while you hear Puccini faintly in the background sung by a stunning raven-haired teenage girl who doesn’t yet know the power and poetry of her voice not to mention her everything else.

No houses crying out to be the cover of a magazine that no one

actually reads anyway and the magazine ends up in the bathroom and then is cut to ribbons for a fourth-grade collage project that uses a jar of rubber cement that was in the drawer by the back stairs by the old shoebox and the jar of rubber cement is so old that you wonder secretly if it fermented or a mouse died in it or *what*.

No buildings on the National Resister of Hysterical Places, though there are some old houses, the oldest of which finally collapses on page 141; *no* cheating ahead to watch it slump like ice cream at noon, please.

But there are some odd sweet corners here, and friendly houses and sheds and barns and a school and churches and shops, and certain rhythmic angles in the town where a road and a building and a line of trees intersect to make a sort of symmetrical geometric architectural textual physical music in the right light—the kind of juxtaposition of things that painters like to paint for inchoate inarticulate unconscious reasons they can't explain.

And the light itself—well, there's a certain *certainness* of light here, the way it shafts itself through and around things confidently, exuberantly, densely, substantively; it has something to do with the nearby ocean, maybe. Or the rain, which falls eight months a year. Or the sheer jungle energy of trees and plants here, where the flora release so many feminine ions that the light fractures into geometric patterns that are organized along magnetic lines coherent with the tides and sometimes visible to the naked eye.

Really and truly.

And some buildings here have a moist salty dignity even as they grow beards of stringy pale moss green as seasick old men; and long relaxed streets that arrive eventually where they are headed but don't get all fascist and linear and anal like highways do; and unusual fauna right *in* the town sometimes, like the young elk who ate a whole box of frozen hot dogs at a school picnic once, or the black bear who wandered through the recycling shed at the Department of Public Works and tore apart a pile of newspapers and was discovered reading the *New York Times* travel section, turning the pages daintily with her claws as big and sharp as steak knives.

Right now, for example, look up, right over there, see the eagle flying low and fast down Curlew Street? Watch: as he sails over the grocery store he whirls and *snatches* a whirling piece of cardboard, and he flap-flopflaps down the street triumphantly, big as a tent, you can almost hear him thinking *I am one bad-ass flying machine, this weird flat brown bird didn't get away from me, no sir, nothing can elude my lightning deftness in the air . . .*

Not something you see every day, an eagle chortling over a beer box, eh?

And down the street goes the eagle, heading west, his capacious shadow sliding like a blanket over the elementary school, where a slim older woman with brown and silver hair and brown and green eyes is holding court over the unruly sixth grade, her eyes flashing;

and over her grandson Daniel age twelve with hair braided into three thick braids of different colors (red, black, brown) who is zooming on his bicycle just in front of a logging truck, giving the driver wiggy nightmares for a week;

and over a sturdy young woman named Grace in an open meadow high on a hill where she is slicing apart a small car with a blowtorch her muscular right arm pumping and flexing with the torque of the torch and the leap of her muscle making her tattoo flash like a neon sign *KISS flash MY flash ASS*;

and over a lithe woman called No Horses in her studio crammed with carving tools as she is staring thoughtfully at a slab of oak twice as big as she is which isn't very big at all;

and over a man named Owen Cooney who is humming in his shop crammed with automobile parts and assorted related ephemera as his pet crow sits quietly on an old Oregon State University football helmet watching;

and over a grocer grocering a priest priesting a doctor doctoring teachers teaching two cooks cooking a man beating his son an insurer insuring a woman vomiting in a creek a banker banking an old nun's heart faltering in her room on the top floor of the hotel a man telling a lie in court a teenage couple coupling on *top* of the blankets in the down-

stairs bedroom of her parents' house so as to be sure that no rumpled sheets will tell tales of their vigorous unclothedness;

and so many more stories, all changing by the minute, all swirling and braiding and weaving and spinning and stitching themselves one to another and to the stories of creatures in that place, both the quick sharp-eyed ones and the rooted green ones and the ones underground and the ones too small to see, and to stories that used to be here, and still *are* here in ways that you can sense sometimes if you listen with your belly, and the first green shoots of stories that will be told in years to come—so many stories braided and woven and interstitched and leading one to another like spider strands or synapses or creeks that you could listen patiently for a hundred years and never hardly catch more than shards and shreds of the incalculable ocean of stories just in this one town, not big, not small, bounded by four waters, in the hills, by the coast, end of May, first salmonberries *just* ripe. But you sure can *try* to catch a few, yes?

At the west end of the main street, where it begins to slide off precipitously toward the ocean, there's a long low building faced all around with cedar shakes. Right over this sprawling structure the eagle turns south toward his nest, and as he wheels against the noon light his capacious shadow slides over two elderly men at a rickety alder table in front of the long low building, and they look up right quick.

That thing big as a tent, says the taller of the two.

Adult male, says the shorter man.

How can you tell from here?

Can see his ego. The angle of his dangle.

They grin.

Actually I can tell it's a male, continues the shorter man, because you notice that he's carrying a piece of cardboard, which is foolish, so there you go.

Gratuitous slur on our gender, says the taller man.

Men: the final frontier, answers his companion. As your lovely bride says.

The two men are drinking beer and eating salmonberries. Between them is one empty beer bottle; they split a beer every day at lunch.

They work together in the long low building behind them. They are, collectively, the Department of Public Works. They have publicworked together for more than forty years, in various jobs. They are the best of friends. They are in their late sixties, they think. They are not totally sure about their ages because neither of them is in possession of a real actual birth certificate for reasons they were too young to learn at the time.

The salmonberries are the first of the season and the two men are eating them very slowly, tasting every bittersweetorangeyellowacidic drop and then slowly sipping the beer a tongueful a thimbleful at a time.

Yum, says the taller of the two men.

Yup, says the other.

Not everyone likes salmonberries.

Vulgarians.

I am told they are an acquired taste.

Vulgarians?

Salmonberries.

Yeh. Listen, this afternoon we have to get back to work on the Oral History Project. We promised that we would get back to work on it the day after the rains stopped and the rains stopped last night and we have got to get to work. We are behind something awful on the Oral History Project.

One of our best ideas absolutely. Whose idea was that?

Yours.

Was it?

You were going on interminably one day about how one way to defeat Time is by recording every story possible. Not only from people but from everything living.

For Every Thing that lives is Holy, says Blake.

Yeh, you said that. Also you said that with the Project we could build an impregnable bulwark against entropy. I remember you saying that because you hardly ever hear the word entropy. Excellent word.

Or impregnable, says the taller man thoughtfully. Unable to be made pregnant? I have to confess, says the taller man, that I was under the

impression you invented the Project as part of your vast and overweening ambition.

Nope. Your idea. It fits the expanded public works idea beautifully though. What a resource, eh? Here is what I want to do this afternoon. I want to record osprey calls along the river—those high screams, you know? Piercing sound. On a May day as they are finishing their nests. I wonder if they are speaking in a different tone now than midsummer or early fall. These are the things to know. Let's add that to the list of Things to Know. Thank God for computers. Remember when the Things to Know was on paper? My god, we had to buy that barn just to keep the reams of Things to Know. That was crazy.

Listen, says the taller man. I've been thinking . . .

Did it hurt?

Listen, my friend, says the taller man, holding on to his line of talk like a rope, did you ever consider that maybe the scope of public works as we have conceived it is too big altogether? I mean other towns and cities use their departments just to fix roads and sewer lines and streambeds and such.

We do those things.

But we also are prey to what I might call a vast and overweening ambition. I mean, really, to preserve history, collect stories, repair marriages, prevent crime, augment economic status, promote chess, manage insect populations, run sports leagues, isn't that a bit much? We even give haircuts.

Are we doing insects? Did I know that?

I'm teasing. But we try to do everything.

Not everything.

I think maybe too much.

I think not enough, says the shorter man.

Don't you ever think we could be wrong? asks the tall man.

Billy, says the shorter man, *this* is why people call you Worried Man.

Cedar, my friend, says the taller man, not smiling. I worry we are arrogant.

Cedar leans over the table and stares his friend in the eye.

Billy, he says quietly. Billy. We heal things. That's what we do. That's why we're here. We've always agreed on that. Right from the start. We do as well as we can. We fail a lot but we keep after it. What else can we do? We have brains that still work so we have to apply them to pain. Brains against pain. That's the motto. That's the work. That's what we do. Soon enough we will not have brains that work, so therefore.

We could stop interfering, says the tall man. Who are we to talk to that young woman, for example? Grace?

Who else would say anything to her?

Her family.

What family? Her mother's gone, her brothers are donkeys, and the father . . . isn't much in the way of a moral compass, let's put it that way. Look, Billy, what good are we to anyone if we are not ambitious to make a difference? If we don't use our brains we are just two old men fixing potholes. Are potholes enough, my friend? I think not.

I watched that girl's face as we talked to her, says Worried Man. She was humiliated. You know it and I know it. Her face stays with me. Was that right? Did we have the right to sting her like that? Is that the purview of the public works department, to embarrass the public?

To speak to her honestly about her behavior is to care about her, Billy. In a way it is to love her.

Is it?

Isn't it?

Is it?

They drain the last thick dense bitter drops of their beer.

Owen says today is Joan of Arc's feast day, says Cedar, standing up to go.

Her name wasn't Joan, says Worried Man, also rising. It was Jeanne. Jeanne La Pucelle of Domrémy.

Brave child by any name, says Cedar.

She was a meddler too and look what happened to her, poor thing, says Worried Man.

She changed the face of history, says Cedar.

She was roasted to death one morning and her ashes were thrown in the river and the men who murdered her also managed to murder her real name throughout history, says Worried Man.

They bow and part: Cedar to visit a client, as he says, and then to the river to record osprey calls, and Worried Man to his office in the Department to record an answer to this question from his grandson Daniel: *How did my mother get her name?*

Remembering the Power of Words

The Life of an Oregon
Activist, Legislator, and
Community Leader

AVEL LOUISE GORDLY

with PATRICIA A. SCHECHTER (2011)

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“If you have ever wondered how a principled woman lives a public life, read *Remembering the Power of Words*! Here Avel Gordly reveals the challenges, victories, and fears of her life of public service—in the Oregon legislature and Senate, especially. Writing as a black female pioneer, she combines the personal with the political in a fascinating way that speaks to all of us.” —Nell Irvin Painter

This honest and moving memoir recounts the brave journey of the first African American woman elected to the Oregon State Senate.

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BEFORE WE BECOME DUST

Growing up, finding my own voice was tied up with denying my voice or having it forcefully rejected and in all of that the memory of my father is very strong. To this day—and I am today a very experienced public speaker—preparation to speak takes a great deal of energy. A lot of the energy is dedicated to overcoming fear and the pain of injury previously inflicted on me for speaking up. Over the years, I have developed some sure ways to find my voice, catch my breath, and start to speak. Sometimes I think prayerfully of the names of my

mother, Beatrice Bernice Gordly, and of my grandmothers, Alberta Louise Randolph and Lessie Gordly. Sometimes I say their names to myself, sometimes I speak them aloud. I say the names with thanks and gratitude to God. Saying their names always centers me. Sometimes I even start my remarks by dedicating my words to honor their memory. I also use word-for-word prepared texts for my speeches, not just notes or outlines. I have to write down every word to get through my fear.

Just recently at an Urban League dinner in town, Dr. Julianne Malveaux, the brilliant economist, gave a wonderful speech—without notes! I've loved listening to her for many years. I admire how she uses language, her comfort in her own skin, her way of storytelling, and her use of humor. As I acknowledge and affirm who she is, a little piece of *me* still feels “not good enough.” A tape recording in my head about being “not good enough” was violently enforced in my life over a period of many years. My story involves a struggle to quiet that tape and find my own voice in the world. Though we are both accomplished Black women and share certain perspectives and experiences, my voice is different from Dr. Malveaux's. We have different, unique stories and selves, formed in different, unique circumstances. My circumstances took shape in Portland, Oregon, where I was born on February 13, 1947.

Many, many times during my childhood my mom, my sister Faye, and I would be at home glued to the television set watching something related to the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, any time a Black person was on television at all my mom would be on the phone calling someone to tune in and watch—or someone would be calling her—which speaks volumes about Black invisibility in the early 1960s. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., visited Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church in November 1961. My grandmother's copy of his book about the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *Stride Toward Freedom*, was signed in that church when he came to visit. I have this volume in my personal collection, a treasured memento of those historic years of hope and struggle.

A march held in Portland on September 22, 1963, brought the Civil Rights Movement even more directly home to me in Oregon. A wonderful high school teacher, Mr. Amasa Gilman, encouraged me and

my friends to participate in this march, intended to protest the murder of the four little girls in church in Birmingham, Alabama. On that Sunday, we marched from Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church on the east side into downtown Portland and we massed in front of the federal courthouse. I have a strong memory of being present with my girlfriends Irma and Lela, my buddies. We were sisterfriends and traveled everywhere together. Many participants in the march spoke about their pain over the killings. It was painful for me to dwell on this outrage but it was also a relief. That march was a defining moment because it exposed me to people who spoke out in support of something of great importance—civil rights—and against something horrible—the murder of innocent children. Looking back, the event allowed me to link the issue of African American civil rights explicitly to horrendous violence against black girls. Something about that moment in time remains heavy for me to this day. Yet that march told me that I could have a voice, too, even as a young person.

The march evokes important memories of the power of words in my life. Words carry so much feeling, history, and meaning. Words carry the power to inspire; they can also inflict great pain. I always attend carefully to language because I want my words to mean what I say. I'm keenly aware that words are not just sent, they are also received, yet the speaker can only control the first part, the sending. In my life, all too often the right word from me did not bring the desired response. I remember an assignment in high school—it may have been a crossword puzzle—requiring us to identify names of famous people. One name was that of the well-known film director Elia Kazan. I knew the name because I was a reader and the name was just there for me. When I spoke out the answer in class, the teacher looked at me and asked: "How do you know that?" I felt like I had been struck because his words meant: "You are not supposed to know that." Many years later a white female colleague in the legislature would say to me with surprise, after hearing me speak: "You sound smart!" A boundary between knowledge and speech had been transgressed and this teacher reprimanded me for assuming the power to cross it.

At school, knowing the right word and speaking it often elicited racist hostility. At home, I faced another set of challenges related to speaking up. Talking back, especially to my father, was strictly forbidden. My dad let my sister and me know that we were not to question him or ask "Why?" about anything. When he spoke, that was The Law. A defining moment of enforcing this Law took place in the kitchen, when I was a teenager. My mom was fixing dinner and she and my dad were talking. I was sitting in a chair; somehow I was part of the conversation and asked the question "Why?" The next thing I knew I was picking myself up from the floor. My father had struck me across the face so hard that I literally saw stars. That punishment was for asking the question "Why?"

It is a gift to look back and unpack everything in between then and now and reflect aloud. How many of us get to do that before we become dust?

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