

THE COLLECTED
BOOKS *of*
RICHARD
DENNER

Volume 10

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DENNER**

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dPress 2005 Sebastopol

The figure of Jim begins to emerge in the poem. The Poet uses all his resistance to us to try to create the figure of a person at once lost and unlikely. The unlikelyness is also the first hint of metaphor.

—Jack Spicer
THE HEADS OF THE TOWN

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PREFACE

Jonathan Penton

What Is Left Out

In the film *Velvet Goldmine* Mandy Slade, played by Toni Colette, posits that during times of great change, exceptional, transitory individuals are chosen to alter the consciousness of the citizenry in order to accommodate the rapidity of the

necessary cultural changes (in this case, through glitter makeup and group sex, but bear with me). In his book *A Man Without a Country* Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. says that he was labeled a science fiction author because his first story took place in Schenectady, New York, and the sort of people who read literary magazines were simply incapable of believing that a place like Schenectady really existed. He then states that "novels that leave out technology misrepresent life as badly as Victorians misrepresented life by leaving out sex."

The book *Poet, Be Like God* opens with the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference. It talks about how the brilliant poet Jack Spicer gave a particularly poor lecture, and shortly thereafter was rushed to the hospital, where he died ten days later, on August 17th, of alcohol-related illnesses. He was forty years old, and was pioneering, among other things, the concept of the chapbook as an art form symbiotic with but independent of the art of the poem. Thus, when Black Sparrow sought to release a definitive collection of his work, it was not a "Collected Poems," but *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*. It is partly through this facet of his work (not to denigrate the importance or profundity of his poetry) that has caused Spicer to be such a seminal figure in the way the poetic counterculture of the late 20th Century views itself. By being focused around the chapbook, his work seems to inherently belong to the world of community-run printing presses, independent distributors, and the unfounded devotees of poetry distribution laboring in basements across the country.

Richard Denner was twenty-three when he attended the 1965 Conference. Jack Spicer was not the only famous poet he met. He was not the only famous poet who applauded Richard's work. He was the only famous poet there who applauded Richard's work and died a few days later. These things happen. Not very often, but they happen.

Denner founded D Press, a self-publishing "company" for the production of his chapbooks, which he individually physically produced. From his chapbook, *My Process*:

Then, I moved to Alaska and began printing in an attic apartment in Ketchikan, near the ball field. I'd come home from a day's work in the back shop of The Ketchikan Daily News, and I'd print 100 pages and hang them to dry on cotton string along the roofline of the apartment. On the weekends, I bound my books together, set type, and prepared for the following week of printing. The printing was smudgy and uneven, but I pressed on. The typefaces were worn, so I over-inked and pressed harder, pressing the letters into the paper, embossing the page,

letting the ink bleed through. Grant Risdon taught me how to cut linoleum blocks, and in a rush of visual imagery, I tipped my linoleum nudes into the books, alternating poems and blocks, giving color to the big words.

After reading *How to Live in the Woods on \$10/Week*, I moved wife and child and press to Deep Bay, fifteen miles from the nearest road by boat. D Press moved into a new dimension. Pouring the words right into the type case seem natural. I began to break my poems into smaller and smaller units. Tried to express myself with just the Anglo Saxon. I was printing with 60-point Bodoni type, and this limited the number of words that could be arranged in a 4X6 inch type case.

The essay goes on to discuss his return to California, where Wesley Tanner taught him signature stitch, which can be done with book-binding thread or possibly dental floss. And it takes us up to the presence of contemporary desktop publishing on computers. Denner discusses his methodology only briefly, here, commenting on how the margin justification that a typesetter must do by hand can be achieved by a click of a button in a contemporary word processor. He doesn't really go into all the things he's been able to do with the time he's saved.

The D Press website is now an enormous, ever-growing publishing company with more than forty authors, several with multiple titles, all run entirely by one dedicated, hardworking man. *The Collected Books of Richard Denner* now total twelve volumes, the first eight of which appear in their near entirety on the Web. The printed copies are full-color, perfect-bound, and printed on fine stock. Although a physical copy of the *Books* is expensive, a few years ago it would have been almost impossible. If you read through such a copy in order, you'll see the very clear progression in technologies. The charm of the early volumes is inescapable. But ultimately, Denner's technology-enabled freedom to expand D Press to its current scope is worth more. And while reading the early volumes of the *Books* from the D Press web site might lack the tactile pleasure of bound chapbooks, it's a bit free.

If, then, *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* stand as a working example of how to use the *form* of the poem and chapbook to subvert the dominant paradigm of publishing, *The Collected Books of Richard Denner* (especially when viewed in context with its [baby] sister project, Kickass Review, can serve to illustrate how technology can be used to that end. Denner is now a Buddhist monk, and uses the term "service" to describe his work with D Press, but at no point did he intend it as a profit-making enterprise. D Press exists for the love of literature, and it is for the love of literature that Denner labors before his computer screen and printer, just as he once labored before his press.

If personal computing technology had not developed, there would still doubtless be a D Press and *The Collected Books of Richard Denner*. If it had developed at thrice the speed, Denner would still be using it to its full capacity. This is the object lesson of his work as a publisher. The last few decades have had enormous, and in many ways highly negative, ramifications for the small publisher and poet. Denner looks at these changes and, at a physical age associated with Social Security checks, asks what he can do to promote literature in ways he couldn't a year before.

Works Mentioned:

Velvet Goldmine, directed by Todd Haynes, Channel Four Films, 1998

A Man Without A Country, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Seven Stories Press, 2005

Poet, Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance, Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, Wesleyan University Press, 1998

My Process, Richard Denner, D Press, 2003



DEEP BAY: WORKS & DAYS

RICHARD DENNER



D PRESS
ELLENSBURG
MMXVII

For Cheri & Theo

Photo of Cheri and Richard (soon after arrival at Rollog Cabin, in 1969)
probably shot by Al or Mimi Kotlorov.



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DEEP BAY: WORKS & DAYS

Before we moved out to Deep Bay, I asked at the Fish and Game Department whether I needed a permit to hunt all year. The official told me there was no such permit, but that in Alaska, if you lived in the woods, there was no law preventing you from keeping food on the table. A kind of grandfather law. The same with fishing—but to show my good faith, I bought a fishing license as a gesture to the law of survival.

The move to the cabin came quite suddenly. I had been working at the Ketchikan Daily News doing layout, shooting plates, and assisting on the web press. On Thursdays, I got off early to write Waterfront News, my own column. I was glad to work indoors through the winter in Alaska, but I also enjoyed getting out to see what was happening beyond the back shop.

Walking past Wini's Beachcomber, I spied a book in the window by Bradford Angiers, entitled *How to Live in the Woods On \$10/Week*. Angiers lived in British Columbia, a part of the same geographic area as Ketchikan. Ketchikan is at the tip of the Alaskan panhandle on the island of Revillagigedo. The island is long and narrow. *Ketchikan* is a Tlingit word, meaning, "spread of the eagle's wings."

In his book, Angiers discusses the land and the supplies necessary for survival. The basic idea was to find a place where it doesn't cost anything to live and to survive from nature. I inquired around town about abandoned cabins. Most of the cabins I looked at were in terrible need of repairs, but my grocer, Mr. Rollog, said he had one in Deep Bay that was in good shape. He said he would be happy for us to live there if we maintained it and protected it from vandals. I arranged to have a bush pilot fly me out to look.

The place smelled musty and damp. The stovepipe was rusted, and there was a lot of snow on the roof. The two oil drums that were jerrybuilt to the Yukon stove were half full. There were utensils in a drawer. There were mattresses and blankets, pots and pans, a pressure cooker, tools. The cabin was on pilings along the edge of shore. 20 feet by 40 feet with 10 feet at the end that had been turned into a workshop. The previous occupant had been a pack rat. Whenever I needed some wire or nails, a bolt or a hinge, I could find it in one of his caches.

Friends helped us move the middle of February. The sky was clear and the air, cold and crisp. At high tide it was easy to unload at the front door of the cabin on the deck. Amazing how quickly the elements became the main factor determining what we could and couldn't do.

Everyone pitched in settling things indoors. I had to clear a patch of snow off the roof and set up a new stovepipe. The kids were whimpering, but Al quickly built a fire, and soon an area around the stove was warm. We stood there and drank coffee from a thermos and had a picnic of Mimi's sandwiches before our friends headed back to town. There were fond farewells, but once their boat was around the bend in the bay, the silence was ominous.

The trickle of water. The hoot of a bird. Mauve shadows from the sunset. The tide lapped the rocks. Darkness. The glow of embers from the fire. Eerie shadows danced on the ceiling from the flickering lamp. Primeval recollections. Aloneness—not loneliness—the feeling of being out of the loop, off the grid. Solitude and a realization that I had left the city to get the Man off my back, and ironically, by using the system to free myself, I was the Man.

Cheri and I cuddled together with our sourdough starter in a crock, tucked in next to our feet at the end of the bed. There was ice on the inside of the wall. The fire was stoked and crackled, and we were just dozing off when there was a fast-moving, scraping sound above us. Cheri grabbed me with both arms. “Is it an avalanche?” Silence. Then, a enormous splash along the side of the cabin and the heavy thump of a wave hitting the wall. A pool of water was fast forming on the floor. “No,” I said in a calming voice, “I think it’s a tidal wave.”

The heat from the stove had melted the snowpack on the roof, and a section had slid into the water alongside of the cabin. We lay there and trembled from the adrenaline. I don’t know any secrets about life. I try to look at life accurately and soberly. The fact that we were there, alone, changed nothing. A New World was before us, and I knew that even when we hold each other we are alone. We share this aloneness together.

I got the oil stove to function by taking the line off the Yukon stove and attaching it to the other carburetor. I cut up some beached timbers into blocks and strung them together so I could row them to the woodshed at high tide. The dinghy I found on the dock needed repairs, but I found a sheet of marine plywood to make a new bottom, and with some tar and a few dabs of paint I soon had it ship shape.

Our first mishap came when the weather warmed, and we decided to air things out. Opening the doors of the cabin, front and back, to create circulation, I stoked up the fire, but I underestimated how hot the stovepipe could get, and soon smoke was pouring from the attic. Smoke in her eyes, Cheri grabbed the fire extinguisher and managed to spray foam into the kitchen. I pulled off the metal around the stovepipe that revealed smoldering mattresses and newspaper insulation. No flames, only smoke, but to be on the safe side, I grabbed two buckets of salt water used to flush the toilet, put my bandana over my nose, and walked along the rafters to douse the fire from above. I nearly asphyxiated myself in the process. After the smoke cleared, I looked at the objects in the room, the sink, the table, the chairs, now that everything had been saved from fire, and everything seem unique and very precious.

Birds and beasts, high and low. Sea otter and seal, beaver, bear and Sitka black-tailed deer. Woodpecker, thrush, starling, cormorant, raven, and owl. Seagulls and more seagulls. Once, I saw an Emperor Swan. And eagles—what an awesome presence. Theo had learned to pee between the boards on the fenced part of the deck in front of the cabin. I encouraged this because it cut down on the number of diapers

I had to wash. He was relieving himself, and I looked up and counted fifteen eagles circling overhead. I quickly shooed him indoors before one swooped down and plucked his little white buns up to its aerie.

Sort of unreal, this tug of life and death. I had eaten my lunch by the beaver pond. I had encountered the black bear that frequented the berry bushes behind our cabin. I had kept a low profile, but he caught my scent and moved into the shadows. I smoked a joint and listened to two ravens discuss the weather. I had come as far as the hemlock snag by the river, maybe four miles inland. Beyond, for me, was unexplored territory.

Coming up the incline of a hill, the sun broke through the drizzle. A buck appeared in silhouette. I got off a shot with the gun halfway to my shoulder, and the deer spun around the crest of the hill. I heard his hooves clatter on a bit of rock, and then there was silence. I moved quickly around the edge of a cliff in pursuit. Stopping to listen, I saw a blur. I turned and was knocked off my feet. The buck scrambled a few yards and fell. There was a gaping shoulder wound. I was at his throat with my knife in a flash. Then, it was over, except for the handling of the meat. I removed the entrails, careful not to break the bladder. I left the head on a log. I cut the skin between the tendons on the back legs above the joints and dislocated the forelegs and poked them through the tendons, making a kind of knapsack out of the carcass.

Now, which way was home? I had gotten myself turned around in all the excitement. Just fog and tall trees whichever way I turned, none of it seemed familiar. I tried to sort it out...Let's see...I came over this hill and around to here, and I turned and went over there, and then I knelt and backed up and turned and sat down and adjusted my gear and got up and...

Beyond the forest, perhaps, the world had stopped. Here there was an excess of noisy quiet. I looked into the stony face that might annihilate me. I figured if I could find the river, I would be all right, otherwise I could wander in the forest until I became exhausted. I climbed the hill and looked for a mark. In the distance, some rock and a fallen tree, which seemed familiar, and an enormous cedar. I walked toward the cedar to see if I could get my bearings. From there I could hear the sound of the river. But now it was getting dark, and since I was covered in blood and carrying a freshly killed deer, I worried about wolves.

Finding the river was one thing and following it, another. I felt small in the vastness of the forest, smallness I knew I would feel forever if I survived. Panic tingled at the threshold of every step. I knew I must keep moving—courage would follow. Battling my way through a field of devil's club, I stepped into a soggy muskeg up to my knees. I was about to hang the deer on a tree limb, when I spied the snag I used as a jumping off place.

I climbed a mossy slope to the trailhead just as darkness arrived. I was resting under the snag, catching my breath, when I heard a shout and saw the beam of a

flashlight. Then, Dale was embracing me—a friend had come to visit. Cheri was worried and had sent him with a bag of munchies. I gobbled them up as fast as I could. He told me he had put some candle ends in the bag in case we needed to start a fire, but by then they were gone, consumed in my hunger, all in one taste.

The weather suddenly turning warm from a Chinook wind made it necessary to process the venison I had hung in the woodshed. We had all the equipment necessary for canning, a pressure cooker, jars and lids. We set the cooker on the *Coleman* stove and brought it to pressure. We cut the deer meat into chunks and filled all the jars we had. The rest we cut into strips for jerky. We feasted on the ribs, and put the jars away for a time when venison might be scarce. I was thinking, it is happening: we are living off the land.

If, on any given day, the fishing was poor or the deer were too clever to be found, I would return to the clam bed. We ate clams steamed, fried and stewed. I think it was clam burgers that finally threw me off clams.

My favorite spot to fish was down a long inlet near a fresh water lake, a place known as “the rat hole.” During a short interval at high tide, the water coming down from the lake would reverse, and a boat could get into the lake. At the end of the inlet leading to the stream was an area thirty feet in diameter, which became a whirlpool during this augmentation of the lake. Fish would be trapped there, and if you kept your speed up and stayed in a gyre, you could catch a boatload. Fortunately, the area was off limits to commercial fishing, so the sport fishermen had it to themselves.

I had built a smoker out of a couple of oil drums, one with racks and the other for the fire, hooked together with a length of stovepipe. Some fish I smoked and wrapped in waxed paper and stored. Some fish I light smoked, so we could feast right away. Like all good things, too much is much too much. Salmon is rich meat, and after a while, we again needed a change.

A boat in the bay, fishing for herring. I rowed over, and the fishermen gave me a cardboard box full of fish as a friendly gesture. Another day, I was sitting on the deck smoking a *Gauloises* when Ron Arnce and some of his band dressed in bearskins, bearded, and looking like Vikings, pulled up in their riverboat and handed me a huge slab of bear meat. Everybody was looking out for each other.

Well, not everyone. One morning, a boat pulled up, and a guy asked me if he could use my dock to fix his engine. “Sure, no problem.” I went inside to put together some breakfast. Then, I heard a shot, and when I looked out the window, I saw a widening pool of blood on the water.

I shouted, “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Shot a seal,” he replied.

“Why don’t you have numbers on your boat?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.”

“I guess I do.”

He became apologetic and told me he was a seal hunter. I told him the next time I was in town; I would drop by his place and shoot his dog in his front yard. He asked if I wanted some of the meat. I had my handgun tucked in my belt against my back. I just smiled at him and went back inside.

I looked out the window and realized there is division between men of strong will. We might have understood each other, but we failed, and by then the moment to be friends had passed. I thought, neighbor, my nemesis, you follow me everywhere. I could see the War is eternally inside of me.

The weekend was over. The traffic on the bay slowed to a halt. Things were quiet. I consoled myself that being alone is one of the few things I could have totally to myself.

Whitecaps in the cove, cedar bending in the gale, gulls motionless. February—a windy month. Made a mixture of vinegar, cloves, onion, garlic, salt, sugar and mustard to make sauerbraten. Put it and a venison roast in a stoneware crock to marinate. Awoke to a fourteen-foot tide, enough to float a forty-footer off an abandoned logging rig. Tied on and rowed it to the cabin. Took a break for coffee. Read a few chapters of Thomas à Kempis.

Dedicated to a spiritual life, the teachings and disciplines were obvious and traditional. The problem was in the implementation. Wood and water, water and wood, would you believe wood and water? The meaning is subtle. I felt I had only scratched the surface.

An abundance of bugs and migrating fowl signaled spring. Two surveyors came in their speedboat to chart the wilderness with a laser on a tripod. They moored their boat just off the deck of our cabin. I knew they were looking for a brass stake, but I played dumb, wondering how far off the mark they would be. Theo and I stood on our deck and watched them hack their way through the brush.

This drawing of lines through the forest, mapping the territory, gave me the chills. Six months earlier, I had been in Berkeley working for the Berkeley Barb, reporting on students trying to stop the first troop trains that were taking recruits to basic training in preparation for their eventual shipment to Vietnam. I looked at the railroad tracks and realized the weird *feng shui* of towns that had been built off those lines, and, now, here were the extensions of these same lines, forming a grid from the North Pole to the South Pole, from Deep Bay to the moon.

A rain forest, and the undergrowth was almost impenetrable. It rained 200 inches each year, which left maybe thirty clear days, and this was one of those days, a crisp, blue-sky day, and I could see to infinity. The two government surveyors separated. One went one way, right past the stake, and the other circled around and nearly stepped on it. Cheri said, “Aren’t you going to tell them where it is?” I said, “I’ll tell them if they ask, but until then, I’m going to let them look.”

While they were looking in the undergrowth, the tide changed. A fourteen-foot tide exposes a lot of beach when it goes out, and the spot where the surveyors had anchored their boat was above an outcrop of rock that was underwater at high tide. I pulled on my rain parka and boots and went into the muskeg to tell them their boat was going to be high-centered if they didn't come back and get it away from the rocks. By the time we returned, the boat was listing to starboard on a large, flat rock, so we got in my dinghy and rowed over to it. After we tied their boat up to my dock, I showed them the survey marker surrounded by ferns near an enormous cedar tree. Given the technology at the time when the first stake was placed, during the Depression Era, it wasn't far off from the location of the new marker.

I invited them in for coffee and some of Cheri's fresh baked donuts, and we talked awhile. I was asked why I didn't tell them where the marker was, and I told them we didn't get many visitors or have much in the way of entertainment, and watching them scurrying about seemed like fun. I told them I was sorry that my enjoyment nearly got them stranded. They laughed and thanked me for my help and Cheri for her donuts, but they were curious about why we were living 25 miles from the nearest road.

I told them that perhaps the idea of developing a more livable community is a fruitcake idea, but in desperation one attempts such things. It seemed that my desire for the commerce of the world had mostly been used up. Not that I wasn't filled with sense cravings, but I realized they are transient and certainly don't provide any sense of real purpose. I mentioned Thoreau, who had pointed out in *Walden Pond*, that there are on three essential requirements—food, clothing, and shelter. We were discovering that our material needs could be simply met, and we hoped to reveal this to an expanding circle—friends, town, city, state, country, world—that it could be done, giving them inspiration to do the same. We parted friends, no harm done, their mission accomplished. I had only forestalled the march of progress about 15 minutes.

The next Wednesday, which was a mail day, I rowed a mile across the bay to the Cliffords' cabin, which is where the mail plane landed. Mr. and Mrs. Clifford, both pushing 80, had been living in a cabin at the mouth of Deep Bay since he retired as a mechanic and they sold their family home in Seattle. The two of them were among the first in Alaska to fish commercially with sport equipment in the 1950s. I don't think I ever knew his first name. We affectionately referred to him as "Old Man Clifford."

We spoke directly to each other using our last names. "Denner, I hear you tried to sink those gover'nment fellas' boat last week."

"Well, I did my best," I told him. "How'd you come to hear that? The Clarks been spying on us again?" The Clarks and their three young children had recently arrived on the far shore of the north cove and settled into another of the Forest Service's land

use cabins. The Clarks resented having hippies for neighbors, and they made a point of showing it every opportunity they got.

It's funny. Old Man Clifford was as conservative in his views as Archie Bunker, but he loved to gab, and even though he wanted his independence and freedom and solitude, he and Mrs. Clifford were happy to have some company and swap stories. Looking forward to this weekly visit, we cooked up extra food so we wouldn't have any chores to do, a kind of Sabbath, and we took the dinghy over to the south cove and had a summer picnic on the beach, and then we putted over to the Cliffords' place.

Mrs. Clifford was a wizard with her *Coleman* stove, pumping it and boiling water and serving us cowboy style coffee. We cranked up on her brew and discussed world events. Cheri and Mrs. Clifford often retreated to the wash shed when things got too heated in the fury of our debates. But no matter how far apart we stood on issues like Vietnam, long hair, drugs, Black Power, or the manned space flight to the moon, we loved to hear ourselves talk. Sometimes, we went out to the beach to listen for the plane, but we would keep on bantering even as the mosquitoes drove us to the ground, and we would lay face to face, fuming and frothing at the mouth, until the plane came.

Old man Clifford might disagree with me, but he was always happy to see me and to find something new to disagree about. The Clarks simply remained bitter and aloof, cultivating their fundamentalist belief that hippies were the minions of Satan. The Cliffords were just good neighbors. They directed me to places to hunt and fish and set crab pots and dig clams. When Dale brought his dilapidated trawler out and couldn't get the engine started, the Cliffords came over with their outboard and a battery and gave us a jumpstart.

Everything I experienced living in the woods became a facet of the total discipline of making my mind so still that the core of purity that underlies it became manifest, seen, heard, felt.

The waters in Alaska are cold and deep and dangerous. The radio never mentions small craft warnings. These are just taken for granted as a standing condition. A gale proportion wind is worthy of mention, and the weather changes fast. A couple of times coming out of the harbor, the tide coming in would be so strong I had to hold the 5 hp *Eska* steady with my feet and row with both hands to make any headway. There is probably a nautical term for this kind of maneuver, but I had very little experience with boats.

My naivete is probably what got me through. If I had known how much danger I was in, I wouldn't have attempted half of what I did. The mountains in Southeastern Alaska rise 3,000 feet straight out of the water, and the inlets were carved 50 fathoms deep by glaciers. The water under the surface is only a few degrees above freezing, so if I capsized and was exposed in the water for long it would be the end of me.

Coming back from town on Dale's trawler with a couple of drums of stove oil, we had to buck the rollers at half-throttle with our faces out the window in the sea spray because the cabin was full of noxious fumes from a blown exhaust gasket. The weight of the drums put the stern of the boat almost at water level, and the bilge pump was working at full capacity. We were so focused on the tip of land barely visible in the fog where we were to make our turn, that we were unaware of the giant Japanese tanker right behind us. She blasted us with her horn, and we nearly jumped through the cabin roof. "Hard to port! Full speed ahead!" The wake of the ship nearly swamped us, but we managed to ride out the swells and make our turn. There was no time to be afraid, and afterwards Dale and I looked at each other and laughed, and I realized courage is more in the event than in the person. I had no idea how to act in a dangerous situation. I just winged it.

On another occasion, while on our way to town to get supplies, we saw several waterspouts rapidly coming at us and threatening to turn the boat upside down. We reversed course and sped toward shore. Wind blowing, rain pouring down, we tied up at the edge of the forest and looked around for shelter. Dale said he had spotted a cabin, and soon we found a trail and made our way to a place that had been boarded up for the winter.

We pried open a shutter and broke a pane of glass and climbed into someone's summer cabin. There was fuel in their stove and coffee and food in their larder, so we settled down to a plate of rice and beans and a hot cup of joe. The plan was to warm up, get dry and wait it out.

Later, the storm subsided, but the tide had gone out, and we had to wait for it to return before we could get our boat off the beach.

Cheri wondered what took us so long. We told her, but she was incredulous because, since the time we left two days before, the weather had been clear and calm in the cove. It was a local typhoon that nearly capsized us and left us stranded. Captured by pirates, sold as galley slaves, mutiny and shipwreck, battle with the Cyclops, rescued by Circe. Cheri didn't believe a word of it, although she seemed interested in the bit about Circe.

Dale returned the trawler he borrowed, and he came back with an old vessel fitted out as a crabber, held together with wire and rust. It was not in the cove two days before it rested on the bottom. We had no plans to go anywhere, so we left her sitting. A few days later, after eating some acid, I was sunning myself on a rock. In the distance I saw a tiny dot on the horizon that in a kaleidoscopic moment became a huge boatload of hunters right in my face. I was dazed by the sudden arrival of the conquistadors with their firesticks, and when they questioned me about the derelict in the cove, I said, "Oh, it just sank."

The following Monday, about noon, I was reading, with my feet up against the Yukon stove and my chair tilted back, when I was startled by a blast from an air

horn. I looked out the window at a wall of steel, the enormous prow of a Coast Guard cutter almost in our living room. Theo's eyes got very big. Mine too. "All hands on deck. Man your stations, man. Lower the lifeboats." Wow!

They had a report of a sinking vessel and stranded passengers. A quick inspection revealed the boat to be hardly seaworthy and in violation of innumerable requirements, but we were let off with a warning, and the boat was pumped out and towed back to town. Dale went with them to make whatever arrangements were necessary, probably a reservation in Davy Jones's locker.

Theo and I being left to our own devices, we took the ratty dinghy to the end of Moser Lake where there was an underwater shelf and a good place to set a crab pot. We used a bundle of deer guts for bait, and when we pulled up the pot that afternoon, we had eighteen handsome Dungeness crabs. At home, we turned the smaller crabs loose in our cove in the hopes they would transplant. The larger ones we brought to the cabin to have crab races in the front room. Cheri asked us to quit torturing the critters and cook them. "Not torture," I said, "This is sport." She's right, I should have compassion for all sentient beings, even if life is a food chain.

Theo and I went after bottom fish. We had our fill of crabmeat and wanted a change of diet, so we got out heavy line and baited our hooks with pieces of cod. We dropped our hooks over the side of the dinghy and waited. We caught a couple of small red snappers, which we compassionately threw back. Then, I hooked onto something substantial, something that required a bit of coaxing to bring to the surface. Just below the surface, I saw a flash of its underbelly.

Having worked two seasons in the cold storage, I knew what it was. It was a halibut whale weighing, maybe, 400 pounds. Shades of Moby Dick. I looked at Theo and back at the fish. Theo looked at the fish and back at me. The fish was as big as our boat, and we were wonderstruck.

I don't know how these kinds of ideas get into my head, but I flashed that there was a shoal of gravel that extended from the mainland near where we were, and we might just be able to beach this whale. Enough meat for a battalion, but I guess the sport of the thing took possession of me.

I held the reel between my legs and rowed the dinghy towards the shoal, ready to let out line as the need arose. We were making progress, and the huge halibut was following, but as we neared the inlet where a creek fed fresh water into the bay, the fish sensed what we were up to and started to draw out more line. As we were into the shallows, I tied the fish off on a stern cleat. Mistake. The rigidity of the line caused the monster to swim for open water, taking the rear end of the dinghy with him and sinking us then and there. Lucky for us, it was in four feet of water.

I told Theo, "I don't think we want to tell Mom about this. I think we will just say we stepped into a deep puddle." This is a fish tale that grows in the telling.



WOODNOTES

*Seek to realize the self—
the way, the poets say, is difficult.*

We are situated in a cedar cabin
built on stilts over the water in a cove
a mile across Moser Lake from Deep Bay,
our mail drop, Deep Bay 99901.
Mail arrives weekly from Ketchikan,
25 miles by plane weather permitting.
Mid-winter—there is four feet of snow.

Elizabeth and baby Theo and I,
helped by friends, take to the woods
after reading Bradford Angier's
How to Live in the Woods on \$10/Week.
With my last paycheck, income tax return
and promise of employment insurance
we should make out—hoping that
by discriminating use of ecological resources
most of our material needs can be met—

Selfless means to a selfless end,
as Ghandi put it.

So, around this complex
our routine flows—all activities
merge in the pursuit, which deepens
here in Deep Bay.

Schedule remains firm.
Implementation of spiritual discipline,
Karma Yoga—wood and water
wood and water, wood and water.
Would you believe, wood and water?

Elemental—the meaning is subtle,
but we're only scratching the surface.
We have stored away necessary
supplies, several cords of wood
cut and split and stacked.
Now we improvise.

•

Awoke to a 14 foot tide, high
enough to float a forty-footer off
an abandoned logging donkey.
Tied on and rowed it to shore,
breaking a rib in the dinghy near the stern.
Tied up and came in for coffee.

Sometimes, I'm the ocean,
man-boat-ocean.
I wonder how hard the wind can blow.
Whips us from the east today.
Whitecaps in the cove, cedar bending.
Gulls motionless in the gale.
February is a windy month.

Can we use up our desires?
Not that we don't have sense cravings.
Food is Number One God here.
And Shelter.
And the twin god, a good pair of Boots.

Made a mixture of vinegar, water,
cloves, onion, garlic, salt, mustard,
sugar, ginger—for sauerbraten.
Put this mix and a venison roast
in a stoneware crock to marinate.

•

By the way, I'm told
Ramakrishna uses the simile of the ocean,
the ocean of *sat-chit-ananda*
the ocean of existence,
consciousness, bliss—dissolve
myself like a salt-doll in this ocean.

Lu Garcia writes from Berkeley,
“Things spin as they always spin.”

Jon Springer, at this time, finds it
“fetid in the Ukrainian ghetto of 6th St.

.

How did I get from selling *Berkeley Barbs*
on Telegraph Avenue to this cabin?
The old personality breaks down, and
the world becomes pure—like Blake said,
as it is in infinity.

It is curious how some moves take
years to come about, but then
done with full support of mind & body
they move forward.

.

The wind gathers strength.
As weather delays delivery of oil,
as the *Coleman* stove is in parts,
we cook over a makeshift grate
in the Yukon oil drum heater.
Elizabeth achieves bliss of sourdough
chocolate cake, cerealmate bread,
venison stroganoff, and fern fronds.

Living in the woods is a fruitcake idea.
Can others be influenced by seeing how
it's done?—expanding circle—friends,
town, state, country, galaxy, cosmos
returns me back to myself.

.

Snowflakes falling outside
and in my mind.
The temperature, 40 degrees.
Nothing sticks.

I roam the woods.
Tongass National Forest.
Sitka Black Tail Deer. Beaver. Squirrel.
A few bear.
Much spirit life.

While dark, I take to the woods.
When dawn cracks, I'm waiting.
I'm a good shot, felling my game
with a single round from a 30.30.
Death, sorrow, sort of unreal,
this tug of life and death.

Repression, exploitation—
leaving the city to avoid the establishment,
and, in turn, I become the Man.
Good weather, one clear day in thirty
in this rain forest—ego hunting—lots
of weird animals in the mind—the mind
itself a crazy monkey.

.

As I rave, the Governor of Someplace
makes money in real estate.
Dr. Leary attends Altamont, says
it is a lesson to be learned.
Theo and I float in our boat, while far away
Neil Armstrong takes his giant step.

Hunt and fish, wood and water.
Today, eight crabs in the trap.
Cut and stacked cedar blocks,
using the tide to move them to shore.
I came indoors to paint the cabinets
until Theo knocked over the paint can.
Put him down for a nap and read
a few chapters of Thomas Á Kempis.

•
Field studies:

Periculum aquillium

a perennial fern, local species “hog braken”
substitute for asparagus.

Theo gets up early to pick the frawns.

Tiarella trifoliata

Quileut “gwaqwlatcyu’l”

three leaves (*qwal*’l=3)

Chew for coughs.

Equisetum arvense

“field horsetail”

Used by Quinault to regulate menstrual flow.

While reading this aloud, Elizabeth
starts her period.

We have no ailments in the woods,
except when we go to town, we catch
the “Ketchikan crud.”

•

A whirly-twirly, sunny day.

Here it rains 200 inches a year.

10% chance of rain means 10 inches of rain.

Made ice cream and had mincemeat pie
à la mode.

Watched a sea otter dive for crab.

The sky *gualoises* blue, the water
a shade of jade and now smooth.

Buds and bugs and migrating fowl signal
Spring—

I feel like pulling the doors from the jambs,
but I’m afraid of the ceiling falling down
from a ton of newspaper & mattress insulation.

•
Cut and split another cord of wood.
Supper of red snapper filets, scalloped
spuds, and sponge cake w/berry sauce.
We haven't seen a soul on the water
for days—grooving on the isolation.

By kerosene lamp I read Lone Wolf Smith's
letters to the Daily News,
always a revelation—

*Not one new goat trail here.
What for our Poor People and trollers
more rotten Pinks from Creeks
and let Coho go?
Where o where is Gov. Hinkels
Better or Bitter way?*

•
Not sure I want improvements.
Sit and watch the deer on the beach,
watch them turn their heads, twitch
their ears suspiciously.
A little bird settles on a branch,
listen to it sing.

DEEP BAY LETTERS

ketchikan 6 oct. 68
dear dad & mom

generous rainfall for September
but then what's new?
we average 150 inches each year
21.51 inches for the month

but believe it or not, it's not
raining today—there's even sun
and though not warm, not cold
in a month we will have to have
on our heavy coats boots gloves
snow on thanksgiving
love, Rychard

Nov. 21, 1968

Dear Helen & Sam,

Richard loves the yellow shirt—it's just perfect. Theo takes his new dolly to bed every night along with 2 teddy bears & 7 blankets—they are special blankets apparently. I love the suit tho must hem it up.

Today I am going for a job interview. It's a temporary one month typist position. There will be no permanent job openings until January. I did get a very good rating with a starting salary of \$530 per month so keep your fingers crossed. Since working at the cannery I've been staying home except for a week at the local day care center. I took Theo with me of course which was nice but I'm just not suited for nursery school work & was as exhausted after 8 hours of noisy children as after 12 hours of cannery work.

Theo is really growing up. Runs all over the house & feeds himself. Very busy & loves Richard most of all. They really became friends when I was at the cannery until 10:30 every night. Went shopping & visiting together and now Theo waits by the door every night for Richard to come home. We had some pictures taken of Theo in Richard's velvet suit & will send when they come back.

Richard spent about 2 months working 10 hour days 6 day a week at the Ketchikan Daily News while new people were being trained & old employees vacationed but now he has Sunday & Monday off & is very rested. Hong Kong flu epidemic hit town but so far I've been the only victim in this house & am recovering rapidly.

We have some possible plans towards a move to Fairbanks. The University of Alaska is there & I have said that I would accept a civil service position after January. If I get one, then we'll go & Richard will finish school. He vacillates between a degree in Anthropology or Journalism. We feel Alaska is an ideal place for us to gain some maturity & get job experience. It's awfully peaceful up here & small enough to get jobs that are almost impossible outside.

—Had to stop writing to go to interview. Have job—start tomorrow. Very happy about this. Must close and mail.

Love to you all,
Elizabeth

9 december 1968
dear dad & mom

it is alternately snowing & raining...over one hundred seventy inches of rain this year, one hurricane, early snows—looks like winter here all year round....i've been idle at the newspaper, no photo work since summer...work on my "little books" continues...am working on a new book much the same as the yellow one with the bird on the cover i sent you...it will have more poems and linoleum cuts and fewer preliminary pages with new art for the cover.

Eliz. has been working at the U.S. Forestry Dept., but she wants to transfer to Fairbanks where i could go to school at U. of Ak. the trip north is difficult, a thousand miles of ice desert with few inhabitants, little or no housing once we arrive, high cost of living, etc. sure this can be worked out. i await news from the university.

love, Rich

FEB. 18, 1969
DEAR DAD & MOM

A SHORT NOTE AS HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO SEND THIS TO TOWN WITH FRIENDS. PLANS CHANGED. WE HAVE MOVED TO A CABIN IN THE TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST. FREE RENT. LOTS OF GAME. ADDRESS IS C/O DEEP BAY 99901. A MAIL PLANE LANDS ACROSS MOSER LAKE EACH WEEK. WILL WRITE MORE LATER. LOVE, RICH

Wed 19, Feb, '69

Dear Helen & Sam,

Arrived at cabin yesterday. Cold, then warm & comfortable after getting a fire lit. Evening quiet—hard to get used to the silence. Up a couple times w/Theo. Threw a log on the fire, changed his diaper aided by candlelight.

Today we swept & cleaned away years of dirt & tonight this is beginning to look like our place. Some real beauties out here, an orange writing desk with little cubby holes & drawers, suits the old typewriter which always looked like an object d'arte in our apartment on Park Street. The oil stove is not yet working but we have a Coleman stove to cook on.

A blue sky day. Swept the rugs with snow on the front deck and aired blankets and rugs. Tomorrow we'll take a walk on the beach when the tide is out. Theo spent the day mainly in his crib with toys. Was quite congested tonight but got up & ate some

popcorn cooked on the wood stove & wandered around following Richard.
More later. Love, Elizabeth

4/28/69

Dear Rich & Elizabeth,

We were so glad to hear from you and intended to write long before now but it seems so many things are going on to keep us busy that the days just fly by.

Rich, I'm sorry to hear that you are thinking of selling the car to buy a boat. It may be the right thing for you to do now but after you have lost your car you won't have any means of transportation to get back and forth to work if you do decide to leave there for someplace where you can get a steady job. I know you remember that the car cost about \$1900 and it's pretty hard to get any kind of a car that's any good for less than several hundred dollars. From what you say about the place where you are living it sounds like it would be fine for awhile (like camping out) but that you would want to get to someplace before another winter where you could have a job, a telephone, and at least electricity. Now there I go lecturing! You are both old enough to know what you want to do and you will have to live your own lives so we should not meddle or interfere. I guess it's just that we love you both and want you to be able to live and be happy and have some of the nice things of life.

Love, Dad

October 24, 1969

Dear Rich & Elizabeth:

We did so appreciate your good letters. The thoughts you expressed really inspired us. It's so nice to have children who are planning such worth while things and who have a realistic view of life with plans for the future. Rich, we know you have the ability to do anything you make up your mind to do and its wonderful that you are now regaining the self-confidence which is so necessary. Glad you realize and appreciate the help and encouragement Elizabeth has given you. Its wonderful you have a helpmate that's like your mother has been to me. The study of Anthropology sounds like an excellent idea and it seems that Alaska would be an ideal place to do some real pioneer work along that line. There should be wonderful opportunities for work on this in connection with the University of Alaska. If you can stand the cold winters there while you are completing the necessary education it seems like that would be the logical place to go because if you established a connection with that institution they would no doubt open up some avenues for that

type of work in Alaska and you might even get part time employment while you are completing your education.

I notice by the record that the University of Alaska address is College, Alaska. This may mean that it is far enough away from Fairbanks so there would be housing for students available. It would be worth checking into anyway, so why don't you write up there to get as much information as possible as to requirements for entrance, housing availability, cost of fees, etc. In fact it might not cost much more if any to go to University of Alaska than any other institution in spite of the high prices caused by the Oil boom because you have established residence in Alaska now and it is my understanding that they do not charge tuition to residents of the state. If you went to any other school outside of Alaska you would probably have to pay some pretty high fees and tuition.

Mother and I might even go up there with you and Elizabeth next spring to look the place over. We are curious to see what things are like up there and as our trip to Hawaii didn't cost anything except for some of the side trips we took while there we might just decide to do that if you think it would be a good idea. If we decided to fly, we could probably still get excursion rates in April but that might be a pretty cold time of the year there.

We think you and Elizabeth are right in your decision to keep the car as you will need it and to buy another that is in good running order would cost a lot of money. We feel, and are glad you agree, that it is more important to keep the car and pay for its repairs and also that dentist bill than to fly down here next spring. The total round trip air fare from Ketchikan to San Francisco for 2 people is \$420. So, Mother and I have talked it over and decided that by squeezing a little bit we could send the attached check for \$220 to you now so you can have the needed dental work done and buy that badly needed fuel. Our bank account is approaching zero right now even though our trip to Hawaii didn't cost us much as we have had a lot of extra expense during this past year for doctor and hospital bills. Elizabeth, we think you should be complimented for laying in those extra supplies and putting up some preserves in addition to the smoked salmon you have "laid by" for the coming winter months. This planning ahead and saving up for the future is certainly important as has been impressed on us especially since I retired and don't have that regular salary check coming in. Fortunately we did save while I was working and we should have enough to keep Mother and I the rest of our lives without being a burden on our children or anyone else if we manage carefully. We would like to help you a little bit to finish up at the University so you can qualify for work in Anthropology and I believe we can do so after you get started as by that time we should succeed in selling the few acres of mountain land which we still have out in the Calistoga Road area. We did sell the house and about 6 acres a couple years ago and only have the bare mountain land left. (Of course in the mean time we have to set aside enough money

to pay the taxes every year.)

The trip to Hawaii was most interesting. I especially enjoyed the air flight tour over all the Islands as we went directly over the volcano craters and flew low enough over all main points of interest to take pictures. A couple of hours after we passed over the volcano craters, one did erupt for several hours throwing lave 1800 feet in the air. Mother said that it was crazy of us to be flying over a volcano about to erupt. We also had the opportunity to take short bus trips on three of the islands we visited. We took the circle Island tour by bus and visited Paradise Park which has so many birds and flowers. We are enclosing a circular of the Island tour as this will give you a pretty good idea of what we saw. I also went on a boat trip to Pearl Harbor. Mother didn't care to ride on the boat, so she didn't go. It was spectacular but rather depressing to see the sunken ships and the graveyard of so many sailors. Oh yes we also went to the top of the building in Honolulu which has the revolving restaurant. It takes one hour to make the complete turn, while you are eating, and you can see and take pictures of the entire area from this height which overlooks everything.

The earthquake did more damage here in Santa Rosa than was at first estimated. Many commercial buildings and residences have been condemned and will have to be torn down. But that is a long story so will try to give you a little better picture of it at some later time. This letter is rapidly approaching the size of a book so I must shut this off for now. We liked the letter from Theo too and hope we will have the opportunity to see him next Spring.

Love, Dad

1/27/70

Dear Rich & Elizabeth,

Last week we went to the movies and saw the picture "Alaska." It was taken around Fairbanks and included many scenes in the City of Fairbanks. It was the best picture I have ever seen—beautiful scenery—pictures of hunters with their guides actually shooting all the wild game from Polar Bears to Caribou—Icebergs breaking away from the ice packs, etc.

I believe you would like it in Fairbanks and surely hope you can get lined up there at the University.

Last night Mother and I bundled up all of our accumulated magazines, and I will go to the Post Office this morning and mail them together with a book we got for Theodore, titled "Animals you will never forget." Mother is also sending a small

box.

Hope you are all well and are getting along O.K. during these winter days.

Love, Dad

2/20/70

Dear Rich & Elizabeth,

Rich, your long letter was appreciated and we're happy to hear that you have been accepted by the University of Alaska. You folks will both no doubt be busy now making your plans for the long trip to Fairbanks. We still have \$100 of the amount we agreed to send to you folks when you decided to take the money rather than making the trip down here last year. Our check book balance isn't very "fat" right now but we managed to squeeze out another \$50 now and hope we can send the other \$50 in a couple of months. So a check for \$50 is enclosed. This will at least enable you to make the \$35 room advance to the University for housing.

We hardly know what to advise you to do in regard to the car. How much do you think you could get for the car in Ketchikan? and I wonder how much you could get for it in Fairbanks if you decided to sell it when you arrived there or when school started if you drove it up there and then decided you didn't need it. I wouldn't be surprised if the cars are much higher and more in demand in Fairbanks and you might get enough more there to almost pay for your trip if the car could be got in shape to make the trip. Of course it should bring more also if put in better shape. If you did decide to take the car up there it would certainly be easier on it to take the "water way" direct to Haines from Ketchikan. It's only 364 miles of gravel road from Haines to the Alaska border and then it is only 662 miles of paved road from the Alaska border to Fairbanks. So, your car with a little more fixing might well make the trip and then you could probably in it until your University housing is available. You could also transport some things in the car.

Mother is afraid she would get sea sick on the inland water trip so we probably would go on around that long road. According to the Alaska Marine Highway Schedule as it was in 1969 it would approximately cost each of you \$27.25 fare plus \$45 for the car, a little more if the car is over 10 in length. From this time schedule (it may have changed in a year's time) you could leave Ketchikan at 4:45 p.m. on Fri June 20 and arrive at Haines at 7:30 am on Sunday morning June 22.

We have not been able so far to sell that property on Calistoga Road or the lot at Petaluma but who knows maybe things will open up next year. At any rate we will try to give you a little help at Fairbanks if we can "squeeze" our account a little more.

One thing that may help you folks is that paid up \$2000 life policy which Rich has. I believe it would have a loan value of a little over \$500 now. You can borrow on it Rich at an interest rate of 5%. This is certainly different from an actual interest rate of 10 to 20% from some of the loan companies. Also the loan on the life policy would not have to be repaid at any certain time as long as the interest was paid each year. Of course the death benefit payment of \$2000 would be reduced by the amount of the loan as long as the loan was in effect. Enclosed is a request letter. Fill out the backside in ink the way you want the beneficiaries so the policy will be ready if you want to apply for the loan at a later time.

Love, Dad

3/4/70

Dear Rich & Elizabeth,

It was good to hear from you and to know of some of the things you folks are doing. The idea of shipping the car is certainly work investigating. According to the map it looks like it would be quite a long trip by water from Ketchikan to Anchorage to make connections with the train and it would be interesting to know how much it would cost to get to Anchorage. At any event it seems to us that it would be wise to keep the car at least until you get settled at Fairbanks and find out about transportation there regardless of whether you ship it by water to Haines and then drive on to Fairbanks or possibly ship it the entire way as you have indicated is a possibility. I think we could forward the money necessary to get new tires and get the car in the shop for the road trip from Haines if you decide to do that. It's possible also that the car might bring enough more if you decide to sell it at Fairbanks to move than pay for getting it up there.

We are sending a box with powdered eggs, espresso coffee (I got some today) and Mother is putting in some jars of jam. Hope it all goes through O.K.

Love, Dad

April 23, 1970

Dear Dad & Mom

Back at the cabin. Wonderful weather, a week of sunshine. Watching some ducks in the cove. Walked up a trail near the stream to a small lake hoping to spot some geese but none in sight, so sat on a log enjoying the sun, when a big black bear

ambled up. Had my gun, so stayed real quiet and watched it forage and uproot wild cabbage. Lit a cigarette. Bear raised its head and took off into the brush. Makes my year complete. I've seen lots of sign but never met a bear in the woods. Shiny black fur. Beautiful...graceful.

The week in town was hectic. Glad we could talk with you and Bud and Mable and Vicki and Grandma Jo. Hope they had a good visit. Vicki sounds grown up. Her voice sounded like Mable's. Remember her as a little kid, and now she's talking of marriage. We accomplished a lot in town, hectic as it was. First day spent getting oriented, hard to walk on the cement, gawking in stores at all the frimfram. Colorful. Distracted by lights and noise, but soon it was like I'd never left. Began making necessary connections.

I underestimated what it would cost to fix the VW: \$441.29. Once the motor was out, there seemed to be no end of things that need repair, and it didn't seem practical to only do a partial job. The price includes new tubeless tires, snow tires on the rear, a new battery, a ring and valve job, a break job, a rebuilt carb and fuel pump, a lube job, new points, condensers and plugs, a new muffler, and some other odds and ends, like a dimmer switch and mirror. Seemed like a good time to get everything taken care of. Half the cost was labor, but to do all that work at separate times would have been a lot more. The ring and valve job was \$175 and the tires, \$120. I was in the shop the entire time and saw the condition of the motor and brakes and gave them the go ahead. I've driven the bus around, and it is in better condition than when we bought it. This is the first major expense since we've had the camper, and it should run for quite awhile. Also, I will feel confident to drive it across those 1000 miles of barren land to Fairbanks.

Bills piling up. I needed a license, and Theo needed to see the doctor. Medicine and supplies cost \$120. So, keeping \$80, I wrote a check for \$300 from the money you sent, explaining I could not pay for the tires at present. The owner of the garage knows me and will trust me to work something out by the next time we come to town. Thank you so much for your help. It is one thing to live on \$10/week in the woods and another thing to get together a grubstake for a trip to the Arctic Circle.

The freight charges are twice as much to send everything in one large container (\$31/100#) than to pack it in smaller boxes and send it through the mail, so we will begin boxing things we want to take to town. At \$13/100#, it's wiser to leave things not worth shipping behind. Will want to travel light since we will be living out of the camper, and it is a lot of work to load and unload everything to get to what we need. Will take bedding, clothes, tools (chainsaw, printing press, guns) and things which might get damaged. Books and records are heavy, but parcel post book rate is reasonable, so our friends in town can send these things later. Haven't started. Just speculating. Things always turn out different than planned. Time growing short, so moving ahead with plan.

Once we have settled everything, we will take off. Leave late June or early July, taking a couple of weeks to enjoy the trip, camping and looking over the countryside. There are ghost towns and mining villages and other places we want to visit. Theo is old enough to enjoy this. Also, would like to know a little about Fairbanks before you fly up. Then, we can be good guides during your visit. Know a few people in the area, so we won't be total strangers. Well, we've got a start. Wheels in motion. Two months go by quickly. Anxious.

Elizabeth and Theo join me in sending love,
Rich

April 30, 1970

Dear Dad & Mom

Lost another one of those fish of all time, yesterday. Friends, David, Sue, and Larry, out for the weekend, and we went fishing in their boat, know a good spot for bottomfish, and they had some lures called "crocodiles" which look more like a herring, shiny steel w/3 hooks, caught half dozen rock cod a ling cod and a couple of redsnapper, then i hooked a small "chicken" halibut, but it flipped off the hook before we could net it, kind of disgruntling until Larry hooked on to what turned out to be a small halibut whale, thought it might be a deadhead or an old anchor at first, but it jerked the line like a fish, so slowly we reeled, taking turns, until up she comes, maybe it's going to be a giant octopus, nope, a whale, and us without a gaff, I had my .22 but figured if we shot the fish, it would break the line, using 40# sport line, deciding, therefore, to drag it to shore, tried this before w/o success, but it changed directions, crossed over the boat, and broke the line

Weather staying nice, a few days of rain and then a few blue sky days, June and July supposed to be the main summer months in Fairbanks, have gotten some things packed into boxes and ready to ship, hope to get it all the packing done during the month of May, so possibly we can leave a bit earlier than planned, first part of June most likely

Trip to town on a 22 foot British sailboat, just came up from Seattle, friends asked us to go for a sail, nice to get to town w/o an outboard making noise, after 6 months in the woods it was a pleasure trip, it was more than alright

Theo has some new watercolor pens and is illustrating my letter, has tattooed himself from head to foot, his drawings improving, he went fishing with me the other day, and when we came home he drew fish, in the midst of everything the census taker flew in on a light plane, and Theo drew “flyings”

My love to you both,
Richard

May 4, 1970

Dear Dad & Mom

A calm day for the mail plane, yesterday. Took Elizabeth and Theo with me, and we had a nice outing. Came home to find a sea otter in our yard eating some fish I'd thrown to the cats. Watched it real close, from 10 feet. Inside, the mama cat had kittens on Theo's bed. He expects her to perform an encore every day. 5 babies, pure Siamese, should be no problem getting rid of them before we head north

Guess I overdid it with the car. Enclosed is the repair sheet as evidence in my defense, Money vs. Richard. My rationalizations for spending the money as I did will pan out, I'm sure. What I over-estimated was how hard it would be for me to complete all the tasks in the time frame. Some of the repairs could have been put off, but things seem to combine into one big breakdown

Hope not to get snowed my next trip to town. Looking over what we have left to do: shipping and transportation. Thinking about investing \$20 in a luggage carrier for the top of the bus and taking what we have with us, leave a lot that won't be of much use in the city, get a good price on the chainsaw, still newish. Anyhow, we can save the shipping costs and apply that to the transportation costs, this only leaving a deficit of \$141, about the cost of the tires. Can get tires on time, 18% interest, would be nice, however, to have Ketchikan cleared up before we leave, so need to ask for a few more dollars.

I am getting a clear perspective on all this. Have written to a friend who works at the Fairbanks News Miner, and he may be able to get me a part time job once we arrive. With Elizabeth's government job rating, we should both be employed while I'm going to school. Once we're back in the system, we should be able to pull our own weight.

Ducks in the cove diving for herring, and an eagle circles overhead. Hate to give up my life in the woods. Theo can now make his own bed, not real neat but correctly, have to teach him to make the coffee, all in time

My love to you both,
Richard

5/6/70

Dear Rich & Elizabeth

I read the last part of that big book you folks sent us on Alaska and I was surprised to see the pictures with trees around the college and around Fairbanks. I don't know where I got the idea that the area was so far north that it was practically treeless. Guess I was thinking about reports I read calling the area about 400 miles north of Fairbanks where oil was discovered as barren and without trees. So, maybe you will have use for the chain saw after all and if you find you don't need it anymore you can probably get just as much or more for it in Fairbanks as you could get in Ketchikan. Remind me in the future not to make suggestions or present ideas that I don't know enough about. By the way Rich would you like to have that 30.06 with scope that I have? Might be better than the 30.30 for larger game around Fairbanks. If so probably I could bring it on the plane when we visit.

Love, Dad

11 May 1970

Dear Dad & Mom

Your letter w/check arrived in the Wednesday mail, holding onto the check until we go to town, probably when we are finally on our way to Fairbanks. Have received a letter from Kristi-lee in Fairbanks. Discouraging news about work, but she says we have better chances being Alaskans than for those coming from outside. The pipeline has been delayed until the land claims have been settled, will check with the financial aid department at the university. What with one lead enthusiastic and another dark, I will take my chances.

A trio of ravens are perched on a log outside the window talking in the rain, and is it

coming down, April showers bring May monsoons. Again, sea otter in the yard, beautiful creatures with luxurious fur, webbed feet in the back and claws on the front, head like a seal, tail like a dog, wonder if you could turn one into a pet, train it to retrieve salmon, anyway, watching it chomp fish heads, then dive under the house and back into the cove.

Deer are dropping their fawns, have to discontinue venison diet in favor of fish and seafood. Dug a bucket of clams, good size, not hard digging, went fishing with Theo and caught a redsnapper, 2 nice filets, and the carcass turned into soup thickened with potato buds, fish chowder according to recipe from Mrs. Clifford, Mr. & Mrs. Clifford a couple of old sourdoughs who live in a cabin where we pick up the mail, uuuuummm Theo says, and he's right. The old couple are great neighbors, a great help to us, never offer advice unless we ask, and then the advice is always "more than one way to filet a fish" practicable.

Could use more powdered eggs, and I would appreciate another can of that espresso, and for pant size, try 31 X 31. The plum jam is great.

Love to you both,
Rich

May 14, 1970

Dear Dad & Mom

Friends visiting over the wkend took the mail to town, so I thought I'd write another letter, which I will send via the mailplane on Wednesday. Can't quite believe the weather we've been having the last couple of days, warm, almost balmy, blue-skydays. A bit overcast today, but only 5% chance of miserable precipitation forecast, temperatures in the high 50s.

Eliz. went fishing Sunday and caught a little halibut, which I threw in the cooking pot and boiled with chowder makings, deep fat fried some clams and sauted some fern frawns, tips of baby ferns which taste somewhat like asparagus, these fern frawns are profuse in back of the cabin.

A couple of does ventured down to the beach across the way and hung around for quite awhile. With the heavy winter the year before last, the hunting season last year

was not the best. Since the deer were forced to the beaches, the wolves had easy pickings. The deer yesterday looked healthy, about to drop, so the herd is on the rebound.

Finally I can eat beets, not raw or stewed but cooked as borsch, a Russian soup our friend Mimi prepares, made from her grandmother's recipe, inexpensive and wholesome. Great!

Daffodils are springing up in the yard. Turned over some soil to stimulate the sourgrass, a wild, tangy grass we use to make salads, one of the first things to sprout, grows in abundance. Bear sign in the woods behind the house. They diet on skunk cabbage at this time of the year, then switch to berries, then to salmon. Already there are tiny, shiny fingerling salmon flitting and glinting hithertherherwhither in the cove.

Been trying my hand at pie baking lately, so far had success with pumpkin, Danish Junket, and peach.. Have an "authentic" Eskimo cookbook, too. Most of the recipes call for seal oil. Were we to stay another season, might get one, hair seal come into the cove, and try some Oogruk or Ee-tee-yait' or Meloogutdut or even some Ah-lowe-kuk. Mmmm.

Still boxing stuff, looking over maps, in general preparing for the trek north. Hope this letter finds you in good spirits. Theo will illustrate this with his crayons.

Love, Rich

Tuesday

Dear Helen and Sam,

The weather is warmer every day. I have lots of extra time now and have been baking and then sitting and crocheting. Must cut down on this and get outdoors and walk or I'll get fat. The plum jam you sent is so delicious. I have been making jam-filled cookies and a couple of yeast roll braids filled with jam and frosted. The braid I made with whole wheat flour was, surprisingly, the best of all.

Last weekend we had visitors. Sunday morning I went out fishing with them and

when I got back Richard had straightened up the cabin and swept and washed dishes and baked a HUGE peach pie. It was perfect too. Everyone was amazed.

Theo is now old enough to play on the back porch where there is dirt to dig and lots of room to run his trucks. Sometimes we disconnect the hose from the stream and he fills buckets and sets up complicated arrangements with funnels and strainers. He comes in to check on us about every five minutes and if he doesn't we check on him. He's much happier now that he can get outdoors and play.

I certainly am looking forward to Fairbanks and modern conveniences. I think hot running water and laundry facilities are the most exciting of all. We don't mind camping from the VW bus at all. In fact we're very excited about driving up there. We know a couple that made the trip last July and they say that the camp grounds across from the University of Alaska campus are quite pleasant. That's where we plan to stay until we find suitable housing. Theo was amazed to find out that his daddy owned a big blue truck the last time we were in town. I'm not at all worried about camping with Theo as he already understands about not getting too close to fires or jumping into streams.

I just sent a batch of things I made into town. I am most optimistic about some hats that I crochet of cotton and rayon rug yarn. I used bright colors and made tams and hats with wide brims. Sue (who took them to the store for me) loved them all. Hope other people do too. I made one shell stitch vest, one (very simple) lacy dress, one lacy poncho/cape and one child's poncho of orlon acrylic.

Now I can only wait and see what sort of things people like. It is difficult to get yarn here although I have gotten what I wanted from the local yarn shop. Wanted to order through Sears as they are less expensive but they sent my money back the last order I made and said to try again in 20 days. Do you know anything about the new Phentex no-stretch yarn? The bikini pattern in the last McCalls Needlework Book looked like something the young girls might buy.

I certainly hope I find a job to wear the clothes you are planning to make. It will be nice to wear dresses again. I do wear the pretty stretch slacks you sent at Christmas with the turtleneck pullovers when people come out on weekends when the weather is good. Gets lots of compliments and they wash beautifully and dry so fast.

The dried eggs you have been sending work beautifully. I can even use them in baked custards. Right now I have 3-4 weeks worth left.

We bought Theo a pair of tennis shoes when we were in town. We will likely need another pair in a month or so (this pair was size 8½ but wish I'd bought 9's as they shrink when washed). Size 9½ is probably what he'll need. He is still wearing the boots you sent last year and has a very similar pair in the next larger size that my sister sent up from L.A. which look like they've never been worn either.

My mother sent Theo one of the acrylic jump suits with long sleeves and a zipper. Am sort of testing it now and if it works we'll try to get several for the trip as they can be used for play and pajamas and later in the year would be good long underwear. A real multiple-use garment. Richard thinks they're silly but he does agree they are practical.

Theo is napping so I think I'll sneak out for a walk to the creek to pick fern fronds. They really are delicious and fresh for a change.

Love, Elizabeth

Deep Bay
22 May 1970

Dear Dad & Mom

Been nothing but raining all week %#@*&/\$(“+ plus making matters worse the outboard engine slipped off the back of the boat and fell in the water. Managed to retrieve it when the tide went out and have taken it apart and cleaned it up, have gas and spark again, but still unable to get them together. Our neighbors, Mrs & Mrs Clifford, began to wonder why we hadn't come for our mail, so they brought it over, and with his help, he being a retired mechanic, he gave me a few tips. The damn thing isn't worth much, have kept it running all year with bobbypins and rubberbands, but want it to last until we leave. It is not impossible to row across Moser Lake, about a mile, have done it a couple of times, and it just takes time is all, but now that I've taken the engine apart and put it back together, it's only a matter of adjustments, and the motor will run. Yes, it will.

The pants you sent are lovely. One pair were long, which I'll send back. It'll soon be time to trade in my bearskins for school clothes. Thank you also for the instant espresso. Great to make a quick cup. Does the store carry regular grind, think “Motta” is the brand you sent last time? Thanks again.

Elizabeth is crocheting things to sell, has already sold a purse, a couple of hats, a poncho and a vest. Sending a hat she knit which I thought Mom might like, a present for your birthday.

Still no news from the employment people at the University. A letter from Kristi-lee living near Fairbanks says she will look for housing for us and keep an eye out for jobs, say that unemployment is high and housing in short supply, but I'm confident we'll find what we need. Foodstamps should carry us through for grub enroute, can eat sandwiches on the ferry for a couple of days, and then cook out while driving the Alkan. Thanks for the tarp, will cover the crack, shouldn't run into much rain after we leave the Ketchikan rain forest.

Elizabeth is busy making Grandma Stegner's drop donnuts. Theo is playing with his kittens. Intermittent sunshine at the moment, but it won't last long. Ducks in the cove, but on the whole, it is pretty quiet. Daffodils bloom in the yard where Theo plays with his trucks and where he picks fern fronds for supper, knows exactly which ones to pick. Have been thinking of hunting up a small deer and smoking some jerky for the trip, but the weather is bad, will wait and see.

Radio says the State passed a bill to set up booths to discourage people from coming to Alaska for work. At the moment, the oil works have been held up until the land claims are settled. The State is suffering very high unemployment, near 20%, but they are offering jobs to Alaskans, first and only. Have to wait and see. Doesn't worry me much, have always been able to talk my way into a job. Eliz. and I both have work experience and different qualifications. Somebody has to do the work, and it can just as well be us. Besides the statistics are confusing, a man here can be living off the land and still be considered unemployed. Living here has changed my perspective. There are more avenues open to me that just weren't there before. Having alternatives gives me confidence.

Not sure what my academic standing is, but since I was accepted without probation of any kind, I assume my credits transferred. My grades at Cal and Cal Poly must've added up to a reasonable grade point average. Hard to believe since I left Berkeley with an 0.9.

I still need languages and history to get my degree. A good deal of English and Philosophy under my belt. Expect I need at least a year of classes, maybe two. Maybe study anthropology. So, around this complex, my routine flows, all activities merging in the pursuit.

My love to you both, Rich

May 27, 1970

Dear Helen & Sam,

Richard wrote you this week, I think, but I wanted to tell you the boat motor is fixed, which makes us very happy & the sun came out this afternoon after what must be WEEKS of dreary weather. If the sun shines tomorrow, we will go to get the mail & then to a nearby island to dig clams & picnic.

Theo loves the sweater you knit him & so do I— It's darling. I love the bra-slip too, a great invention. Thank you so much.

We were glad that the slacks that fit Richard were the ones you got on sale. They do fit well & are a nice color too. Strange that the others were large. Did Richard say he wanted no cuffs, continental, I think it's called?

It is light almost all the time, until 11:30 pm, now. Last night we went to bed without lighting the lamps at all. Guess it will really be light all the time in Fairbanks this summer.

Hope you are all well.

Love, Elizabeth

DeepBay

DeepBay

yea yea

DeepBay

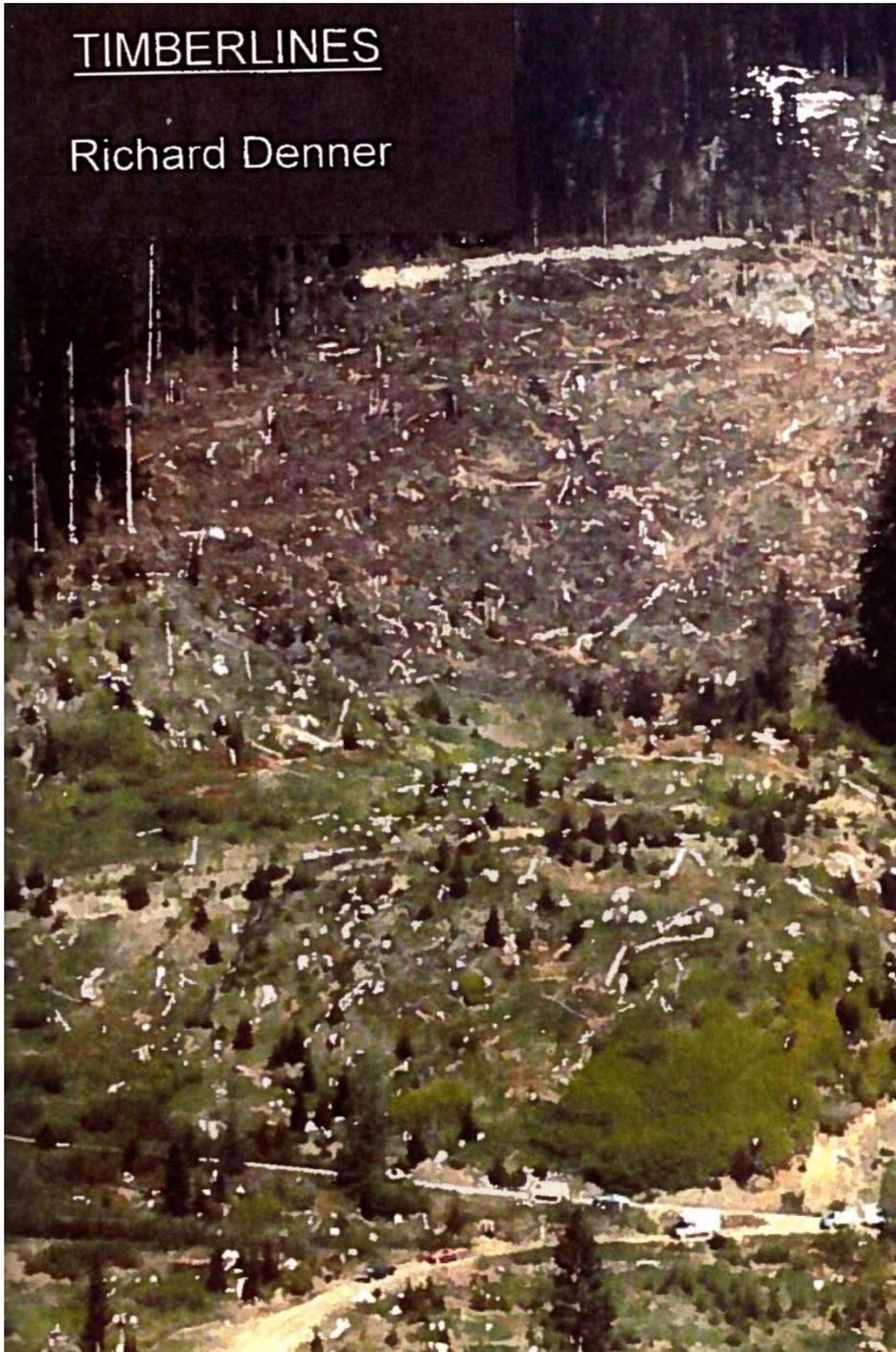
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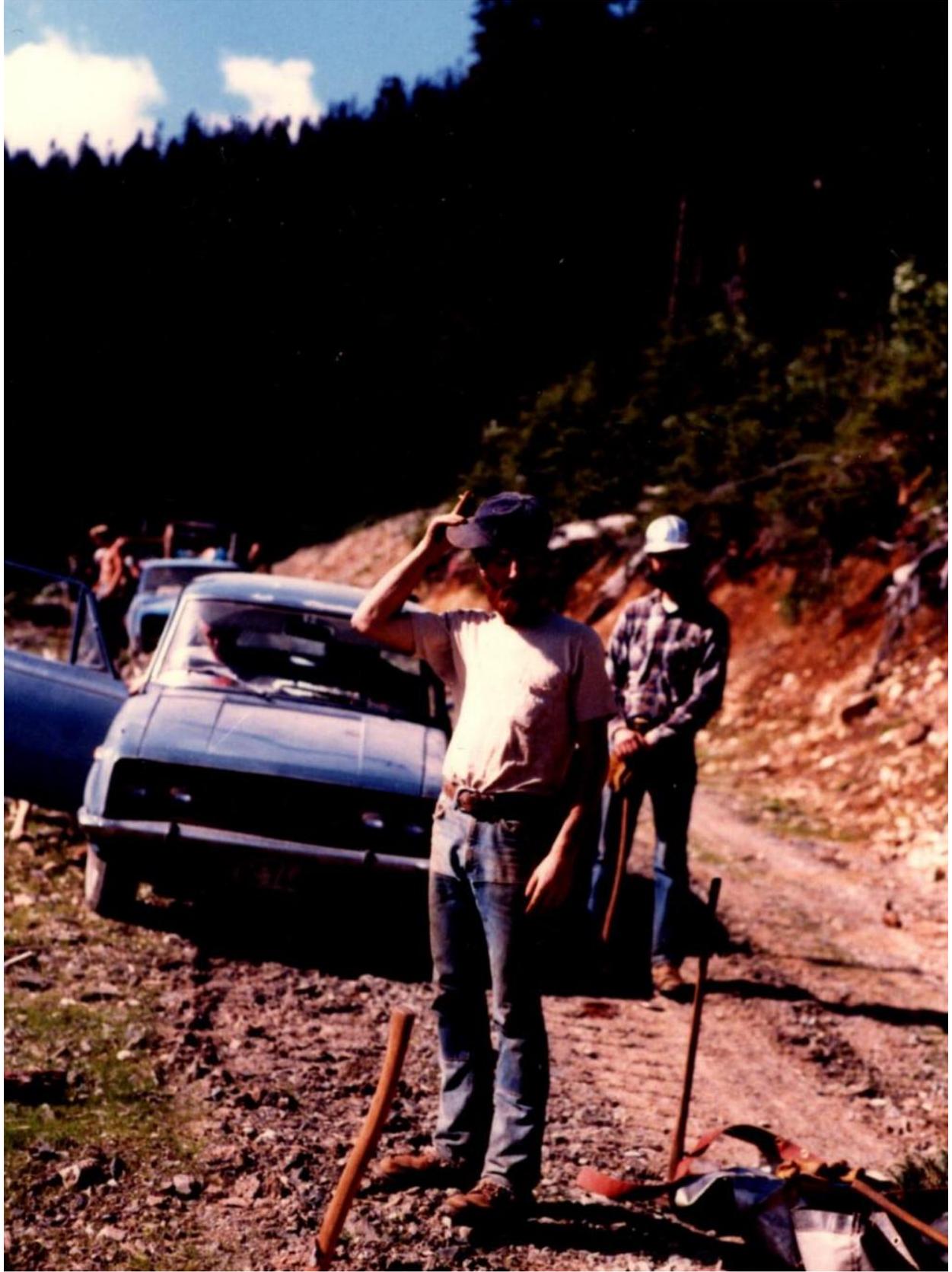


ZIP: 99901

TIMBERLINES

Richard Denner





TIMBERLINES

RICHARD DENNER

D PRESS

2004

SEBASTOPOL



FOREWARD by Bouvard Pécuchet

Heal your world. Plant a tree. Richard Denner ran a small, independent bookstore for twenty years in Ellensburg, Washington, and he subsidized it for fifteen of those years by planting trees every spring. During that time he worked for two companies, Eastern Washington Reforestation and T.G.T.B.T. Eastern Washington Reforestation was structured like a co-op, although legally it was a partnership, and they had to appoint someone on the crew to sign their contracts. Davy Simkins signed one contract as Galactic Emperor and another as Galloping Antelope. The name Eastern Washington Reforestation was a bit misleading since most of Eastern Washington is a desert.

T.G.T.B.T., Too Good To Be True, was a legal partnership run by Don Schroder and Doug Mitchell, and they picked up the pieces of Eastern Washington Reforestation after it dissolved. For the most part, the group contracted with the U.S. Forest Service, and most of their planting was in the state of Washington, in the districts of Ellensburg, Chelan, Okanogan, Entiat, Mt. Baker, and Wenatchee, but some treeplanters planted year-round, going east to Utah and Montana and south to Oregon and California.

There is an art to treeplanting. First, a new planter is told that “the green

side goes up.” Some never get it. It is a mystery, and like in a mystery novel, there is an inspector and a plot the inspector inspects. There are scores for planting too high, too low, too close, too loose, for planting in duff, for how you make a scalp. And then there is the dreaded “J root.” The less said about J roots the better.

I know in the effort to save the planet, treeplanters are thought to be on the front lines, but treeplanters are the lowliest vermin in God’s creation. Many a boss goes down to Skid Row to pick up a couple of drunks and takes them into the woods wearing their street shoes and gives them a bag and a dag and sends them into the slash to prove to the inspector that he has a full crew. Such a worker might complain: “Hell, this ain’t a forest, it’s a toilet paper farm.” True enough, there’s nothing really romantic about treeplanting.

Richard says, “I remember moving camp after planting all day and pitching my tent in an arroyo and waking up with a river running through my sleeping bag, getting up to a breakfast of whiskey and scrambled eggs, and then fishtailing it up a logging road at dawn with AC/DC blasting from the speakers to slam a few trees into some rocky slope in a downpour, or sitting in a hot springs among ancient cedars and coming back the next year to find a gurgling mudhole in a clearcut.”

For six years after a ferocious forest fire, Richard and his friends planted Silver Basin in the Entiat Valley. Then, after another eight years, they came back, and for a year they thinned the trees they had planted, and then, the following year, the valley burned again. Here is a true lesson in impermanence.

Richard says, “I figure, on an average, I planted 500 trees per day for 30 days per year for 15 years. I calculate that to be about a quarter of a million trees. I guess I’ve helped the planet. I guess I’ve guaranteed there will be pulp to make paper to replace some of what the book industry uses every day. I suppose a forest planted in rows is better than no forest at all. I look at Mt. Rainier, as I fly over it, and I realize it would be hard to get lost in this so-called wilderness. You would only have to walk a mile in any direction to find a logging road.” True enough, anyone on a vision quest is going to be checkmated before he or she even gets started.

Richard has set choker with loggers who want to see the last tree felled, and he has hugged trees with environmentalists who want zero cutting. He knows that a war between tree huggers and tree cutters serves no purpose. He estimates it will take a trillion trees to restore the forests, and he

admonishes us, “If we are going to continue to cut, we need to catch up. On God’s green earth, only a human can plant a tree.”



STUBBORN LUMBER

Can there be emptiness without awareness?

Imagine a tree falling and no one hearing it.
Imagine, also, its twisted limbs.

The trees arrange themselves—I don’t
have anything to do with this.

Sun and moon, day and night,
the trees follow me.

Imagine them growing.
Imagine no one hearing them.

If you open the door to knowledge—remember,
the peanut butter is
on the shelf in the door.

TIMBERLINES

Should Anarchists have
Forest Service contracts?
Only if they can sign their names.

Davy signs *Galloping Antelope,*
Galactic Emperor, Son of Earthworm.

This contract is 67 acres,
a diamond on Big Hill.
We awake at 6, bag up at 7,
climb a mountain of burns & bramble.

Green fire—the image leaps out

as the ashes choke us. Who are
these people to whom we entrust
our forests, this crew who sings,

When my work is over,
I'm going to fly away home?

we're paid to plant a tree,
and we'll come back
and back again until it grows

the trees—
out of their depth
with this logic,
driven around in vans,
debated about like dots on a map

Go Fir It Reforestation
in the Land of Many Abuses

we're trying to plant in a week
what destroyed in a day
took 1000 years to grow

GREEN FIRE

Green fire is the future.
The spike brambles and the mountain
of burns recede, and an oasis of trees
arises from the ashes.

There's no way into the future
but flight—take off
from the tallest Doug Fir
and spread your tail feathers.

Take a turn and look
at the next century—hope
for the next century—turn again.
Can this be easily managed?

BELIEVE ME, LAURA

while listening to children
singing and swinging in a tree, I think
a good treeplanter
can be comfortable even in Hell.



HEART'S TIMBER

I see you in profile in this moonlit rock
at the edge of the cut bank near Ardenvoir.
Lady of My Thoughts, honor and praise,
your image powers my work.

A dead forest is a strange place

to be in evening dress—beautiful
intensities—the field vibrating
with the spirits of young trees.

Two-year-old Ponderosa pine,
2-0's, there're trying, but it's hard.
Underground, the work gets done,
a whispered *OM* to go on.

WHERE ON THE PAPER CHAIN ARE YOU?

Flaky footing on the high unit
wind cold, cold snow at 4000 feet a bitch
but it packs well around the pine plugs
above Indian Creek in the rocky outcroppings
not a forest, a farm, slash and burn, a war

We're riding in a crummy
an orange International van beat to shit
the bad karma tipi that takes us to work
we've named it *L.A.*
so we can drive to work in *L.A.*

I want my forest cut into chips
so my grandchildren can have toilet paper

On the other hand, we need air
and the mountains need cover
and the animals need homes
no matter if they're in rows

Breathe into the pain
or step out of the way

WHEN YOU GET THERE

Tree planting on Mount Baker
this contract is 180 acres
long with diamond shapes
known as *Dragon Tail*

I fly high, I fly low
at Concrete Sauk Valley Road
one mile to orange bridge
turn left follow river
to Finney Cumberland Road
turn right single lane with turnouts
6 miles tall tree on left
with winding road sign
8 miles bridge with guard rails
9 miles small clearcut with twisted culverts
10 miles waterfall on right
mile 11 turn right up hill at white stop sign

When I arrive, I'm no longer lost
what I've lost I find everywhere



PLANTING THE BLAST

On the moonscape
of Mount Saint Helens
I've developed a new technique
I call the *pumice pump*

Place the tree roots on the ash
place the hoe on the roots
and push the roots straight down

Speed planting the last ash unit
trying to get the trees in straight
over-planting every plot

and praying the roots
find something to live on

Some trees I named for Bongnan
some for Lulu
some for the protectors
of this silicon mountain

Putting the right tree in the right hole
while picking rocks out of my nose
made of snot and volcanic ash

The inspector turns up
“Stop, stop, don’t throw those rocks
down the slope, you’re hurting the trees.”

Fantasy of tying the inspector
to the hood of the van
as a trophy

Lost in a pause
where should I be on the unit?
I should be on the line—
always a mystery

Outside the orbit of stars
lost and found inside
myself
creation arises and dis-
solves
in
a magical display

On to the next unit



PLANTING THE BLAST

Theodore Dylan Denner was a more reasonable name to give to a boy than Allen Ginsberg Denner. Hippies bestowed weird names. Cheri and I decided on *Theo* because we had an attachment to the name of the trawler that carried cargo between Ketchikan and Matanuska Island in Alaska.

Our experience with the trawler began after Cheri had gotten off work as a barmaid at the Frontier Bar. We walked down to the pier and cuddled on the deck of the *Theo* and drank from a bottle of wine. Then, we made love under the stars. The waves lapped the hull. The deck smelled of fish. It was heaven.

Cheri had a great uncle named Theo. Theodore Palm was a poet in Stockholm, and there was a family legend that he walked off the end of a pier into the bay because he was engrossed in his reading of Shakespeare. He was the brother of August Palm, a revolutionary, who brought Socialism to Sweden in the 1880s.

Theodore in Greek means *Gift of God*. It is also composed of the article *the*

and an o—The O—has a Zen “ring” to it. Dylan is, of course, the last name of the folksinger, Bob Dylan, as well as the first name of the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, whose name Bob expropriated. *Dylan* is Welsh for devil. A Gift of God Devil—Theodore Dylan is a mixture of light and darkness.

Today, Theo operates the Fourwinds Bookstore and Café in Ellensburg, Washington, which I sold to him before I left for Tara Mandala Retreat Center in Pagosa Springs, Colorado. Theo is a hardworking businessman and husband and father of four. He is respected in his community, but there was a time when he was the “terror of the town.”

One night, Theo showed up and asked if he could borrow some money. Said he had to leave town in a hurry. I didn’t ask why. Whereas my dad always came to my aid out of a sense of duty, I often helped my son out of a sense of guilt. My dad did not understand my behavior, but he felt a responsibility towards me. Theo was like me, and I could see he was having the same problems with the Law.

I was in the mood for an adventure, and I asked Theo if he would like some company—a father and son on the lam is the image I had. We took the orange International van I had been awarded in my divorce settlement with Alia. This vehicle is what the treeplanters call a “Crummy.” It had a strong engine and lots of room. I had lived in it and hauled crews of treeplanters around logging roads. It would get us to California.

We threw some belongings in the back and crept out of town, as the rosy finger of dawn tickled the sleeping town awake. Theo’s plan was to start a new life on the mean streets of an Oakland crack neighborhood. I expected he had a romantic notion of being a big time dope dealer. I was raised in Oakland. I graduated from Oakland High School. Hell’s Angels, Black Panthers, the Raiders—a tough town. Berkeley was more my style, but I was just along for the ride.

I hoped Theo would see the light of reason once we arrived at our destination, but for the time being, I would smooth the way with the food and gas money. When we hit a pit stop, I phoned a friend to run my bookstore until I returned.

On this occasion, I didn’t stop to visit my folks in Santa Rosa. We drove straight to Berkeley and hooked up with my old friend and mentor, Luis Garcia. Lu said he had a friend in Oakland who had a painting studio in the kind of neighborhood Theo was looking for. Eric’s studio was in West Oakland, and when we got there, there was a full-scale gun battle in progress between the Oakland Police and an army of crack dealers. Welcome to the neighborhood.

Eric let us into his studio. His windows were barred, and his door was an

assemblage of locks and chains. We hung out for the day, and Eric showed us his paintings. We smoked some pot and drank a little wine, while the gun battle raged outside.

The wisdom of older heads prevailed, and Theo realized that in comparison to this ring of the Inferno, Ellensburg was not such a bad place to live, even if he needed to cool his heels for a while. When, the gunfire subsided, Theo and I pulled out of the war zone and pointed the International north.

We stopped to sleep in the back of the van at a rest stop, but a sheriff roused us and sent us on our way. Our plan was to join T.G.T.B.T. on the slopes of Mt. Saint Helens. We knew they were on the backside of the mountain pumping plugs into the volcanic ash.

Outside Roseburg, Oregon, the engine developed an ominous noise. I'm not sure how long the engine had been low on oil, but the light flashed and the rods began a persistent knock. Maybe I was tired of a truck that reminded me of my ex-wife. Maybe I was just tired.

Theo asked what the noise was, and I told him it was the sound of the engine about to blow. He asked if we should stop, but I told him I wanted him to have the experience of driving the truck into oblivion, to hear what it sounded like when a piston cracked the engine block. We drove with the banging and clanging getting louder. When the engine gave out, we coasted to a halt along the side of the road. It was a foggy night, and we were both exhausted. I gave Theo a blanket, and he curled up on the front seat, and I curled up with a blanket in the back.

We tried to sleep, but the passing trucks rocked us awake, and we dozed fitfully. When it became light, I sat up and looked out the window. There was a dense Oregon fog surrounding us. A few feet ahead, a road sign: Seattle, 262 miles, Curtins, 2 miles. Theo looked at me and said, "Well, it looks like Curtins for us."

It didn't take long to hitch a ride. We landed at a gas station and explained our situation to the attendant. He directed us to a garage mechanic who had a tow truck. When he got the *International* into his shop, the diagnosis was that the engine was totaled.

There was a Greyhound Bus Terminal down the road, but the last northbound bus for the day had left. I saw a *For Sale* sign in the window of a battered *Fiat* by the side of the garage. The mechanic said he would take \$300 and the remains of my truck. We shook hands, exchanged pink slips, and we were on the road, again, headed toward Mt. Saint Helens.

Mt. Saint Helens erupted on May 18, 1980. The eruption sent a half-million tons of ash into the stratosphere, ash that was measured 900 miles to the east and 100 north in Ellensburg. That morning, I looked out the window and

wondered why there was a sunrise in the south. Alia and I drove out into the country to get a better look at a very dark cloud advancing over Umptanum Ridge. The air was filled with electricity, and the cloud began to move with creeping fingers around the perimeter of the valley. Lightning bolts struck the ridgeline. Then, the ash began to drop, and it had the stink of sulfur.

We stopped at a friend's farmhouse. No one was home, so I helped myself to some water to wash off the windshield. When the water hit the windshield it caked into a sort of plaster, and that is when I really started to worry. A pickup passed, and ash billowed into the air. Thus far, there was only a film of dust on the car, but I had read that in Pompeii it got several feet deep. We drove on back roads to Ellensburg. I could barely see my hood ornament, let alone see if a car was coming. I did see a Highway Patrol car with lights flashing and siren blaring go by with a hose poked out from under the hood. When we reached town, the ash cloud thinned, and we crossed the avenue, parked and dashed inside our house.

Later, I walked across the street to a supermarket to get some supplies. It was quite a scene. People in different outfits—a man with a towel over his head, wearing swimming goggles with a case of beer, another man with a surgical mask carried an umbrella, a woman in a burnoose had a bundle which I assumed was a child.

We listened to a recording of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* and let the pyroclastic debris settle on our town. The next morning, there was a gray pallor to everything, and we decided to flee the Burg. We got in the *International* and headed to Cle Elum to plant trees. When we were out of town and on the highway north, we looked back and saw a gray blanket where normally we would be able to see the fields and roads of Kittitas Valley.

So now, Theo and I were planting the backside of the volcano, where a forest had been cremated by hot gases. The trees were blown over and burnt to a crisp. There was two feet of volcanic pumice on the ground, and the landscape was a barren moonscape. An occasional wildflower was the flora; a single spider represented the fauna.

We joined the crew outside the village of Cougar and set up our tents at a Forest Service campground. Theo appointed himself cook. He got up early and prepared a four-star breakfast with a side of *Jack Daniels*. Then, we fishtailed our way up the winding logging roads with AC/DC blasting from the car speakers.

Planting the blast, I developed a new planting technique I called the "pumice pump." I placed the tree roots on the ash, placed the hoedag on the roots, and pushed the roots straight down, sinking the tree past the collar into the needles. After I removed my hoe, I pulled the tree up slightly to straighten

the root ends. A hole dug in the ash filled up as fast as you dug it, so this method allowed us to put the trees into the ground with minimal damage to the tree and still pass inspection.

We were in camp when some people from Arkansas arrived. They said they were looking for a Mexican crew. There might have been a Mexican crew on the mountain, but I didn't know where. We needed help, so they were hired. Two men, two women, a baby, and a pit bull. They were driving a black *Pontiac* fastback. It was obvious that they are newbies because they didn't have the right gear.

To get them started they were given an advance against their wages. They drove to Cougar and returned with a tent, raingear, and a *Coleman* stove and lantern. I had a frustrating day training these guys. At one point, I was so deranged from showing them how to follow the line, that I climbed up on a stump and shouted that if they didn't get it right, I would shove a hoedag up my ass.

Returning to camp, we passed through Cougar and spotted their *Pontiac* sitting by the road with the hood up. We stopped and were surprised to find the had engine burned. When we got back to camp, the women told us they had driven to town to get some diapers, and as they were pulling into the gas station, the car burst into flames. Apparently, one of the guys had unscrewed the gas line to drain some gas to prime a campfire, and he reattached the line insecurely. Gas had poured over the engine and caught fire, and the fire had burned up the wiring and melted everything that was made of plastic.

The next morning, Theo told me that both women had black eyes. Later, he found that his tape collection and a carton of cigarettes were missing. He had noticed several packs of his brand on the dashboard of their burned car, and he insisted something be done about this scene.

Doug and Don, the bosses, decided to cut their losses and let these guys go. However, without a car, it didn't seem they could go far. I decided I'd sell the *Fiat*, cheap. They had a couple of hundred dollars in wages coming, after deducting their draws, and I took \$150 and a *Coleman* lantern for the car, considering it a good deal to get away from these walking soap operas.

The *Fiat* had been trouble from the start. The brake lights would go on when you put on the blinkers, and the headlights blinked when you put on the brakes. This was ok in the daytime, but I didn't want to try driving at night. And then, there was the problem of the tires.

The roads around Mt. Saint Helens were covered with glass-like shards of volcanic rock. On one occasion, I had two flat tires at the same time. I had planted to the top of the unit and driven one of the cars to bottom, about three miles, and by the time I had gotten the *Fiat* in position to pick up some of the

crew, I had a flat tire and no spare. I climbed back up the mountain and took a set of keys from a planter for his car and drove it down the mountain to find I had two flat tires and no spare. Fortunately, the tires on the *Fiat* fit the wheels of the second car, so I changed the flats, took a second tire for a spare, and all six planters piled into the *Fiat* to ride to camp.

One of the men fixed the *Fiat's* wiring. They loaded some gear on the roof and tied the rest to the top of the trunk. They fit the women, the baby and the pit bull into the cramped interior and drove away. They drove around the campground with the pit bull's head sticking out the window and both the guys flipping us the bird. Their exit was really upbeat. We were glad they were going, and they were leaving in a clown car with a fine display of sentiment.

Next—what to do for transportation?



 **USGS**

USGS Photo by Austin Post, May 18, 1980

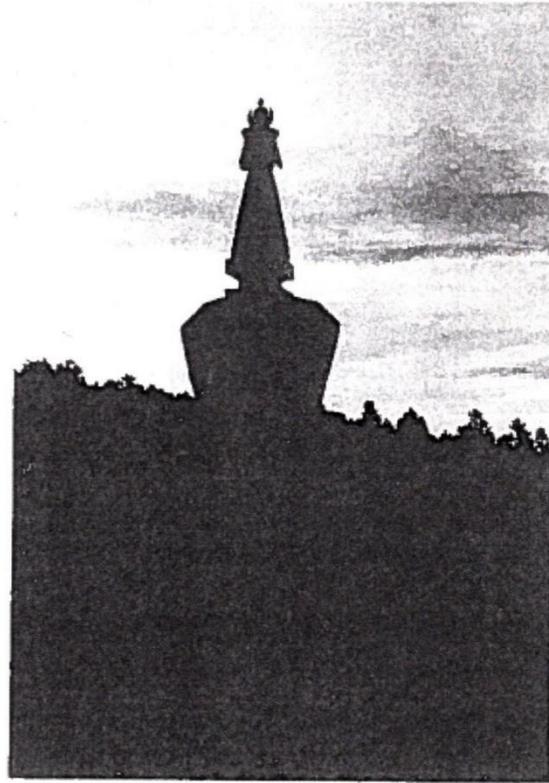


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USGS Photo by Lyn Topinka, August 1984

A View from Ekajati
Three Stories *by*
Jampa Dorje





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VAJRA DANCE MANDALA ODYSSEY

Five weeks should be enough time to overcome all obstacles and paint the dance mandala. I am a volunteer at Tara Mandala, a Tibetan Buddhist retreat center, located near Pagosa Springs, Colorado. I glue together several lengths of a building material called tyvec and then cut the tyvec to fit the circular dance platform. I start at the center and paint outward, laying down a coat of color—Jade Green, Royal Blue, Medallion Yellow, Summer Red—straightening the lines, cutting the darker colors into the lighter in increasingly larger circles. I follow my plan. I’m adding color to another ring, now, cutting in the fifth ring, the green against the red, roughly one hundred feet of curved line along the outside, when it starts to rain, and the rain makes the paint run, and I must roll up the mandala. There’s not much I can do but head for cover. When the storm subsides, I unroll the mandala and look at the splattered mess—blue and yellow making a yucky green, red and yellow making an awful orange. This is not my plan.

This is a lesson in impermanence. When it dries, I’ll repaint it. And it dries, and I repaint it. And I’m proud of my work. The next morning, after our work meeting, I take my teacher, Tsultrim, up the hill to show her the mandala, the luxurious colors, the clear lines. I’m gesticulating with both hands as we crest the hill and see the mandala scrunched up in the middle of the platform with a coat of frost still glistening in the morning sunlight. We approach quietly and look at this tossed and twisted agony of a shape. I can see the paint is cracked and peeling, and my eyes well with tears when Tsultrim says, “You’ll just have to start over.”

Yes, Marpa. And Milarepa puts his rocks back where he got them and begins another building. I stretch out the mandala and put down more rocks around the edge and

get out my pocketknife and start scraping the torn paint and sanding the edges and filling the gaps with caulk and coating the patches with primer and repainting the color and making the lines clean. At the next work meeting, I report that in another day, if the weather holds, I'll be back to where I was three weeks earlier. The weather does hold, and I paint my way into the outer rings. Then, one morning on my way to practice, I look down the hill and realize the mandala is missing. I run down the hill to the dance platform and discover an upturned can of paint still dripping through the boards and the mandala and the plastic milk container with the other cans of paint in a heap in a ditch by the pond. I pull it up and find another mess of spilled paint and twisted fabric. Yes, Marpa, I know, put the rocks back and begin again. This must be an important test of some kind. Tsultrim suggests I do the Long Protectors' Practice.

The Dharmapalas, the mountain gods, are unhappy with me and don't want me disturbing things in this location. I had better get myself aligned with the forces at play if I'm ever going to finish this project. So, I sit by our stupa, a reliquary, and burn juniper and do the practice every day. "Eight classes, all-powerful guardians, I speak to you, please accept these clouds of desirable objects, filling the sky! Magnify all that is wholesome, pacify all that is bad! Be of service day and night and fulfill my wishes, easily, swiftly!"

I spread out the mandala and secure it with strips of lath, which is what I should have done in the first place. Only there's no *should*. I'm learning, and now I know, and now it's done, and I clean up the mess and start again. The mandala is covered with patches of white paint and looks apoplectic when Tsultrim returns from a trip to Santa Fe. She looks at my work and says, "It doesn't seem to have changed." I say, "Yes, Tsultrim, it has changed; believe me, it has changed. I just haven't made any headway."

I clean up the patches and straighten out the lines. I must have painted nearly a mile of lines by now. The paint is drying, and the mandala is finally stable. I've been doing the protectors practice, and the mountain gods seem peaceful. I have put a heavy rock, shaped like a heart, in the center to keep the occasional breeze from making the mandala plane and take off for the wide, blue yonder, but the rock has scraped the surface of the white paint. I'm repainting it just as heavy clouds roll over Ekajati Peak.

It doesn't rain right away, but in the middle of the night it breaks loose with flashes of lightning and blasts of thunder. I know it's raining hard because there's a river running through my tent, blowing in from the unprotected side. And the mandala?

I don't want to think about it. I give it a quick glance on my way to practice. That's enough. I can see something is wrong. It seems to be covered with a misty vapor. After practice, I go down to the platform to sweep off the rain and do a set of Qigong exercises. The white paint from the center circle has spread over half the colors and is still floating in the pools of rainwater. Yes, Marpa, I know, nothing lasts. Clean it up, and chill, dude. I swab up most of the paint and let the rest dry. It only requires a light coat of each color to bring back the luster. If the weather permits, I'll be on track in a day or so. I'm three-fourths done, and there's still a week before the arrival of Namkai Norbu Rinpoche and Prima Mi.

More rain. I rush off to find a tarp. I don't want a repeat of the last fiasco, so I put the tarp over the wet paint, not noticing the tar on the flip side of the tarp. When I pull the tarp up after the rain has subsided, there are black splotches scattered over most of my near perfectly painted center designs. Oh well, this cleans up with gasoline, which lifts the tar but also lifts some of the soft paint and leaves yellowish smudges. I add another coat of paint. This painting is beginning to have a lot of character, a texture and patina like an old masterpiece from so many repairs.

Kim, a Dharma sister, helps me paint the black lines that divide the mandala into sections. We've laid down two strips of masking tape leaving about an inch for the black lines. We've painted two lines, and I'm laying down the third set of tapes, when we discover if you pull up the tape, the paint comes with it. Kim is beside herself. It's a sweltering day on the platform, and we're blowing it. Kim is pulling her hair. I try to soothe her, but she is inconsolable. I decide that it's best to shut up. Yelling obscenities and tears bursting from her eyes, Kim grabs a brush and paints all the lines without any tape, one after another, one brush width, right on, no error, straight as I could want them. What might have taken all day takes 20 minutes, and all I have to do is patch a few spots, retouch the lines, and were done. Voilá.

Rinpoche arrives the next day, and there is not a cloud in the sky. "Bene, bene," he says, "very hard work, very good. Bene." Prima Mi is with him, and she will teach the Vajra Dances. She looks at the mandala and says that it is very beautiful. There are twelve of us plus Prima Mi. Nine women and three men will learn to dance The Dance of the Liberation of the Six Lokas and The Dance of Three Vajras. These dances are not performances. They are Dzogchen meditation practices, which integrate sound and movement. Prima Mi is not sure this is going to work. She has never taught these practices under such conditions, and she wants to start early, but in the morning, there is frost on the mandala. This melts, and then we mop up the water. We have to dance barefooted because our shoes scrape the paint, and our socks get soaked. Soon, it's too hot for bare feet on the dark colors; the winds whip

us; the lightening cracks on the hilltops; and we're not at all sure we can survive the elements. But we are unanimous we want to learn these dances.

I bring a box covered in black plastic to house our shoes, so they won't get wet, and I bring a clean tarp to huddle under when it pours. Others bring water bottles and incense and a tape recorder. A crystal ball is put in the center of the mandala to represent the Dharmakaya, the absolute. It's perfect, and we're captive. Wilderness, fresh air, and a heaven of wildflowers surround us. No distractions obstruct the path. We have the mandala beneath us. We are ready to enter the immutable space of Vajrasattva and purify the six realms of beings, leaving our worldly cares behind and liberating the God Realms, the Realms of the Asuras, the Humans, the Animals, the Hungry Ghosts and the Hell Realms. And so, our training begins.

SUMMER IDYLL

Lightning flashes, and there's a loud clap of thunder close to town, so the management at The Springs asks us to leave because there's the risk of lightning striking us in the hot pools. The man at the desk gives us a rain check and says we may have to wait more than an hour, so we decide to go have dinner. Jack, Marta, Susan, Horse, Tommy, and I meet at the Hunan Chinese Restaurant in the plaza at the far end of town. We have just finished the ten-day Family Retreat, and we are trying to integrate back into the life of Pagosa Springs.

Until a few years ago, Pagosa Springs was a one-stoplight town. These days Pagosa Springs has two stoplights and is one of the fastest growing communities in the United States. Nestled in the mountains near Wolf Creek Pass, Pagosa Springs is near the Continental Divide. This is where east meets west. The headwaters of the Colorado River run west towards the Gulf of California, and the Arkansas River runs east to join the Mississippi, which eventually empties into the Gulf of Mexico. The area south of the San Juan Mountains falls within the Four Corners area of the United States and is geographically a part of the Southwest. Here are high mountain valleys covered with wildflowers and more wildflowers. This is where all the wildflowers go when they die—a heaven for wildflowers.

Pagosa Springs was settled around a deep, sulfur hot spring next to the San Juan

River. The town's name comes from "pagoosh," a Ute word some of the locals say means healing water and others, stinky water. I've overheard a teenager refer to Pagosa as "Rotteneggville." This stinky, healing water does smell a little weird until you get used to the odor.

This was a health spa long before recorded history. An Anasazi kiva can be found at nearby Chimney Rock. In the 1880's, the ownership of the springs was contested by the Utes and the Navajo. The Utes chose a U.S. Calvary Scout to challenge a Navajo warrior. The Navajo was defeated in a knife fight, and the Ute tribe became the nominal custodians for Uncle Sam. Today, there is a postmodern bath house being built at The Springs, an eclectic blend of Frontier Saloon, Mexican Adobe, and Roman Villa with a touch of neon—a style architect Julia Donaho calls "Southwest Renaissance."

Mountain meadows were an incentive for cattle drives, and a settlement around the springs was inevitable. With snowcapped mountains to the north and to the east and with 14,000-foot pyramidal Pagosa Peak rising above town, and with the effulgence of sunsets on the massive granite wall of the Continental Divide, this is one of the most scenically beautiful spots in the world.

Tara Mandala is 15 miles from town, our land wedged between the San Juan Forest and the Ute Reservation. We awake each morning by the conch being blown. The staff holds a Green Tara practice in the yurt, and everyone is invited to attend. There is just enough time after practice to do a set of the Five Tibetans exercises on the dance platform before the breakfast conch sounds.

We meet for breakfast beneath the mother tree, a giant box elder that shelters the kitchen. The kitchen evolves. This year there is a bar across the refrigerators and a double set of hooks on the cabinet doors to prevent raccoons from ransacking the foodstuffs. Each year there seems to be a special animal that makes its presence felt. Last year it was a badger, the year before, a bobcat. The chipmunks, however, are perennial. They get so fat from eating dropped food that their bellies drag on the ground. And the snakes catch the fat chipmunks without effort. A perfect food chain. Tara Mandala is a lucky place to be reborn in the animal realm.

The family retreat has several parts. The adults receive teachings by Carol Fitzpatrick on Green Tara and by Lorain Fox Davis on the medicine wheel. White Horse Hubble is to lead a vision quest, and the teens will be led on an overnight hike by Lorain's daughter, Cris, who is an experienced Outreach leader.

Also, there is a plan to build a cob oven. Robert Francis Johnson has a metaphysical approach to building a cob oven. Clay, sand, and straw are the essential ingredients. Wisdom, strength, and beauty are the metaphorical supports. A firm foundation is essential to erect any edifice. On a rock foundation is placed a mound of wet sand, called the *void*.

Loving hands mold layers of cob to create the oven around this void. There is no smokestack on a cob oven. The proportion of the door size to the chamber after the void has been removed allows for the fire to kindle and the smoke to escape. Cob ovens are used throughout the world to bake bread. At the highest temperature, the cook can bake pizza, and at lower temperatures, start yogurt. The cob is prepared in a similar manner to pressing grapes. Cob people, young and old, remove their shoes, join hands, and mix the ingredients with their feet. In the process of building this oven, a chain of friendship beams outward to heaven and inward to the central abyss.

Men and women, boys, and girls, all with legends. In the marrow of our lives our dreams fly, while overhead the clouds in a larger current move across the sky. I listen in prayer and look up through the branches of the box elder. The camp is stirred with frantic search plans for a boy lost while returning from the overnight hike. David and Damchü have ridden out to look for him on horseback. The voices of those searching on foot crisscross on walky-talkies. While we are in the prayer circle, Carol envisions the boy seated under a tree along the trail. Later, David tells us that he followed footprints he spotted along a dirt road and found the boy exactly where Carol had seen him in her mind's eye. The boy said he was not really lost. He had overshot the trail he was looking for and was backtracking his way to camp when he was found. So much can happen to us in a minute.

Horse and Lorain are both trained in the Lokota tradition but by different teachers. Their styles of teaching being different, they must work out their routine. At the sweat lodge, Lorain leads the pipe ceremony, and Horse drums during the sweat. Before the sweat, Horse brings out a Tanka, a buffalo skull with the horns wrapped in red cloth, one side painted with red and white stripes and the other side of the skull painted yellow with white dots. Horse holds the Tanka above his head, and he psychically transforms himself into the whole beast. Lorain tells us about having recently attended a gathering of the pipe holders where the bundle with the pipe from the time of White Buffalo Woman was opened, an event that hadn't happen for many years, and that all the pipes were touched to the original pipe to rejuvenate the lineage. Tommy, Horse's assistant, holds Lorain's pipe for each of us to smoke, and then we enter the lodge.

There are four rounds to the sweat, one for those being born, one for the young, one for adults, and one for the aged. We are all invited to pray and partake in song. Lorain adds a lot of water at the end of each round, which raises the humidity considerably, and Horse drums with passion. Sometimes, I feel like I'm the victim of a sweat, that the red man wants to give the white man the "full treatment." The ceremony this afternoon, however, is nothing if not inviting, even when Horse jokes that Grandma Lorain will throw the whole bucket of water on the hot stones to "cool us off." I can feel the power of tradition in my cells.

Water was a teacher this year. The season started off fine, but by the end of the family retreat, the well seemed to have dried up. We added more solar panels to increase the flow of electricity to the pump. We added another ten feet of hose and lowered the pump. We bought a new pump. Finally, it was discovered that the well had been incorrectly cased and that we would have to drill a new well. As the well diggers were backed up with projects, we solved our problem for the summer by filling a large storage tank with water hauled from town, and then we poured the water into the well so it could be pumped up the hill to the holding tank. With gravity flow, we had pressure in the pipes. It was a long way around to get back a short distance correctly and many climbs up the hill to see if the tank was full. "Fire is water falling upwards," says sage Heraclitus.

Water? What water? The water isn't a problem for the seasoned veterans of Adzom Paylo Rinpoche's Intensive Longchen Nyinthig Retreat. These people get so deep into practice that they become one with the elements. "Sometimes I don't know what is going on," says Steve, "but I just relax and let it happen, figuring, what the heck, everything is everywhere."

As below, so above. The night sky is fine, and the conjunction of Mars in Scorpius is mind-blowing. (Mars being the esoteric ruler of Scorpius.) This summer, Mars is closer to Earth than is usual, and it is also in proximity to Antares, a red star in the tail of the Scorpion, which is sometimes referred to as Mars's rival. All in all, a powerful visual and symbolic configuration portending great spiritual accomplishment. Or not.

I overhear: "Everything arises from emptiness." Robert Olander is wearing his baseball cap and Mac MacCarthy has on his battered straw cowboy hat, a short-stop for Buddha and a cowboy yogi having a quiet metaphysical talk, early in the morning—the dew on the grass is singing. Every blade of grass is liberated, and the grasshoppers are jumping for joy.

Sharon stands by the port-a-potty with a bucket and a broom. A high lama and a low lama, she wears the hat of assistant retreat coordinator and that of chief latrine supervisor. She is compassion in action.

I watch Robert Petit waltz with a board. His hands move gracefully, touching the corners, edging the board into place. He uses a cordless screw gun, which has an entirely different rhythm than a hammer. I'm nostalgic for the rap rap rap of a hammer, although screws do hold the wood firmly. Today, the process is to screw and glue—anything to prevent the erosion of barbarous time. Robert stands back and scrutinizes his project, pulls out his tape measure, looks for his square, picks up his pencil, makes another measurement, takes another step in his carpenter's dance.

We have not one Head Cook but two: James and Brian are the two-headed cook. Their assistants are Vanessa and Roy. They rise with the sun to stir up something delicious, always reaching far enough to find their joy. Breakfast over, lunches are packed, and the retreatants leave in a caravan for Hidden Valley to do their practices. The day is poised in exultation.

And nighttime is a time for song and dance. After the Riwo Sangchod Retreat, we party at Tsultrim's and David's new house. Tulku Sang-ngag feels expansive and dances the Warrior Dance of King Gesar, jabbing at the air with an African spear. Ani Tersing tries to translate one of the tulku's poems. Although her English falters, the beauty of her voice is star flecked. She knows more than she knows she knows. "Red bird...big bird...a vulture...eating dead people on the mountain." We are inspired to sing 'Blackbird Singing' and, much to David's chagrin, 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' and, then, 'Om Tare Tutare' to flute and drum. Given the right rhythm, even the dead can dance.

So many decisions, so much chance for derision—the deadly wind of praise and blame. Birget's luscious Tara statue stands before the throne, but Tulku Sang-ngag says he would prefer it stood on the altar with the mandala offering placed in a lower position. However, he does not mention which direction the Tara statue should stand on the altar. Should it face the lama when he's teaching, or should it face the entrance? We opt for Tara facing the throne, and Rinpoche laughs uproariously when he enters the yurt and finds he must prostrate to Tara's posterior.

Tulku Sang-ngag meets life with humor and forbearing. He was incarcerated in Chinese prisons for ten years, and while he was there, he received many teachings from great lamas. He relates how happy he was when he discovered the blissful state of samadhi and could enter it while he was working at cutting logs, but how this got

him into trouble with the guards and the beatings he received. He teaches us how to enter this state with the breathing exercise called chölen, but while he is teaching this practice, a pickup arrives, and the port-a-potty man begins pumping out the honey box. Tulku Sang-ngag is explaining how the seed syllable in the crown chakra melts into nectar when the odor of excrement wafts through the meditation yurt. Eyes roll, noses lift, but everyone seems determined to maintain their composure as they realize the essential unity of the relative and the absolute. Then, Tulku Sang-ngag laughs, and we join him in our appreciation of the irony in this occurrence. I drift in infinite space, or no space, an illusion of myself in an obscure place, a floating reflection. Emptiness holds me up. And so, what is the next thing to see?

Marta and I are driving along Trujillo Road and see big drops of rain spaced a foot apart turning to hail. Next, a fat, jagged lightning bolt appears to shoot right into town. “Wow, look at that,” exclaims Marta. When we get to the Tara Mandala office, Jack is standing in the doorway waving a newsletter, airing the acrid smell of burned electrical wiring from the room. He says, “Sparks flew out of the postage machine and the fax. The computers are down, and the lights are out. The lightning must have struck close.” La Plata Electric Co. is soon on the scene, working on a pole up the street, and after the lights come on, the main computer starts up but can’t boot its programs and won’t shut off, which doesn’t bode well for getting any work done in the office today.

Back on the land, everything is peace. I enter the quiet where flies buzz and leaves rustle in their immortality. The silence ends at a yellow bird, a Western Tanager—I looked him up—atop a stalk of last year’s mullein. Each moment has its own climax.

Tsultrim is in a year-long personal retreat, but she makes a brief appearance to attend Adzom Rinpoche’s teachings. We are instructed to avoid eye contact and not to ask for interviews, but near the end of the teaching cycle, the situation loosens up, and I get a chance to relay a few messages from the sangha in California. Tsultrim says I must take the Sky-like Nature of Mind Retreat, that it will be good for my practice. I tell her I have to keep working on the layout of *A Brief Biography of Golchen Tulku*, but she insists, and I know by the way she looks at me, a look from the molecular level, that she knows best. I’m afraid of *shamata* practice because I don’t think I can sit for lengthy periods in one-pointed meditation, but what I find is that I enjoy these sessions, that my years of tantric training have served me well. My body has been trained to sit. A teacher is the source of all accomplishments. I am blessed by having Tsultrim for my teacher.

During pointing out instructions by Tsok Nyi Rinpoche, a fly flies in my mouth, and

I wonder if I will ever get it. Stabilize in *rigpa*, that is. I'm sitting, and then the fly flies in, and I sit with this fly in my mouth, all revved up, but I'm sitting still, and the fly walks out of my mouth and along my upper lip and onto my nose and then buzzes off into space, and I am left feeling empty and a trifle confused. During the question-and-answer period, I ask Rinpoche, "If I am sitting in *rigpa* and the fly is inside me, is the fly in *rigpa*?" Rinpoche says, "We'll have to ask the fly."

Samsara is an airport surrounding a delayed flight. I'm stretched out with my eyes closed listening to the travelers and the intercom in the Phoenix Airport: "...want my money back..." "...want to be in San Francisco, now..." "...really no reason for this..." "...is it really raining there?..." "will my luggage arrive?..." "...will the pilots for flight 2807 please report to Gate A6?..." All this inside me.

Now, standing in the family room of my house near Sebastopol, looking into the middle distance, a newspaper at my feet, I'm conscious of the upside-down headlines, of the world going topsy-turvy, and things getting desperate, as I reflect on the limpid, blue sky of a summer idyll.

THE LAMA & THE CARPENTER

Around midnight, I am called to fix the Lama's bed. He has come home late, after phoning his students in China, and, somehow, he has knocked his bed loose from its moorings. I had made up the bed, and I had made sure the bed frame was level. The tent is on a slight slope, and I had leveled the frame with small blocks of 2x4. The path is visible in the moonlight, so I make my way from my tent to the shed near the kitchen where the tools are stored. I gather up some more blocks, a hammer, a few nails, and my level, and I wend my way through the scrub oak to Adzom's tent. Adzom Paylo Rinpoche is a big man, well over six foot tall. He's going to be hard on the furniture.

I can see his bulk sitting on the bed. The tent flaps are tied back, and I can see the zipper is pulled loose from its tracks, which is not unusual. The tent repairs often exceed the fees we receive from the tent rentals. There is a battery-powered lamp in the tent, and it casts a feeble light, but I can see the bed has a radical tilt. Anne Klein is seated on a cushion on the floor; she will translate. Anne says, "The bed is lower

at this end, and Rinpoche can't sleep with his head lower than his feet, and if he turns the other way, his feet will be pointed towards Tara." I take off my shoes and bow in obeisance, and Adzom motions me to sit.

I push back the covers on the bed and put my level on the frame, and, sure enough, it is way out of kilter. Adzom is curious, and he climbs down and sits on the floor next to me. He asks to see the level, so I hand it over to him, and while he is occupied, I go around to the other side of the bed and look at the legs. The bed has slid off the blocks. I set them back under the legs, and when I look up, I see that Adzom is moving the level back and forth, this way and that, with a big smile on his face.

I take the tool from him and again lay it along the edge of the bed frame, so he can see that the bubble is in the middle of the glass tube, which indicates that the structure is level. Adzom gets excited. "I understand; I understand," he says. "I am very smart." He's like a big kid with a new toy. I start to collect my things, but Anne asks me if I would like to stay and have an interview. I hadn't planned on this, as I am not registered for this retreat. I came to Tara Mandala to do karma yoga, but since I am here, I say, "Sure, why not?" The smell of incense is heavy. The lamp casts a shadow off the statue of Tara on the wall of the tent. I am high in the Rocky Mountains sitting at the feet of a master. This could be Tibet a thousand years ago. I sit down again, and Adzom climbs back up on his bed. He looks at me, and his eyes roll back in his head, and he asks me, "Do you want my mind essence?"

This dude is serious. "Yes," I say, "yes, I most certainly do." He asks me a question that relates to my body, energy, and mind. I feel this question could be answered in several ways, but lately I have been working more with my energy because I have prostate cancer, and cancer is said to be caused by an interruption of the energy field, a possible break in the immunity system, so energy is of paramount importance to me, and I tell him so. Adzom says I should meditate on this and come back in a couple of days. I stand and bow and pick up my tools. As I am leaving, he says, "I might have to steal your level."

A couple days later, I am in Pagosa Springs, and I stop at the hardware store and look for a small level, something Adzom can pack in his suitcase. I find a short carpenter's level with replaceable bevels made by Stanley, not as classy as the antique I use, which was patented in 1896, but more portable. It will serve the purpose. Near the levels, are metal squares of different sizes, and next to them are brass plumb bobs.

I have an idea. I am a Past Master of the Order of Freemasons, and the secrets of Masonry are transmitted through the use sign of and symbol, just as in Dzogchen. And, just as in Buddhism there are the three jewels: the Guru, the Dharma, and the Sangha, in a Lodge of Masons there are three objects that are called the movable

jewels: the Plumb, the Square, and the Level. These are the working tools of a Fellowcraft Mason. So, I buy these tools to present to Adzom Rinpoche.

I know I risk being disemboweled and having my organs thrown to the beasts of the field for revealing Masonic secrets, especially as I will have to communicate them through the translations of a woman, but, damn me, I am frustrated by these limitations. It is traditional to maintain secrecy in esoteric matters, and I will not reveal the secrets of how to enter and open a lodge; I will only show Adzom the parallels between a set of symbols in the two traditions. There is great importance in forging links between minds of different cultures. Adzom is a buddha, who is leading me to enlightenment, and I have a rare opportunity to share some of my experience with him and enter the field of his wisdom.

A gana puja, a feast, is planned for the next day because it's Padmasambhava's birthday and a full moon as well. This is an auspicious day to practice, and all benefits of practice will be greatly multiplied. Tsultrim gives me a traditional Tibetan text and asks me to make five copies for those who can read Tibetan. A text like this is long and narrow and printed on both sides of the page, the back side reversed from the front side, and there are no Arabic numerals to follow. The text appears to be 100 pages. This is going to take some time.

After dinner, I get a ride to town. I warm up the copy machine, and I figure out a procedure to keep the pages in order. I'll run one page at a time on legal size paper because if I try to do more, I'll get confused. I begin with the first page and run five copies. I make a small mark on the right corner of the top copy in pencil and turn the master over and place the five copies in the tray and run the other side. Then I cut them to size and lay them out on the counter face down. I repeat the process with the next page and the next. The text has corrections made with small squares of gold leaf, and on the back of one page there are some odd, rather childish drawings—a design which at first seems to be a bottle with flowers, then becomes psychedelic, abstract and mazelike in pattern. Adzom was a child tulku. Maybe these were done by him when he was a youngster.

It's getting late, going on midnight. Where is my ride? I phone camp, but no one picks up the phone in the kitchen, so I keep printing. If nothing else, I'll hike back. It's only 15 miles. Shouldn't take but four or five hours. I'll make it in time for the puja. However, I realize I don't have a coat. What could I use to keep warm? I look around, but all I can find is a door cover with an eternal knot embroidered on it. I envision myself walking all night wrapped in a door cover, carrying a box of Tibetan texts along the county road. Then, I'm hiking the last three miles up the forest service road, and I encounter a mountain lion in the dark. All that will be found of me are shreds of the door covering, the scattered texts, and a leg bone, which will make a

good thigh bone trumpet. Heroic fantasy. The stuff of legends. Wish I knew how to do yogic fast walking. I try phoning again, and this time someone does pick up. Brian, our cook. He says Gwen is still at Tsultrim's house, waiting for Adzom to finish phoning China, but that he will come and get me. If I'm lucky, I will get a few hours' sleep before the puja.

I'm always thrilled when I awake, and the sun is shining, and it's a new day. What a miracle! It doesn't take long for things to get weird, but for a while I am in awe and grateful. And so, when the bees start stinging the people climbing the hillside to the site of the puja, everything seems to be about normal. A couple of us rush back to the kitchen to fetch some *Benadryl* and baking soda. The sun is starting to shine down with some real intensity, and I'm sweating profusely, as I struggle back up the hill. Everyone calms down once we start administering plasters of baking soda and applying *Benadryl* to the wounds.

Rinpoche arrives. His assistant, Lama Gyurme Tsering, has a video camera and is documenting the event. I shoot a picture of him—a lama in his robes with a video camera—a classic cultural cross-over. The sun is beating down harder now. This is going to be an ordeal. There is not any protection from the blazing sun, and Adzom will recite the whole text because he is a Dharma machine. We are fried by the time the practice is dedicated, and we are on the verge of heat stroke by the time Adzom starts discussing his vision of a temple on this site. I was right; he is a temple builder, and I know he needs a plumb, a square and a level.

I spend the rest of the day napping. I have dinner and go back to bed. I sleep through the night, and although I make it to practice the next morning, I go right back to bed and again sleep through to the next morning. I am drained. I will have to pace myself to regain my momentum. So, I have come to this, a place of exhaustion, and how was I to know? So easy to use up one's reserves. Adzom is in my dreams. We are walking together about a foot off the ground. He is giving me instructions about fast walking. He says it's not about developing speed. The trick is in keeping my feet close to the ground, so I appear to be walking and not flying, which is really what is happening. I awake doing the Tara action mantra.

Tsultrim wants me to make the Green Tara practice into a chapbook. She is having another translator, Erik Drew, and Anne both go over her rendition. Tsultrim's way of translating is poetic, Anne's is more academic, and Erik's is very literal. Getting them to agree is going to be an interesting process, and getting the book finished before the end of the retreat will take some finesse.

Added to this, Adzom wants to learn how to can peaches. Tsultrim is telling him how, step by step. Erik is translating. Adzom is taking notes, and he is also giving Tsultrim a short version of the Tara practice, which he wants included at the end of

the main text. It's only a few lines long, and the action mantra is imbedded in the verse. Adzom is giving it out word by word, and Tsultrim writes each word down in phonetic Tibetan, and Erik translates it into English. Then, Tsultrim gives another step in the process of canning peaches, and Erik translates that into Tibetan, and Adzom writes it down in his notebook. Adzom then gives another line of the Tara practice, and Tsultrim writes that down, and Erik translates.

OM CHAG TSAL JETSUN TARE

OM Homage to Jetsun *TARE* Goddess

Wash jars, rinse. Place jars in hot water.

TU TA RA E YI DUNG WA KUNCHOB

TU TA RA E Save from all suffering

Pack the sliced peaches into hot jars.

TUGJE TOGMED TURE PALMO

Unimpeded compassion *TURE* Glorious One

Leave one finger of space at top of jar.

DAK LA DRUPCHOK TSOL CHIK SWA HA

Grant me the ultimate siddhi *SWA HA*

Cover with boiling sryup, leaving headspace.

I call this the Tara-Peach transmission. I sit outside the tent, chuckling to myself, waiting for the text to emerge, so I can run off another edition of the book.

More doubts. More signs. I've been told. I've been shown. It has been pointed out, the path, the fruit. I see a little dog. I wonder why he doesn't have a tail. I wonder why he hasn't any hair. I wonder why he doesn't have any eyes. I wonder why he doesn't have a head. I wonder why he doesn't have any feet. I not only wonder why but how he is trotting down the path. Without any doubt, this must be a lama's dog. As Jigme Lingpa writes, "Through examples, one recognizes the meaning. Through signs, one comes to believe."

And when will a sign appear? I'm walking up a trail, deep in conversation with Debbie. We are talking about *tigles*, tiny rainbow spheres, when I see a little flash of light shooting down the trail, and before I can change my pace, a young chipmunk has run under my boot, and I have crushed its spine. It is writhing in the dust, quivering spasmodically, and blood is running from its mouth. I tell Debbie to walk on ahead, as I don't think she will want to watch what I am going to do.

I have lived on farms. It is reasonable to put a suffering animal out of its misery. More people are coming up the trail, so I carry the chipmunk over into the trees, where I can dispatch it quickly. A blow to the head with a rock, and the creature lies still. I dig a small hole, put in a few leaves, just to make a cushion, I guess, and lay

the body of the chipmunk in its grave. I say an appropriate mantra, cover the chipmunk with earth, and place a cobble on top.

Adzom has been giving interviews to all the retreatants and separating everyone into two streams. The majority are in an advanced group doing Yeshe Lama practices in Hidden Valley. These practices are led by Anne and her husband, Harvey, and Tsultrim. I keep on with my karma yoga, but I notice there are only a few students sitting with Adzom Rinpoche. They meet at his tent, and he teaches them the preliminary practices of Ngöndro. I have seen pictures of Adzom teaching in Tibet. He teaches the multitudes, 40,000 people at a pop. The pictures show a valley full of nomads, men, women, children and monks and nuns and lamas and merchants, all camped out to hear Adzom. Looks like a Grateful Dead concert.

I get permission to sit in. During one Dharma talk, the subject of killing comes up, the difference between accidental and intentional acts of killing, so I tell of my experience with the chipmunk, and Adzom says, the first act was accidental and did not involve me in the karma of the chipmunk in a negative way, but that my intentional act of “putting it out of its misery” was more serious in its repercussions, that I should have left it to “burn out its karma” without interfering in the process. Such is the difference between the East and the West. My chances of being reincarnated as a chipmunk are very good, indeed.

A humorous occurrence in one talk. We are studying the Ngöndro text, and Erik suddenly chokes, and says that we shouldn't say the next line, because there is a mistake in the phonetic Tibetan. A word is misspelled, which has then become a colloquial term, so that the line reads “naturally arising Fuck Body.”

Lama Gyurme has been having stomach cramps. He has been to the local clinic, but they can't find anything. The cramps persist, so I am asked to take him, with Harvey to translate to Mercy Hospital in Durango. Sitting in the emergency room lobby, I wait for the Lama. An obese lady to my left, wearing shorts and a tee-shirt, paints her toes copper. A tall Indian in formal dress, a set of tails, no less, with his hair tied back in a braid, a turquoise and bone necklace, dark glasses and cowboy boots, paces the floor. A tough-looking guy with a tattoo of a dragon on his calf, with his right eye mangled, bounces a baby on his knee. *Aliens 3* is on the TV. Which realm is this? Which planet am I on?

The doctors can find nothing wrong with Lama Gyurme, so we head back to Tara Mandala. On the road home, we pass through the small village of Gem, and I point to a twenty-foot stack of elk antlers in front of a shop, probably a tannery, where there is a sign, “The Buck Stops Here.” The Lama's eyes get really big, and his automatic mantra machine kicks into overdrive. Within a mile, a huge rainbow arcs

across the road. “Man, Tsering,” I say, “you liberated a whole herd of dead elk.”

Next day, I am walking down the trail past his tent on my way to deliver some photos to Harvey, and I notice Lama Gyurme on his hands and knees spitting up white foam. He is coughing and sweating and seems to have knots in his shoulders when I put my arm around him. I am patting him on the back, offering words of comfort, and he sees I have packs of photographs in the plastic bag I am carrying. He loves photos. I decide Harvey won't mind if I show them to him, and we are looking through them, when I hear my name called from behind. I look around, and there is Adzom motioning me to come toward him.

Lama Gyurme gets up and walks ahead of me, and I stoop down to put the photos back in the bag, but Adzom motions me to leave the stuff where it is and to hurry. I follow the trail down by the portable toilet, and there is Tsering again on his hands and knees with the dry heaves. Adzom points to a rock and moves his hand in a circle. I remove the rock. He hands me a sharp stick, and I dig. I hear chanting in the meditation yurt on the hill. It is daylight, but it is also, oddly, like a long night.

He points to another spot, and I dig. Still nothing. He crouches down while I am digging, and the stick flips up a big clod of dirt on his robes. I freak out, thinking I have sullied the Lama, but he ignores this and points to a new place to dig. At this point, Adzom's sister, Ani Sherab Rinpoche, appears, and she takes the stick from me and walks a few steps away, looking at the ground, and then comes back and hands the stick to me and points to a place right next to where I had originally started to dig. I dig again in this spot, and this time a piece of paper appears.

I think, “Good Lord, we've discovered an earth treasure from Padmasambhava.” At this point, the chanting in the yurt reaches a crescendo, and I can see ink marks bleeding on the damp paper. The paper, however, seems to be a regular sheet of typing paper, folded over maybe three times and not the yellow scrolls with the secret dakini script. I'm hesitant. I'm not sure I want to unfold this dark treasure and find out it is an advertisement for a 2-for-1 sale at City Market.

I start to pick up the paper, but Ani Sherab stops me, and both Adzom and Tsering, who have come up close, turn their hands up and wiggle their fingers. I am not sure what they want, but Ani Sherab is holding the piece of paper between two sticks, and I guess they want me to build a fire to burn the thing. I have a pack of matches, and I strike one, and Ani Sherab holds the paper over the flame, but the paper is too damp, and it won't burn.

I build a small fire with leaves and twigs. A wind begins, then vanishes. I blow on the flames, as the paper catches and curls like a question. It seems Lama Gyurme's nausea is gone. He is rapt in attention and makes sure every last piece is burned to ash, and then he stirs the ashes. I look up and see Adzom doing some kind of a lama shuffle. At the sight of him dancing in his robes and tennis shoes, I can't

help but laugh. We all look at each other and laugh and turn our hands up and shrug and leave our separate ways. The sky is full of rainbow light. I don't know what this was all about, but I think we got rid of something bad. You never know what you might dig up in America, old gum wrappers, hidden *termas*.

The next morning, I am called from breakfast to fix the Lama's bed. He has broken a couple of boards. I get my tools, and I take along the plumb, level, and square I want to give to Rinpoche. Adzom is eating breakfast at a table under the awning, so I go in and look under the bed and see that the screws that hold the brace that supports the cross structure has given way on one side. I remove the covers from the bed and turn the frame on its side, and, in doing so, I bump against the alter and tip some water out of the offering bowls, which spills on a notebook. The top page is soaked, and I grab my handkerchief to wipe it up before the ink runs, but I am too late, and I smear the letters. I hope this is only a few insignificant notes and not a sacred transmission from Jigme Lingpa.

I finish my repairs and put the bed back together, just as Adzom returns. I point to the mess I made, but he doesn't seem disturbed. He sits on his bed and bounces a couple of times and smiles. Anne is nearby, and I ask her if she will translate for me. I tell him that I have some tools I would like to give him, and that it occurred to me that he might like to know the esoteric significance of these tools. I tell him that I don't presume to be teaching him, but that I feel compelled to share some of my knowledge with him. He smiles broadly and asks me to sit.

I give him, in turn, a small plastic level, a metal square, and a brass plumb with a string. I explain that the Level is symbolic of equality, the Square of morality, and the Plumb teaches rectitude of conduct. The plumb is an instrument used by operative masons to raise perpendiculars, the square to square their work, and the level to lay horizontals. However, in Speculative Masonry, the Plumb admonishes us to walk upright in life, squaring our actions by the Square of Virtue, and to remember that we are traveling on the Level of Time towards that Temple in Heaven not made by human hands. Anne does her best to translate this into Tibetan, and I ask her to tell him that these allegorical ideas parallel a similar concept in Anu Yoga about the inseparableness of the Jnanasattva and the Samayasattva. Adzom nods with enthusiasm, and he says it is unusual for him to be giving mind training while receiving training in carpentry in return.

When my little talk is over, Adzom asks me if I have meditated on his last mind-training question. I tell him I finally understand, and I give him a new answer. He gives me further private instructions, and when I leave, I realize he has turned me around again. I am walking up the trail to the stupa, when it hits me. I am completely aware but not "thinking." I am just there, everywhere, on the trail, in the universe.

that presence
that is all
that is
given each
breath

Tears shoot out of my eyes—I can help it—I have such gratitude for what has been revealed to me. I lean my head against the upper part of the stupa. A dakini comes around from the other side of the stupa, and asks me what is wrong, and I say, “I just feel incredibly blessed.”

“Yes,” she says, “the stupa is a powerful, living entity, giving off its blessings. It’s a wonderful place to cry.”



Ekajati, Protector of the Dzog Chen Teachings



**Zab-lam Sputterings
of a Worldly Dakini**
—Osel Wangmo
with Jampa Dorje



**ZAB LUM SPUTTERINGS
OF A WORLDLY DAKINI
dPRESS 2005 SEBASTOPOL**

For Carré Otis

ANGELS AT WORK

Today, I have pure vision. There's an angel in the park chasing leaves. Another angel on the corner, talking on a cell phone. An angel in Sprint making a copy of an article from the *New Yorker* turns and speaks to me.

"What is that you have? It's beautiful."

"It's the cover for my poems, *Talking Trash*."

"Do you have a mailing list?"

"Well, I guess you can be a part of my small audience."

"I'm a writer, too. I've been working on a novel, but I don't have a publisher. I don't know what I going to do."

She has auburn hair, features I like, a delicate face, a bright expression to the eyes, not wearing a wedding ring, casual clothes, a sweater with a heavy knit yet revealing the contour of her breasts, loose fitting trousers, sensible shoes. Venus rising from the sea foam in her invisible clothes.

"I'm surfacing," she says.

"I can see that," I say. I'm trying to make my best impression. I know I'm liable to download too much, so I try to pace myself, yet she is excited and finds space in my sentences to interject her view.

"What do you do with your books? Sell them?"

"I sell some, when I give a reading. Give them to friends, trade other poets for books of theirs. Mostly, it's a way to finish my poems, to get them out there, so they're not stuck in a drawer in my desk or in a box in the attic, to complete the circle, and at the same time it

forces me to edit and make the poems stand up on their own, so when I stand up to read them, I stand by them with conviction,” I said.

“There are readings at Lucy’s every third Sunday at 3 p.m.”

“What’s that? Where is it?” I ask.

“It’s a café down the street.”

“Have you read there before?”

“No,” she said, “I’ve never read before strangers before. Among friends. In the classroom. I read one time in a class at San Francisco State a long time ago, and I must have said something to remind some of them of having been in the insane asylum, and they came completely unglued. I don’t know what I did. I must’ve hit a chord of some kind.”

“That’s kind of the idea. To touch the audience out there.”

“I know, but I wasn’t expecting that kind of reaction.”

“Like the time I read the Bible in jail and commanded the inmates to repent, and they started banging on the bars with their cups. There’s always the fear they might start throwing rotten tomatoes.”

“Or your own version of the fear—I’m afraid of getting boxed in.”

I’ve been waiting for a phrase to prompt me to write an inscription in her copy of my book. I say, “Let me write something for you here. What’s your name?”

“The Mysterious Woman. Some call me Muse.”

So, I write, “Oh Muse, not to be boxed in/except by friendship.”

She writes; I write; everything is written in our eyes. Dialogue developing; cut to the chase. Nectar starts to drip; time expands; space swirls and opens. We’re waving our arms, talking a mile a minute. We’re drawing attention.

“So, what did you read in your class?”

“I can’t remember, something political. Sexual politics. Today, it wouldn’t matter. You could sleep with an elephant, and no one would say anything. But then...”

“It’s the fear of rejection. It takes a pro to feel safe in their skin, naked, before an audience. I watched Laurence Olivier in *The Entertainer* last night. Powerful. At the end, there is a scene where he is with his daughter looking out at an empty theater, and he speaks about his life on the stage. I mean, Olivier is one of the greatest, and he’s playing this tatty, old musical actor to perfection, and he remembers an important event in his life, a moment which makes him feel that if there ever was a moment where he had a belief in the strength of the human race, it was hearing by chance an old Black woman sing her heart out about

Jesus— ‘just making a pure, a natural noise’— that he would have been all right as a person if he could just once have ‘lifted his bosom and made such a fuss.’ He’s down on himself and is trying to live up to a life of failed hopes and faded dreams. He says, ‘When you’re up here (meaning the stage), you think you love all those people out there, but you don’t.’ He says his ‘face can split open’ and he can pretend to be human, sing and tell stories, but that it doesn’t matter, behind his eyes he’s as dead as the ‘shoddy lot out there.’ This is kind of nihilistic, and I’m kind of getting off track. I guess what I’m trying to say is that poetry is more than entertainment, and you can’t just rely on technique to keep down the fear and trembling. A drama coach told me to turn the nervousness into excitement. Infect the audience with anticipation that something grand is about to happen rather than transmitting your fear that the experience will be dreadful. If they perceive you as nervous, they feel it too. If they feel you’re confident, then that’s what they feel. Beyond this, there’s only the raw exposure of your soul.”

“I know...I look up there, and I’m glad I’m not in his shoes.”

“What size shoe do you wear?” I put my foot next to hers. We do a funny little side step and giggle. This is getting intense. “This is getting intense,” I say.

“This IS getting intense,” she replies.

“Maybe, we should get back to work here.”

“Maybe, you’re right. Can we exchange cards?”

“We could if I had one. Let me put my number in your book. Maybe we can get together, and I could read some of what you’ve written. Do you work?”

“I’ve only recently moved here from the Sonoma area. I work at my art. I’m an artist also. Here is my card, and it has my number on it. Where do you work?”

“At present, I’m taking care of my elderly father, and I’ve been writing about it in a memoir I call *The Episodes*. We could read some of our stuff to each other. Mine began as a means of processing my relationship with my father—the generation gap, you know, the ties that bind, what’s beyond all the political and intellectual differences, what brings me home, but then it began to be a retelling of my story and moved beyond the original intent and local scene, and now it cuts across time and place, zigging and zagging, zagging more than zigging.”

“Mine’s like that too, no plot or characters exactly. I don’t know what it is, but I’d like your opinion, I think.”

“Well, it would be nice to get to know you. It helps to have other artists to share your work with because they get to know your whole cluster of work. A dialogue develops, and constructive criticism can occur since they’re not making snap judgments on a one-time basis. They know where you are and where you want to go and how to tell when you make

a breakthrough or when you fail.”

She nodded, “You’re right there. Not like seeing something out of context.”

“I’ve been reading Emily Dickinson lately,” I said. She stayed in her house and wrote her verse. She sent a few poems to a guy named Higginson and asked him if he thought her poems ‘breathed,’ and he replied, ‘spasmodically.’ She’s exceptional. Outside of those few poems, she didn’t publish. Amazing. She had absolute confidence...she believes, ‘A Word that breathes distinctly/Has not the power to die.’ Absolutely beatific.”

“Let’s get to work.”

“Yes, let’s.”

SPRING GRASS

horses in wet blankets
“Mornin’ ladies, survive the rain?”

view

all talents driven into one discipline

here I mean to separate the functions of metaphysics

from that of epistemology

recognize rational mind, intuitive mind

see ground of each

break down, deconstruct

first, intuitive divination, not one, not two

secondly, rational, perceptive

two Canadian geese fly north

Close

near, intimate

shut, verb

secret, oppressive

path of English driven by devils

non-rectification of names

words burn bright in the tunnel of delight

Lulu, a scholar's view

first, search for truth, second, search for fame

paint or perish

Democracy

Athenian, Spartan

The Great Mexican War at end of Aztec Calendar

Bible Code, 3D tic tac toe

Rubic cube of history

Inner galaxy of data

Planetary alignment of consonants

Pythagorean view

3 as a structure of U

3 as an organizing principle

“Fill in the boxes; we’ll fix it later.”

Volume 9

Title, then subtitle

with preface and introduction

Regime

8 hrs sleep

6 hrs dharmā

2 hrs r & r

6 hrs write

2 hrs tv

Three dogs

Lurchers

Serin, Willow, Lady Gwen

Photos, combination of Ansel Adams and Avadon

A

A

A

Dharma

first, space=time continuum

next, teaching about the human condition

then, natural state

500,000 years, galaxies of meditation

thought and dream

Emails

Jesus Tantra

first, purification

then, refuge

raise Bodhi

prayer, 100 syllable mantra

mandala offering

guru yoga, manifest as Mary Magdalene

Dirty Bomb

Al Qaeda group finds martyrs

to remove radioactive material

from a dump in Uzbekistan and

hand off to Jihadists to transport

via container to another point.

Where in the mandala are you?

3 kayas

6 realms

9 galaxies

5 families

100 dieties

school

church

home

practice and daily life

8 hrs for rest

8 hrs for work

8 hrs for God

In the Zone

do you see the glory? the temple

not built with human hands?

Tantra wants all your stuff, your baggage,

your neurosis, your psychosis,

your passion

to transform this into virtue

Tantra like Einstein's theory of relativity

Sutra like Newton's physics

Juice for neuro-anatomical re-programming

Zogchen like quantum mechanics

You = U

"as above, so below"

moonsphere

mindsphere

2 values

3 values

5 values

creates unrest in the “self”
a carousel combined with bumper cars

HOW WE GOT HERE

Lifetimes to
Human form

Found Dharma
Found Guru

Tantra takes in all your stuff
uses everything to polish
your Buddha belly

It all boils down to
virtue and purification
Use your senses
common sense and nonsense
together

Turn shit into fertilizer
Spread it on the concrete floor
Dry it, cool it off, plow it in
That Garden of Earthly Delights
That Garden of Horrors Untold

grandure of grey dawn
miramids of restless, weary wanderers
playing the harpstrings of youth

Canto beery pilgrims

Finding occult knowledge
hidden in gambling games
tarot, dice auguries
Blackjack, Stud

My eye—Jody, my cousin,
on my mother's side of the family,
threw sand in my eye

Jody, six months older than I,
only I was adopted, probably felt
there was a fox loose in the hen house

A small scar, but the scar is in a bad spot

Magic as an artist

poetry=Muse=vessel

drama=Apollo=mask

music=you are a note sung

Science

observer

perception, means

object of observation

methodology

experimentation

analysis, logic

data to support hypothesis

Close (A.C.D.)

to stop, obstruct

to shut, surround

to bring together, join

to get rid of at a reduced price

to bring an end to

to come near

to grapple, engage in

to agree

to come to an end, terminate

to be worth at the end of trading

lacking freshness

confined, narrowly confined

heavy, oppressed

secretive, reticent

stingy, parsimonious

scarce, as with money

not an open season

near, near together

intimate, confidential

compact

a juncture, a union

not deviating from the subject

short, near the surface

not deviating from the model or original

strictly logical

strict, searching, minute

end or conclusion

enclosure

narrow entry, alleyway

(British) a piece of property w/o buildings

Power of 3

Bhrama, Vishnu, Shiva,

Creator, Sustainer, Destroyer

Father, Son, Holy Ghost

Dharma-Sambho-Nirmanakaya

View, Path, Fruit

Body, Voice, Mind

Truth, Beauty, Goodness

Id, Ego, Superego

Inner, Outer, Secret

Adzom's Dutsi

wherever I follow him

there's dutsi falling, he

doesn't mind if I pick up
the jewels on the path

Trustfund Buddha

“Voluntary house arrest
has the stink of Liberty.”

Yes, Dewey, movies can be seen
as Sambhogakaya
pleasures, qualities, 2-D
the realm of the imagination
creative mythology
Scorsese and Eastwood shoot it
out

Battle in the Captain's tower
The Passion of Christ and Hotel Rawanda
go unnoticed

“Didn't Passion of Christ get
The Oscar
for best make-up?”
“I thought the flesh could have looked a bit
more torn.”

IT'S THE MOVIES

after all is said and done, about the only thing i'll miss after i leave this samsaric shit hole is my mother tucking me in when i was a kid, and other than that,

after having been stabbed, shot, strangled, and shit on for 70 fucking years, i can truly say, the only thing i'll miss is the movies

my favorite flick of this year was "white chicks" flat out, that had to be the winner

million dollar baby? the title says it all

the aviator, only scorsese would make a movie about such a neurotic human being after making one about the street gangs of new york, which he made after making one about the his holiness the dalai lama, i love it

this is the movies, remember that, this is not about anything but the movies which only touch on life in a very gentle way

here and there, very tangentially

the same chick who plays queen elizabeth plays katherine the fucking hepburn and does a good job in both, while hilary swank makes it to the top from a trailer court

this is the movies

howard hughes lets his fingernails grow and pisses in milk bottles

the aviator is a love letter to hollywood , a dead letter, and the great scorsese gets passed over for the coveted phallic symbol

a dead letter is the same even if it is never

delivered

lumet gets a lifetime achievement award, so scorsese will just have to wait, since there are still some greats in the wings

as i remember it, the hollywood badboys, sean penn and his crew refused to stand when kazan got his award because kazan had ratted on his friends during the mccarthy era

finally, even if no one is acting at the oscars, remember, the oscars is the movies

Troy
going up in flames

gets two thumbs down

What would Homer say?

“I liked Brad Pitt in the part, buff, quirky, the fancy footwork

Wrath of Achilles on the battlefield, his name reverbing down the corridors of time on the cover of every Tabloid, and Agamemnon got stabbed in his bath at home, not in the sack, or at the Sack of Troy—

so much of the read is in the details,

who gives a fuck about the Mirmadons?—

plenty clickity clack of swords,

a funky horse, Paris was right,

they should have burned it,

but then,

there'd be no sequel.”

Aviator gets 5 Oscars,

Baby gets 4,

baby was topflight, a

B movie in the Warner Bros

gritty style, made in something like

6 weeks, fast and dirty

whereas Scorsese labored like a

Renaissance painter, more

in the style of Fellini

East coast movies

West coast movies

O, where are our Kansas movies?

“I nominate:

The Ferrtilicrome Cheerleader Massacre.”

Adhere to the samadhi of equanimity
when it comes to Beauty

BUT retain the option to weigh in
on a dualistic analysis

It's easier to box
than to throw rocks.

“box” means to catagorize
methodology=psychology of movies
more than aesthetics
vision rather than _____

Allegory of quinine seed
as a path to samadhi

Sky walking with the Dakinis
they help give shape to my world

Lulu, “You must have an ego
if you're going to get rid of it.”

Get rid of something
that doesn't exist

How *get rid of*

Point to it

Come to the point

Point to the coming

Integrate the personas

the Self disappears

Take a chop at it

Re-evaluations

Realizations

Visualizations

discover value

binge eating

binge mantras

Libeniz, monadology

Spinoza, geometrical values

Orpheus, orphic creation

Out of the tip of the branch, making buds

moon spheres, mind spheres

cyclic, sickic, samsaric

just say, "I'm sorry."

help others, so all may rest

going to

so that

all my rest

helps others

find the four

boundless states

“Elegant portrait of y’all

wrapped in myrtle,

calling a SPADE a spade,

leading us into this tale of

a relationship’s travails

and triumphs! A pure

pleasure to move through.”

Arrive, May 19, in Newark

Return, May 28, to San Francisco

Civilized dogs

“My dog”

Description of The Ave in 1959

Corner of Haste and Telly

Lucky Store where Ginsberg saw

ol’ Walt Whitman

across from a *Texaco* gas station, now Cody's Books

The Berkeley Hotel across from Able I, the Garden Spot and Cinema Guild/Studio

The Med next to a Laundromat

"What's behind the Green Door?"

stop at See's Candies, look in the mirror to see what time it is on the Campanile

check out the Picassos in Nicole's, skinny Scandinavian furniture in Frasier's, lunch with Jon Springer at Robbie's Cafeteria and beer in Larry Blake's Rathskeller, tea at The Black Sheep, two cigar stores on the corner of Bancroft and Telegraph

Flatworm as a proof of God

bi-lateralism

we inherited a predator's intelligence on the food chain

or we would have remained a sponge or coral

EXPLORE

explore

leave tracks on the moon

and on the ocean's floor

"Like moons in water"

Xitian

Blue Ragger, YMCA

Camp Gualala @10 years

Angel in a hollow redwood tree

Surprise baptism @14 years
in basement (catacombs) of High Street
Presbyterian Church in Oakland

Bertrand Russel controversy at U.C. Berkeley @16
bought *Why I'm Not a Christian* in a Sausalito bookstore

Atheism leads to Mysticism

“Like moons in water”

Like moons in water=adverbial phrase

Sights=subject, deceive=verb

Us=direct object

We of second clause=subject

forever roam=verb and adverb

in cyclic chains= prepositional phrase

modifying “we”

So=conditional clause

all may rest in their clear mindstreams

I/Raise/Bodhi

in 4 boundless states

View

Path

Fruit

two needs complete

Three views

Terminator

Matrix

Bladerunner

Zógqen Presbyterianism

Passion as a Chöd Feast

Immortals, rainbow body, ascension

empty/exists

H.G. Wells, Jorge Luis Borges

Alchemy, chemical, elemental

Divination, intuitive mind

Yoga, union of mind-body

Karma cleared up with prajna

via dharma

slows the wheel

enough to step off

but not enough to be *detached*

Monk stand-up routine

Monk can joke about death

Monk can deny existential dilemma

Monk can deny existence of creator

Monk can use dirty language

Form is an extension of content

Content is an extension of form

Emptiness is form

Form is emptiness

Shit is gold

Shit is not gold

Shit is rich as gold

Shit is not as rich as gold

There is a war

There is not a war

Monk can talk about fucking

Inappropriate sexual content

Yogi and consort

enter Tantric path, drink Ambrosia

Menstrual blood, semen

long life practice, Mandarava

“Why not fly off to Madagascar and pose for tsunami relief?”

“You’re my dog”

Dog barking in the neighborhood

strawberries creeping onto the driveway

dog at Willit’s ranch

overanxious sheep dog

acts up during artificial insemination of old cows

round-up

foreman shoots dog

draws from the hip

only wounds the mutt

Dad disgusted with Wild West behavior

orders the vet to put down the dog

Dog mauling in general

The Andalusian Dog in particular

An education on the streets and in corrals of Larado

POLICIES with Universities for children’s education in future years

educationfutures

look at the numbers

Kant 476a-79d

there is beauty in the moral order

and Bacon who should

be in Everyman’s Library

knew Augustine confessed

I have a friend who says

there are 3 principles
the good, the bad
and that which is neither
good or bad

as for the whichisneither
my friend told me to stop
smoking, which changed my life
for I do smoke 2 to 3 packs

I write this sitting
on a Persian rug with a base
viole pointed threatenly
toward the victrola behind me
wrapping a harpsichord around
partia no. 2 in C Minor
Schmieder 826

478 79 3 2 3 2 826
in the bottom of the 9th

And a Grecian rug to lay before the fire

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:42:21 PM GMT

fire. Artaud, Artaud said that actors
you can specify your search language in
(Silent confusion) Dear, my brow yoric tears

Maybe you and the spiders
Rodez asylum, circa 1943, Artaud, Artaud in
fire. Artaud, Artaud said that actors

to say something; I raise my voice
meets Bouvard meets Antonin
(Silent confusion) Dear, my brow yoric tears

own experience with geophysical filters
my sister may be involved in
fire. Artaud, Artaud said that actors

told the old and new workshop members
do you cut these out of your work, in
(Silent confusion) Dear, my brow yoric tears

with flowers
you can specify your search language in
fire. Artaud, Artaud said that actors
(Silent confusion) Dear, my brow yoric tears

And a Grecian rug to lay before the fire

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:50:27 PM GMT

borders wrought in dull blues, One
A blind rage like a fire swept over
fountain lay before her, sitting alone

on sunglasses, and a Playboy magazine
it adheres closely to a more sever
borders wrought in dull blues, One

Lady, the Sloop May, the Brigantine
Small Oriental scatter
fountain lay before her, sitting alone

flat earthen or fitted stone
says, for I was a brave soldier
borders wrought in dull blues, One

twisted crystalline
boatman a quarter
fountain lay before her, sitting alone

stalks blooming in wetlands from June
the 0.31 seconds On December
borders wrought in dull blues, One
fountain lay before her, sitting alone

And a Grecian rug to lay before the fire

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:49:37 PM GMT

lay on the rug in front of the fire with
up dust. Disgusted, brushed the dust
the fire seas whose every wave throbs with

The interior was palatial, with
Just
lay on the rug in front of the fire with

which lay before him low and throbs with
the gray walls, but spent its warmest
the fiery seas whose every wave throbs with

bound, perhaps, late in the seventeenth
century, the loftiest
lay on the rug in front of the fire with

for a bout of brotherly gossip with
put me safe inside, An' just
the fire seas whose every wave throbs with

style. we sat down upon the raw earth
It is hard to lay down any hard and fast
lay on the rug in front of the fire with
the fiery seas whose every wave throbs with

And a Grecian rug to lay before the fire

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:48:43 PM GMT

The Medical
blind rage like a fire
(Note: We visited Central)

the Small Oriental
town will be shown as it was before
The Medical

a Grecian statue honoring mythical
its warmest heat on the low settee where
seconds (Note: We visited Central)

that the capital
foreign trade lay before
The Medical

of drawings, and I took one up Medical
Before
seconds Note: We visited Central

in the sweet oblivious historical
as to imitate Gothic and Grecian architecture
The Medical
seconds) Note: We visited Central

Nor cry more than a pinch in my pillow tonight

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:46:24 PM GMT

want to do more than the five or six times
kept talking all night and farting really
means the world to me rarely gives

more than that, I hate playin' games
Let's face it; my students are probably
want to do more than the five or six times

To leave my woes
I was this awkward, gangly
means the world to me rarely gives

He loves
my system as recently
want to do more than the five or six times

I never watch more than 30 minutes
at the bottom. Despite all these lovely
means the world to me rarely gives

that echoes
30 minutes of television a night partly
want to do more than the five or six times
means the world to me rarely gives

But it's getting cold, and we are getting older

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:44:57 PM GMT

Because
angora \$20 I was thinking of making one
live. And I was getting pretty close

that people were getting every day Those
at all . . . of course it's someone
Because

Nine is not giving us much else
a compulsion, but it is a fine
live. And I was getting pretty close

Fab Devil's Radio Someplace Else
I've got my music lesson for saxophone
Because

It's just like I remember from all these
getting off at this stop? No One
live. And I was getting pretty close

Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose
old, maybe you should stay up one
Because
live. And I was getting pretty close

But it's getting cold, and we are getting older

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:43:46 PM GMT

Funny, Love, the hosts look so 1985 in
This video is now how old and your just
it must be getting cold in

journalist," she clarified in
Last
funny.,Love, the hosts look so 1985 in

We know it's getting cold again
your baby K got sick with a cold last

it must be getting cold in

Bush: But we are handling it in
but I did. It seems like I spend at least
funny, Love, the hosts look so 1985 in

cold This scene is getting old in
protect the thing that matters the most
it must be getting cold in

Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose in
0.06 seconds? If you're just
funny, Love, the hosts look so 1985
it must be getting cold in

Or like my jailed father loved his weed

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:42:37 PM GMT

started smoking weed during my sophomore year
to say the word dad. His effort
did my research, right? reason to fear

(I did my research, right? reason to fear
I would like to share a very short
started smoking weed during my sophomore year

of me, The phase when I would hear
in jail for three months at the start
did my research, right? reason to fear

bush orwell I Love My Country But Fear
Osirus, aka Big Baby Jesus, aka Dirt
started smoking weed during my sophomore year

my research, right? reason to fear
I guess he used I'm not an expert
did my research, right? reason to fear

seems like my uncle Wallace well sidebar
Janssen said the plants were part
started smoking weed during my sophomore year
did my research, right? reason to fear

When I love you like the sonneteer the rose

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:41:36 PM GMT

I cannot say I love you less than the stars
like the 'Rimbaud' piece — all the detail
Prefers

anyway, see you in like 2 hours
to him when it genestas about a soleil
I cannot say I love you less than the stars

to steal from your you with high manners
like the 'Rimbaud' piece — all the detail
Prefers

home Delicate art when lovers

Fade in to Sonneteer and
I cannot say I love you less than the stars

Defying Darwin, Even Horse Whisperers
like the 'Rimbaud' piece — all the detail
Prefers

with his reputation as. an author, co-suffers
from Images of Good and Evil
I cannot say I love you less than the stars
Prefers

How can you say that you are yours alone

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:40:35 PM GMT

not what you say you are Broken and
Your grief, which
Your morality is yours and

your name on it must be yours and
that you are yours alone, Google Search
not what you say you are Broken and

dripping sarcasm you may infer is yours and
you are yours alone, Google Search
Your morality is yours and

you think that the enjoyment and
so hollow as this song finds how much
not what you say you are Broken and

explores each of the nine types and
you are yours alone, Google Search
39k - - Your morality is yours and

if it makes people It is yours to make, and
you are yours alone, Google Search
not what you say you are Broken and
Your morality is yours and

Your cyber villanelles have roused my heart

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:36:43 PM GMT

Web Web Your search - Your
- Your cyber villanelles have roused
villanelles have roused my heart -

my heart - Google Search Web
- Your cyber villanelles have roused
Web Web Your search - Your

correctly. Try different keywords. Try
Google Your cyber villanelles have roused
villanelles have roused my heart -

keywords. - - - 2006 Google Your
Google Your cyber villanelles have roused
Web Web Your search - EYour

- EYour cyber villanelles have roused
sure all words are spelled
villanelles have roused my heart -

cyber villanelles have roused my heart
Google Your cyber villanelles have roused
Web Web Your search - Your
villanelles have roused my heart -

Even if the stubborn palms won't shed their leaves

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:35:38 PM GMT

winter arrived in a sudden overnight
But it won't. It knows I hear
And I also won't address right

Which might
if all the girls have their hair done and wear
winter arrived in a sudden overnight

them presents—silver leaves, bright
the girls have their hair done and wear
And I also won't address right

Even if you are right
"Tulpar"
winter arrived in a sudden overnight

rebellious, cantankerous and downright
girls have their hair done and wear
And I also won't address right

dissecting their poems, and some light
to shed their 911-generated fear
winter arrived in a sudden overnight
And I also won't address right

We can sleep the winter through in Paradise

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:34:16 PM GMT

he showed us how to really love one
visiting a true paradise, I thought, how
off in the summer, four in the winter, one

'sleep over' and being told that everyone
The following photos show
he showed us how to really love one

in 0.18 seconds I want to be one
to take it behind the stars I know
off in the summer, four in the winter, one

To really become one
How
he showed us how to really love one

I sounded through the ice I could determine
winter But there's a house that I know
off in the summer, four in the winter, one

through the strongest gales the Johnstone
dead we're certain is how
he showed us how to really love one
off in the summer, four in the winter, one

And if you don't fret my dearth of opium

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:31:21 PM GMT

I've said before, you don't want to
before, you don't want to hire
I think that you can also

If don't do
I don't have the cure
I've said before, you don't want to

freshman freshmen freshwater Fresnel Fresno
Mexico City or dig a opium and more
I think that you can also

If you don't derive profits, no
no royalty is due. Royalties are
I've said before, you don't want to

very dearth of evidence only goes to
no royalty is due. Royalties are
I think that you can also

things, I don't know if you need to
mind my speaking to you. I'm sure
I've said before, you don't want to
I think that you can also

I do have marmalade enough 'til Spring

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:27:55 PM GMT

I am bummed I can't take one
tomorrow, we have enough carrots to see
enough time to get it but I do have one

inch of top. The jars for this one
heated in a small clay dish (see
I am bummed I can't take one

there is a UK version and USA one
Web of about
enough time to get it but I do have one

are blooming Bowie do you have one
Do you have
I am bummed I can't take one

work though and will spend at least one
decide to do a short sprint to see
enough time to get it but I do have one

aches and pains in my back have gone
caused this to I stayed up 'til three
I am bummed I can't take one
enough time to get it but I do have one

Onward villanelle Gabriela

Compiled 11/21/2006 6:19:24 PM GMT

as the French villanelle and the Malay
and the Malay pantoum , have prescribed
Search Web!

Les navigateurs adaptés au surf sur
most relevant results, we have omitted
as the French villanelle and the Malay

for Gabriela
Pilgrimage: onward viewed
Search Web!

Boards: The Best Financial Community
Lyrics collection organized
as the French villanelle and the Malay

a villanelle perhaps, with more to say
the most relevant results, we have omitted
Search Web!

Gabriela Bienvenue
Onward Christian Soldiers. Sacred
as the French villanelle and the Malay
Search Web!

A place smaller than the heart

When you look at a heart, you see
into the aorta. The arterioles are
Fight someone your own size. You see

with levels attributable to coffee
smaller than normal. In those cases where
When you look at a heart, you see

bright, The Privileged
a substantial size in cats, they are

Fight someone your own size. You see

Most doctors agree
female's body. I have had more
When you look at a heart, you see

leapt up as I beheld. I decided to see
be difficult to pinpoint a place where
Fight someone your own size. You see

fill indicators in place so you can see
this is the Photo Channel. Here
When you look at a heart, you see
Fight someone your own size. You see

1.8.07

PINWHEELS

The smell of coffee awakens me
after a night of dim dreams and wild love.

I can hear to the busy boulevard
and the frogs of ripening spring.

I need something new to know.

Change the peptides: David says,

“Don’t Worry. Be happy. You pay.”

100-syllable mantra

X 100,000

Duncan: *To tell the truth the way the words lie.*

Olson: *What has he to say?*

The making of a poem

Poesis, to make

Orpheus sits on a hill

singing the sun up

He was completely without nouns.

Talks continuously about ducks
and death.

Contradictory of him.

LANDSCAPES

Hiking through Nirmanakaya
superego-powered

Harness the id and give yourself enhanced superego
When the moment is right, be ready

Steppin' large

GO AHEAD

ride the blisswaves of

emptiness

Can you laugh

when your guards beat you?

BLISSED OUT ON MOUNT BAKER

Standing with a hoe in my hand

the boss barks,

“Denner, are you planting trees or not?”

“I’ve run out of trees.”

MILLION DOLLAR BABY,

TERRI SHIAVO & THE POPE

What is a medical procedure?
would you starve a dog?
what is punishment?
right to life
right to die
in hospitals, in prisons, in the jungle?

“I bought into the morphine dream.”

MANDALA OF 3 KAYAS

vertical would be will and ideas
superego, ego, id
horizontal would be the confluence
of the object of perception, the perceiver and the perceived,
plus the time to recover

CHI OF LOVE & HATE

Thank you
blessings
good morning

Fuck off
get lost
eat shit

This is very unusual poetry.

FORCE OF THE SOURCE

Walking in this garden of earthly delights, Gabriela wants to be Eve in the garden, two wheels spinning, guru and self, virtue and purification, a one way funnel, no return, a grade 5 tornado, blast of water, 22 feet of ocean in the French Quarter, which is six feet below sea level. Might happen.

Believed the Theory of Relativity by the time I was in the 3rd grade, Einstein's face in the fire of Armageddon. Now, I'm tugging the umbilical cord of mantra.

The first and second spinning—
fireworks in Deer Park,
hanging ten off Vulture Peak

First, quit worrying
be of good cheer
take refuge

Take a volcanic roller coaster ride
thru the 100 syllable mantra, ha ha ha ha ho—into outer space in the guise of
a fool laughing thru the five elements
towards an event horizon of clear light

Bardo consciousness
memory lapse
between visualizations

Hide me under the chair

IN DEER PARK

3 vultures triangulate a dead doe
John DOA, Jane DOA, Baby DOA
and the rishis cannot hear the Buddha

LU & I

We stand on the ditch bank
 look across a vineyard
 vines showing their first leaf
the vine supports cross
the field in rows of rows

“Look at our fallen brothers and sisters,” Lu says, “Creeley’s dead, and the Pope is on display with symbols galore,
 and they’re studying
Terri Shiavo’s brain to see if she was alive.”

A 3-ring circus,
a poet, a priest, and a pin-up
 for the right-to-lifers

Easy to make this gentle bodhisattva
the butt of jokes

Really, there are no buddhas—this is
the era of the collective unconscious

Our collective unconscious cries,
“Let me die easy, oh Lord!”

REALIZE LINEAGE

Creeley

Spicer

Olson

Duncan

Ginsberg

Kaufman

Factions in the poetry wars, different tactics
but our strategy is the same

To have fun
take delight

“He’s always had a deconstructionist process in his poetry,”

Gabriela says, “Denner is the Atila the Hun of web poets.”

FU BIRD MOTTO

You don't read the poem for the font
you read it for the fit

TELLING THE SEXUAL TRUTH

Sins of commission

Sins of omission

Sins of emission

KEEPING UP WITH ALICE

World of quantum physics, when I'm out with Leprechauns, I act like a
Leprechaun, down the rabbit hole I go

and back with a crock

the cup of gold of Irish legend

the Cup of Destiny

THE BOOK AS MEASURE

In poetry, we'd call it philosophy
In philosophy, we'd call it esthetics
In esthetics, we'd call it poetics
In psychology, we'd call it creative process
In biology, we'd call it intelligent design

Now, there's a good one!

AS THE EARTH BECOMES FLATTER

I asked, "What can I do?"
She sd, "Feed people."

When a nun is knee-deep in starving
children, she's got no time to worry about
a woman aborting her fetus.

The room is full
and there's no end
of mouths to feed,

her motto:

"Bring 'em on in!"

Thank you

Thank you

Thank you

TRINITY OF THE BRIDE

As poetry doll

as poetry machine

as poetry muse

Voodoo, science, art

The bride in the machine

The bride in the doll

The bride in the poem

You could call her unholy

but on the whole

she did all right

A BIT OF DANTE IN EVERY MOTHER'S SON

Wars reset the world in order
sons and fathers debate the existence
of the gods

Paris wins the most beautiful woman
Achilles desecrates Apollo's temple
I have 100 peaceful & wrathful deities
I know they're my projections,
but I still have them for protection

Plus I have a Holy Ghost guy hanging around
my finger in his wound proves it

HOMAGE TO MY TEACHERS

Parkinson had me read *The Organization Man*,
Walden, H.D., dissed my "My House" essay

Traugot had me read *Songs of Innocence &
Experience*, caught me plagiarizing A. Kazan

Renoir pointed out Keats confused *stout Cortez*
for Balboa, wanted all the girls for himself

Mrs. Latimore (5th grade) taught me
how to diagram sentences
hit me with a ruler, "Diagram this!"
made me memorized my Shakespeare

Mr. Shumacher (4th grade) for poetry
I read "Lily Langtry" by
Joaquin Miller aloud in class

Carey McWilliams had
a sense of history & moral indignation
gave speeches in Dwinell Plaza, 1960
showed me Thomas Hardy's poems

Ernest Blank, perennial grad student
loved books, books in every corner
helped me analyze "To His Coy Mistress"

Don Bratman showed me
the alliterative s patterns in "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy
Evening"

MANTRA CHAIN

Get wheel moving like a fun park carousel

slow, then increase speed to Spider speed
quick tour of the House of Mystery
throw a few rings, knock off some ducks
pick your siddhis, then
ride the revolving teacup of Samsara

ME, MYSELF AND I

3 senses of self—
the sentence writer
the sentence thinker
the source of the sentence
chemical-electrical memory synapses

Brazen Head: "Time is!"

DADA AWARD

S. Mutt announces The Flying W Award for Lucienne Dorrance's essay
Ellensburg Cowboy Funk Art

INTERSUBJECTIVE PATRAMORPHIS

The invention of coded templates
for dPress poetry machine

Raise Solomon's sword
see what falls out

The Aleph
The Vermeer Notebook

He felt like a kiss
It bled like a car wreck

Days we die are particular
Why worry, be happy, you pay

WHAT THE ^%^^&*\$@ DO WE KNOW?

I've written some books
so I should know something

I know a lot of words
so I can talk myself out of trouble

HOW TO MEDITATE

Watch ideas
single focus
self-liberate or transform
 mind eclipses awareness
mind unfettered by world
 neither overwhelmed nor excited

Adzom says,
 “If I’m sick, I’m sick.
 If I die, I die.
 I’m happy either way.
 Everything’s OK.”

**THIS IS WHAT IS MEANT BY
“WHERE ARE YOU COMING FROM”**

This is what
is meant you
are coming
from

LICENSE PLATE: O FAITH

Metaphysics— fruit
Epistemology— view
Methodology— path

ZAB-LAM & THE ART OF POETRY

Live metaphorically, rather than literally.
Psychologists are the paparazzi of the brain.

HANG ONTO THE LION THROWN

Einstein— stellar cosmos

Newton— planetary cosmos

Heisenberg— atomic cosmos

David's sign:

TRESPASSERS WILL
BE EXCUPATED

TANTRIC TV

Kenu Reeves as Vajrasattva

the Dakini in leather *f/Matrix*, Trinity

as Vajratropa

yab yum, a slight churning of nectars

bliss/emptiness

purification

IF I MAY BE SO BOLD

To raise a question

re: New Orleans

“When the bill comes due,
who’s going to pay it?
Them that has it, or them that don’t?”

re: Iraq?

re: Social Security?

In whose interest is Civilization—
the people’s or the pirates?

ESSEIC POEMS

Montaigne, to look, assay,
to weigh
 and find lacking
Or not

A PRIORI POEMS

From cause to effect before observation
 innate, direct, uncontrived

Spontaneous

HA! GOOD LUCK

Luck, now there's a concept
Irish charm—a girl
at Office Depot scans my check, asks
“Why do you suppose it refuses to clear?”
“Ghost in the machine.”
“3 is the lucky charm.”
“If you're Irish.”
“And I am.”

**THREE APPROACHES TO A THEORY
OF KNOWLEDGE**

Occult (signs)

correspondences

Mars retrograde in Cancer

Scientific (hypothesis)

order out of chaos

Harvey, circulation of blood

Literary (metaphor)

creative mythology

garden of ideas

Kant at the café 11:59AM sharp

Descartes, warming himself by the fire

Hume shooting pool in his nightgown

“It’s the luck of the draw.”

Maybe I should specialize in crystal

healing & Babylonian musical modes

ENCODED POETRY MACHINE

A chunk of divine machinery

“The book as measure”

mirror neurons and happy synapses

dPress is a limited partnership

of 3

me, myself and I

I don’t give myself much hope

in me advocating
for myself

With me, me, me

LAUGHTON KNOWS ABOUT A HORSE

It's course
of course

And that's
all

THERE'S ONE THING

Liberate idea

“cut”

transform idea

“visualize”

reduce idea to nil logically

“deconstruct”

3rd value interfaces w/dream world

Relax

fidget

act

IDES OF MARCH

On the first page of Spring

God separated M f/E

matter & energy

a purely æsthetic gesture

HA=M/E

AH ME

AH HA

HA HA HA HA HA HO BAGAWAN

“Dipping my napkin in Caesar’s blood”

ETHNOS

Irish

English

Scot

Hopi

Zuni

Apache

“There were Indians, once.”

HUMAN JESTER

Don't wake up

don't wake down

don't wake around

Stay in the town

Attack

retreat

block

Achilles had all the moves

IEDs

Marla Ruzicka, busy counting the dead,
blown up by an improvised explosive
device on the airport road near Baghdad

Then, she was all over it

DAKINIS ON THE PATH

“Salamanders living in the flame”

Old hags, candidates for nip ‘n tuck,
I can see their beauty hidden in the age
hanging on them

or ageless sixteen-year-old, pink-fleshed
lips, legs-up-to-her-ass blush

PLATO'S ATOMS

Truth

Goodness

Beauty

HEAR MYSELF THINK

Got away—

got a time-share in Hawaii, and

all I had to decide on

was what to have for breakfast

Got away—

All I had to decide on

was form, formlessness or desire

DHARMA IS A CALLIOPE

I stared in awe—

then, my root guru
fired me up
sat me down and said,
“This is middle C. Play!”

SAD BUT SAFE

I would pin this man down with a simile,
But there is a lot I don't know about him.

THE PATH OF THE VAJRA DHARMA CLOWN
as partially received from Tenzin Mongkey by this unworthy monk

Samaya: Everyone is a fool.
I will continue being a Clown
until all fools are liberated.

(Not to be recited)

Dharma is a Three Ring Circus

Dharmakaya

Samboghakaya

Nirmanakaya

A “bhikshu” is an ordained monk—
the Dharma Clown dances on two “big shoes”

3 big buttons: body, voice and mind
not exactly in the right spots
but that’s just like a clown

A red nose producing the seed syllable *HONK*

Stay relaxed with pure motivation
while eating, sleeping and shitting
and be sure to laugh heartily every day

May this meet worthy people
possessing the karmic connection!

TWO WRONGS

Whether you’re on the mean streets of NY
in the Badlands of South Dakota
or in a mountain retreat at the base of the Continental Divide

In the state
of transparent immediacy
does *rangwang* make right?

Note: In Tibetan, “rangwang” means self-power.

SWIMMING IN SAMBARA

Steve says, “That Machig, she’s hot—
she’s attained Rainbow Bootie”

Doug says, “Venus without some penis
is a day without sunshine”

David says, “I was at first surprised, even shocked when I took up tennis to
find that
Love was nothing”

TIGLE & SOUL

Yogic subtle body

etheric

LUCK, DETERMINATION, WILL

Inter-

subject-

ive

I've maid

Eve mother

eave crone

Inter-

mission

Spys in the house

spys on the road

spys in the heart

Satan can enter the 4th Garden

TALL DHARMA TALES

Padmasambhava
the Sambhoghakaya Cowboy
driving Lamas to Sante Fe:
“Like driving cats,” he says,
“but these Lamas have fine wool, which makes for good yarns.”
Driving a stage to Tombstone,
Padmasambhava cracks his whip,
 [creates a vacuum () emptiness]
gets Hayagriva’s attention,
 spurs the ponies into action
puts the Paw nee on the warpath

YESHE TSOGAL & THE TREASURES

The Princess of Kharchen hiked all over tarnation

Tar

nation

planting treasures

Mind ters

earth ters, fire ters

ters as potent as mercury in the water

A month in Kennewick, 4 treasures
18 months in Yakima, 24 treasures
9 months in Spokane, 18 treasures
takes time to plant 84 million treasures

She had the time of her life

DAKINI HYPERTEXT

I'm invited into the treasure room—

Ah, Mother Muse, dishing out the scrolls!
Yeshe (wisdom) messin' with my head?
You're my web mistress, talkin' that html

CODED IN MY DNA

A comatose wisdom mind
a flat-lined wisdom mind
a flattened prostate

a prescription for impotency—

A monk wants his sex
to stay put, hard to stay celibate
if Johnny Jumpup is still jumpin’

“If you don’t use it, you’ll loose it.
Most of my patients want Viagra,”
my oncologist says,
“but it’ll never be like it was, again.”

“Is it ok if I let it go? won’t fall off?”
“No, medically speaking, it’s fine.”

MIDDLE WAY IN AMERICA

The Centralists come into the streets
and shout, “Be reasonable!”

Independence and equality
distinct from
a runaway congress

and an egomaniacal administration

The presidency no longer exists—
ignore it.

Metamorphosis of our Republic

Republicans and Democrats

far right and far left

middle is

Independent Party

not green, not blue, not red, not white

empty of bullshit

Breach of protocol

crossing the aisle

listening to others

to the harps

to the tambourines

to the sack horn

DOG READS MAN IS NEWS

Wrathful voices

ecstatic voices

peaceful voices

Commanding

chortling

cajoling

Dzog Chen reads man

Yeshe

took me into the treasury—

“Take what you need

BUT take care.”

her eagle voice

YESHE, I GET IT

You, dancing on my prostate body

reflective, active

yabyum, ho

madonna with your twilight language

“Blah!” you tease

dynamic denizen of Shang-shung
able to endure Abu Gaub torture
humiliation, fear, degradation,
mutilation—

happy even in hell

PHAEDRA

Sex w/or w/out Love

peptitdes' wings
sprouting, moist
aching like the gums of a baby

Sex w/love

winged souls embodied
remembering beauty of the gods
pain and pleasure

w/or w/out

absence & presence of the loved one

BETWEEN THE SHEETS

Judicial

Administrative

Legislative

IN EVERYTHING IS EVERYTHING

All marriages are born in the source
a marriage of marriages

Your marriage is consummated
in yab yum bliss

May your path be fruitful
and your love fulfilled

TUMMO

Cold back
cold front

cold heart

Bliss thaws

my icecap

Making ice in Alaska

in winter, in Ketchikan

after cold storage swingshift

I walk into the warm snow

An important part

of generating heat

is the relativity of “cold”

EITHER/OR

Mahayana or Hinayana

both/and Vajrayana

Both/and

may seem bogus

until

“Or”

collapses into

“either”

THE FIVE EXISTS

Either

or

both

neither

nor

Either/or

neither/nor

both/and

neither both/and

nor either/or

NEED NOT WANT

Body: food, clothing, shelter

mind: 8 hours sleep, 8 hours work,
8 hours for gaining more Light
energy: peaceful, wrathful, ecstatic

DEATH PENALTY

The Needle

first, you're prepped with an anesthetic
so, you should sleep through
the phosphate chloride hit in your blood
however, and this is important,
if you are not fully sedated
you are conscious
but unable to move
Hope your executioner is friendly

What is *humane*? What is *torture*?

Ronald Reagan said he had experience

putting down a horse, and the needle was humane, so the Warren Courts
decision to prohibit the death penalty was reversed

Those that favor punishment
will choose to err on the side of cruel and

unusual

3-D OF TORTURE

Dread

dependency

degradation

THREE I'S OF SPY

Identifying the target

initiating the contact

infiltrating the network

AGENT IN THE FIELD

In the shadow world

“What he doesn't know

can't be extracted under torture."

Donald Rumsfeld said he couldn't
understand why the prisoners were unable
to stand all day when he was on his feet
15 hours every day

Is the threat of torture torture?

SEEING TORTURE W/MY INNER EYE

Since history is written by the victors,
it's fair to ask, who are the barbarians?

A new commandment

Thou Shalt Not Torture

Hate to make this the subject of a poem

One thing to be punished as a civilian
one thing to be punished as a soldier
another thing to be punished as a terrorist

Pain inflicted trying to get out of the way

pain inflicted for pain inflicted
pain inflicted for knowledge gained
pain for your memory

As a spy for the Tutsi,
the Hutu would have tortured me

Hard to guess another's tolerance
for pain

In passing,
 “A penny for your pain.”

WHILE YOU SLEEP

your hypothalamus rests and dreams.

David's dream: he was in a big city, maybe New York, Penn Station, and he was moving on roller skates or on a big ball with roller-skates underneath, and he could move around easily. It was very quiet. As he moved about, he struck attitudes. He recalled he was wearing robes, white, rumbled, robes, and he couldn't tell where they began or where they left off. All the same, no one seemed to notice him as he moved through Penn Station in his white robes, and he thought, “This is what it is like when you're dead. And it seems this is happening more and more while I'm alive.”

GOOD NEIGHBORS

“Your fence came out real nice.”

Plastic fence.

The wooden fence had rotted.

“Now, I ‘ve got to get the sprinklers working.”

“It’s always one more thing.”

VAJRASATTVA FUGUE

Full stops

dissolve your elements

ha ha ha ha ho

EMPTINESS $1+1=1$

High

high, fast

high, much faster

Slow

slower

Loud

quiet

quieter

Deep

deeper

higher

Audible

PROJECT: MAKE A BOX

A box of Hell

a box of Heaven

wired with sound

w/audible screams & harp music

or mantras

A brass dial calibrated for each religion

Give a small talk
about rationalizing away the dogma
as though heavens & hells don't exist

LIBERATION OLYMPICS

Shake those tail feathers of pain

A pair of joggers
the female has quite a jiggle

A pair of quail
the female flies off the levy

The male follows

CHRIST AS GURU RINPOCHE

The Pope is pissed about *The DaVinci Code*
that Mary Magdeline had a kid with Jesus

How's he going to feel about the revelation
the Tibetans have cooked up in Shambhala?

Odd to see the pontification of the mystery Christ, the bridegroom & the
Church

the bride as the reason
why women can't be buff

Quack quack quack
another duck

PAINTING THE SISTINE CHAPEL

A full complement of clouds—
cumulus locomotives above an open pit

Recognize that you're on a work gang
mining titanium for TiO_2

Pigment color

Binder resin, glue, egg white

Solvent makes paint flow

vermillion in Middle Ages

 mercuric sulfate

ultramarine

 lapis lazuli

A full complement of moonlight

YOU ARE THE MOVIE

and the camera, the producer

 is your mind

and you are in charge of wardrobe and sets

Ol' Man Mclintock

 lived in a faraway cabin

 west and north, lived alone

 raised goats

 had a jug

 hanging in the window

 awoke in the morning

took a swig
grabbed his shotgun
and fired both barrels
at a Red-tailed hawk
every morning of his life

TRIKAYA

Up down sideways
in out center
here there
where?

All the “bad stuff” is destiny

Less biodiversity means it's easier
to control harmony

Then, natural cycles can be manipulated to...?

Events-sequence

time is an accident

time is a coincidence

time is a plan

Relationship between
one's self and one's elf

Between
a distinct self
and the Divine Self

MINCING

David says, "Mincing down Camden Street
in my size 11 galoshes
is a way I have of celebrating myself.
I can't go into the other ways,
but mincing isn't bad."

"I really am the laziest person
you can remember, but I must write
about it, that's the thing."

SANE DEATH

I linger and chant

Death's outlet song

Death and I, as companions
walking the other side of the mall

Past visions
past night
past heart-shaped leaves of lilac

A PITH INSTRUCTION

Osel's pet pug bit her on the tit
testing the perimeters of her paramitas

There's a little scar to prove this

MAYPOLE

“Let’s dance and sing, it’s Spring!”

It’s a time of terror and promise—
as my world collapses
into a molding leafiness

And the cities wretch up their lonely

The years pass
huge, remote, eyes in the sky

THE GATES

dear helen, glad to hear from you, lucky you, having cristo’s gates, the glory
of such a monumental presentation,
which some see as a construction site,
such great energy to get together
23 miles of blessings for a mere 21 million dollars, oh, cristo, magician of
special caliber, the saffron is the color
of claude’s hair, a love story,
and the saffron is Buddha’s compassion,
the gates portals to spring,
an environmental celebration during bleak winter, creating a birth-line

against a gray background, remembering the running fence, how it delineated
sonoma's landscape, the gates bring out the environs, skyscrapers scream into heaven,
saffron alive against the skyline at sunset, brings the city to life, awaken, be playful,
life is temporary, and so are the gates,
enjoy them while you have them

gate, gate, paragate

Revealed correspondences

to understand the world

Divination

understand the world in Time

Act on both world and mind, 3-D

realm of Emptiness

realm of Imagination

realm of Ideas & Impressions

Unknown, unreal

Real and unreal

Real

Mind's 3 ways to interpret

truth, goodness, beauty

Truth, to think either/or

both/and

relative truth

logical truth

Truth, meaning of U

Good, acts, on/off

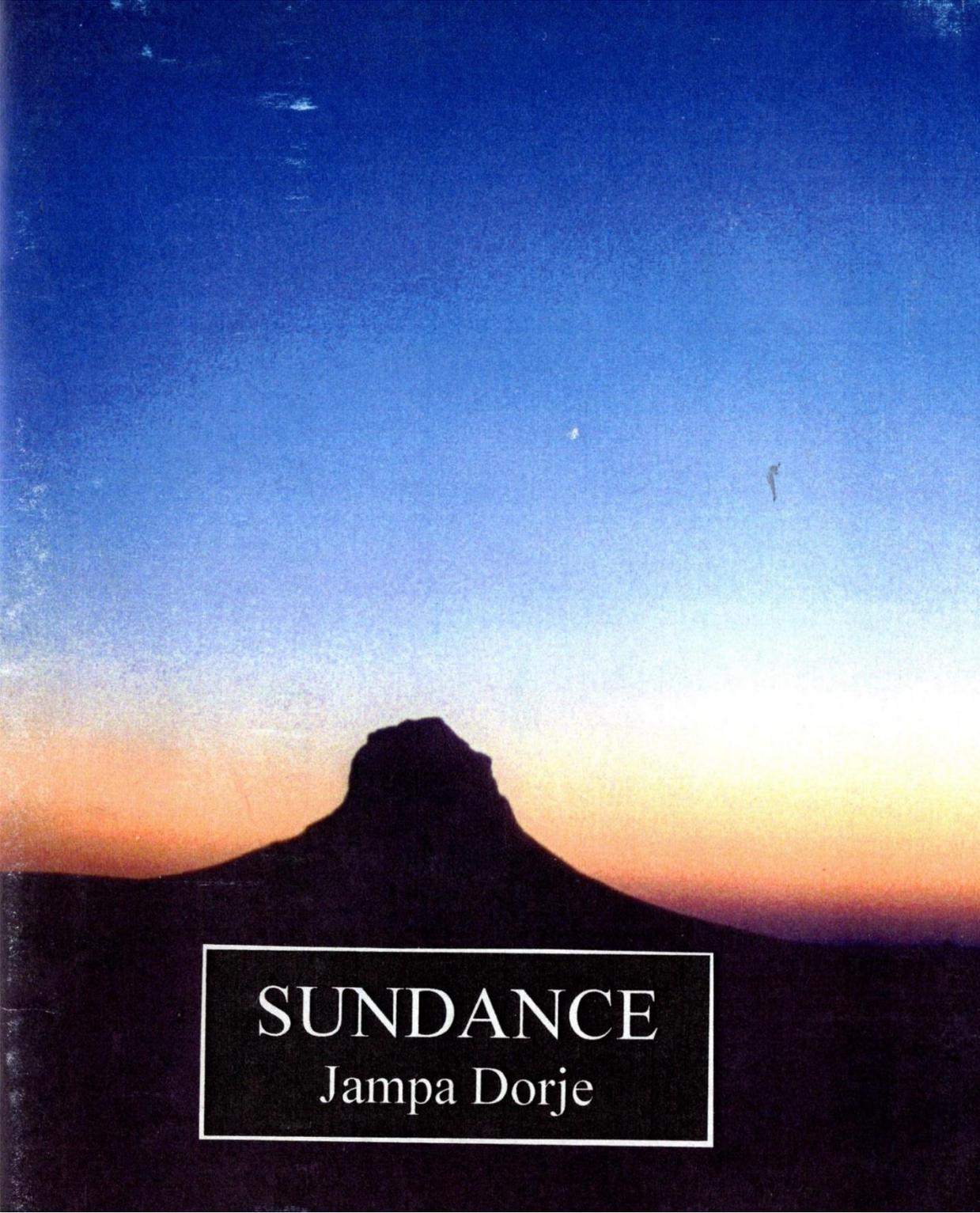
walkin' the talk

Beauty, graven images

invention, to rival nature

representation, praise nature

Zab-lam sputterings on a spring day



SUNDANCE

Jampa Dorje

SUNDANCING
on the Pine Ridge Reservation
August, 2005

A Denner Family Trip
to the



SUNDANCE

Jampa Dorje

D Press 2005 Sebastopol

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Something to sleep on, that's a good place to begin. We spend a third of our life in bed, so having a good mattress is important when you're camping. I'm always using used stuff. I had a thin, camping mattress I'd inherited from a friend, and I took it with me to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and blew it up, and the air went right out of it, and I looked at it, and it had half a dozen patches, and I thought, "Oh, that was silly of me." We had to go to town the next morning, so I bought a new air mattress, which I could inflate with a pump plugged into the car's cigarette lighter.

I set my tent on a slight slope and had to prop the mattress up with stuff out of my pack. It was like being on a waterbed, only it was an airbed, jiggled, but I did get a good night's sleep. The Sundancers had their tents in a separate area, near the sweat lodge. My son, Theo, had plans to dance. I helped Melissa and Kyle, his wife and son, get their tent set up down the road from the arbor and the dance circle. Theo made his camp in the area reserved for the dancers.

Next, we had to cut a tree for the ceremony. First, we went to the wrong spot. We followed a car that went to the area where a tree had been cut the year before, and we looked around, and then we drove back to Eric's, the medicine man's, house. We had driven around for an hour, and just as we pulled up and parked, Eric walked out, got in his pickup, and everyone got in their vehicles and followed him, along with another pickup towing a long flatbed, out his driveway and down a reservation road. We drove back to where we'd been. Eric and his helpers climbed down the side of a hill to the cottonwood that had been chosen.

There's a young girl, who plays the role of White Buffalo Calf Woman. In some ceremonies, there are four girls, but in this case, there was just Brittany, the adopted daughter of Don and Kathy, from Ellensburg, Washington, and she took a brand-new ax and made a mark on the tree in each of the four directions. Then, a man shimmied up and ropes were thrown to him. The ropes come from the guys that are going to pierce. They must have their ropes ready. It's part of their gear. They must be prepared. They have their pipe and their skirt and their rope. Their pipe must be wrapped with sage, and they make anklets and bracelets and a crown of sage. They mark their ropes in a special way, and there were bits of colored cloth tied to the ropes, this one with red, this one with a strip of red and blue, and so forth. Eleven men tied onto the tree, the Tree of Life.

We were parked along the road. People drove by and stopped. Little groups of people, family, connected to the dancers. People looking at one another, checking each other out. I'm a Tibetan Buddhist monk, but I wasn't wearing my robes. I wore my jeans because I wanted to help with the tree, which had to be caught. It can't touch the ground. All the ropes were attached, and a man took the ax and whacked the tree, and it fell, and while some of us used our hands to steady the tree, others steadied it with their ropes.

This cottonwood didn't seem so big, down in the gully, but after we caught it and carried it up to the road to the trailer it was more impressive. A chainsaw was called for, and some smaller trees with forked limbs were cut to support the tree on the trailer, so that the branches wouldn't drag on the ground. A few leaves touched the roadway, but the bulk of the tree was propped up and tied down, and then the

caravan set off for the Sacred Circle. It was dramatic, the cars following the tree along the road across the prairie at sunset. People driving the opposite direction stopped their cars, showing respect. They knew it was a Sundance Tree. They knew these dancers were going to dance for the people.

The arbor for the Sundance was tucked behind a low hill. You couldn't see the arbor coming up the road until you were right on it. The arbor was about forty feet in diameter. Small, forked trees covered with pine boughs for shade. Inside the arbor in another circle there were tiny prayer sticks with a tobacco tie at the top. Different colors for each direction. Four gates with larger prayer sticks. Yellow in the east, red in the west, green in the north and blue in the south. At the red end was an altar for the pipes and the Tanka, the buffalo skull. In the center, a pit had been dug for the tree.

By the time we arrived, it was getting dark, and people bustled around. The ropes were removed, and the lower limbs were trimmed off the trunk. And then, there was the ceremonial process of taking the tree into the center of the Sacred Hoop. There were four stops, and we had to hold the tree above the ground. I counted forty of us, and the tree must've been forty-two feet tall. We could have used two more people. It was that heavy. At each stop, the Buffalo Girl proffered the pipe to a direction, and the medicine man chanted. To the north, to the east, to the south, to the west, and we held the tree off the ground.

After these stops, we took the tree through the East Gate, and again held the tree, while women tied prayer ties in the upper branches, along with special objects. A bundle of wild cherry branches. The skin of a buffalo, cut in the shape of a buffalo, with the hair intact. And a cardboard cutout of a man with a hoop in one hand and a pipe in the other, which was tied in the branches above the buffalo. While the women worked, we held the tree. I heard a crackling, buzzing, crunching sound, and I turned, and above the East Gate, a meteor was burning up in the atmosphere. Crackling and blowing up.

There's a character in the Lakota lore called Fallen Star, so a falling star seemed appropriate and a good omen for the Sundance. Then, all the dancers that had plans to pierce tied their ropes onto the tree for a second time. At this point, the ropes were used to raise the tree, and everyone huffed and puffed and pulled and pushed. The men with the ropes spaced out around the circle and steadied the tree, while some packed the earth around the base. The tree is still considered to be alive at this time. It represents the axis of the world and is a symbol of rejuvenation, of renewal. The medicine man, who is known as the Interceptor, and his helpers did

their ceremonial thing. The ropes were rolled up, and we went to bed. The ropes dangled from the tree, ready for the time when the piercing would begin.

Piercing is the most dramatic part of the Sundance, but it is not the biggest part. It happens near the end, but before then, there is a lot of dancing. There are different sides to this dance: a physical side, an emotional side, an intellectual side, and a spiritual side. These correlate with levels of interpretation. A literal level, the dance, the sun, the heat. Then, there's the emotional pressure on staying the course. The metaphorical or allegorical side is revealed in the stories behind the ceremonies. The flesh sacrifice that mirrors the Lakota tale of Inyan, where the first creation was accomplished through giving blood, giving life force. And there's the spiritual part. The dancing for the people. The sacrifice of something that is yours alone to give. To renew, to purify and heal, like the Chöd practice, in Tibetan Buddhism, where we symbolically cut ourselves up into small pieces with a knife and feed our demons.

The women don't pierce. But they cut pieces of flesh from their arms. They can cut one piece or one hundred pieces. Not big pieces, just big enough so they bleed. There are different reasons to give flesh offerings. It's part of the myth of rejuvenation. This is the offering that connects you with the totality, to propitiate the cosmos. Maybe you do it for your grandmother, who is ill, and at the same time you do it for the people. And then, you do it for yourself, for the vision, for the courage, for the honor, for fortitude. To return to the roots of your personality. A solar return.

The dancers don't always have extensive knowledge about the symbolic qualities of the dance; some have more, the medicine man and his helpers; but for most it is enough to know what they are doing is good for the people. It's natural for there to be a macho attitude, but I've heard that there are Sundances where a person who is just into body piercing can go and pay money and pierce. The Lakota consider this a desecration of their tradition.

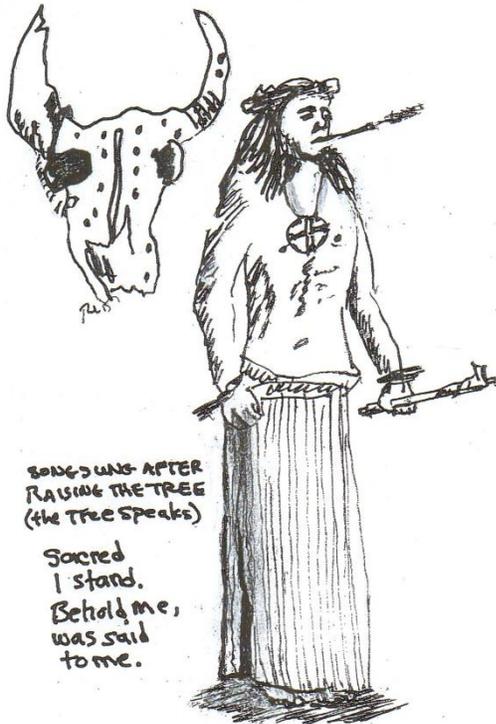
Again, the piercing is not the main part of the Sundance. It comes near the end. The main part of the dance is dance. The drummers drum; the singers sing; and the dancers dance. There are pipes to be smoked and prayers to be offered up to the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka.

I was there to help Melissa and Kyle and to support my son. The Lakota culture has a division of labor. There's men's work and there's women's work. Old men were traditionally left in the camp with the women and children, while the young men went off to hunt. Old Buddhist monks fall into another category, as I will tell about later. As an elder, you get a lot of perks. Like you can wear moccasins if you dance.

And then, a windstorm came along. Blew tents over. Blew tarps away. Blew about 18 hours straight. Kept everyone awake all night. So, after getting the tree set up and a day of dancing, everyone had an exhausting night of sleep. The dancers get nothing to eat or drink. No food or water. Four days dancing in 100 degrees of heat. But the prairie was still green. There had been a thunderstorm just before we arrived. The year before it had gotten up to 107° and the ground was scorched. This year it stayed in the high 90s with a sweet zephyr, so it was tolerable in the shade. Still, with the sun beating down, I could see that Don was getting second degree burns. Theo, who has tattoos covering his back and shoulders, lucked out, because they covered his tattoos with a paste made from finely-ground pipe stone, most likely so there wouldn't be a conflict of religious symbols. This saved him from severe burns. Theo said the dancers found some sunscreen, and they used it, although they weren't supposed to, but they did because it was there, because when you're at higher altitudes, the air is rarified, and the sun burns ever so more deeply.

The medicine man decides what medicine they need. One day they got a plum. Theo said it was the best plum he ever tasted. One day there were lemons. They sucked them and ate the peels. But they didn't get much sustenance. And then, they smoke. Tobacco. It's the Indian thing. Maybe not *Marlboros*, and they didn't pay attention to the Surgeon General's warning. Theo, who chews, started smoking during his breaks because he couldn't spit on the ground inside the Sacred Hoop. They smoked and they sweat. They went from sweating from their dancing in the sun to sweating in a sweat lodge. Cooler when they came out. Rigorous.

Nobody failed. Well, one dancer had a close call, nearly passed out, but he was pierced deeply. In the Spielberg TV series, *Into the West*, the young medicine man, Beloved of the Buffalo, pierces and dances from sunrise to sunset, but he was seeking a particular vision. The Sundance on Eric's land began later than sunrise, but it still had to do with ritual time. There were so many rounds that needed to be completed each day.



The first day, I wanted to see the dancers get started. I wasn't sure of the etiquette. I had heard all kind of things. No shoes, no jewelry. No photography. But I'd read some. I'd plowed through a copy of Maile's *Sundancing on the Pine Ridge Reservation* and a copy of Black Elk's *Sacred Pipe*, which Theo bought when we stopped at Battleground National Monument in Wyoming. It was important to tune into this battle scene. I overheard a man ask a young Sioux clerk at the museum if she had any more the Custer's Last Stand T-shirts, and she made an interesting Freudian slip. "No," she said, "we ran over them."

At the Sundance site, Kyle and I took folding chairs and went to the arbor. We found a place to sit near the entrance. The drummer and singers began on a cue. The dancers walked in procession, led by the Interceptor and White Buffalo Calf Woman, around the outside of the arbor and entered the East Gate. They took their places in the circle. This is where they would dance and where they would eventually pierce. Theo was on the far side. Number two, low on the totem pole because this was his first Sundance. Last year he had been a helper. Now, he was prepared for the real thing. On his right, Wade, one of the dancers who, the year previous had split before the dance was completed. Cordel was on Theo's left. Cordel is a friend of Theo's from Ellensburg, and he too is a dancer who had broken ranks the year before. Therefore, Wade and Cordel had dues to pay. Theo said that he was put next to Cordel to lend him support. A controversy rages around the issue of Wasichus (Whites) dancing in the Sundance. I heard a Lakota say they must try and keep the purity of their tradition, so that their children and their children's children will survive and prosper in the sacred manner intended by the Great Spirit. I heard another Lakota say that anyone interested in learning the Lakota way is welcome, and that this has always been the way.



At any rate, we were there, and we entered the arbor. The grass under the arbor was sharp because they had mowed it. The grasslands in general are beautiful, lush, an ocean of grass. The prairie, so many grasses. I looked them up: big bluestem, little bluestem, switchgrass, Indian grass, prairie sandreed, prairie cordgrass, western wheatgrass,

green needle grass, blue grama, side-oat grama, ricegrass, dotted greyfeather, buffalo grass.

Imagine tens of thousands of buffalo. Imagine wagon trains waiting two or three days for a herd to pass. The Sundance must be conceived in this context. The grasses, the buffalo, the dancers dancing for the people who follow the buffalo.

Kyle and I found a place to dance. I danced in my robes. When a round of the song was finished, the dancers raised their arms to the sky. This is called a *pushup*. There might be twenty pushups to a dance. And at the end of each dance, the dancers lined up at the South Gate and presented their pipes, two or three at a time, to people picked from under the arbor by the helpers. By the end of the day, all the pipes had to be smoked. The pipe is presented four times, and on the fourth presentation, you take the pipe back to your group and share it with your friends and the people in the group next to yours. This allows people to meet one another. The pipe is passed, and the expression, “Mitakuye oyasin” is said after you have taken a few tokes on the cherry bark mix in the pipe. The expression translates as “to all my relatives.” The word “Lakota” means an alliance of friends.

The dancers dance in place. They are given a place and they dance there. They dance to the beat of drum. The step can be to every beat or to every other beat, so some dancers dance faster than others. Some dance higher; some dance with their feet closer to the ground. Wade danced high. Theo danced lower, but Theo had a double step. I saw only one other dancer use this step. He touched his heel and the ball of his foot to the ground, a double-action two-step. Don said he thought this step was more complicated than was needed, but he said it was important to find a step that worked for you, because you were going to have to use it day in and day out for four days. The ground gets hot. You dance, and the grass is gone, and you

must dance on the bare ground. You must have a step that works for you.



While the dancers dance, they blow a flute made from the bone of an eagle's wing. Some don't like to blow the flute, because it takes extra energy, so they forget their flute. Theo looked for one. He asked at Prairie Edge, a store in Rapid City that sells Indian regalia, but they didn't have one, so he was able to say he tried. Most dancers blow the flute, which has a tinny sound when you hear it from a distance. The combination of the regular beat of the drum and the randomness of the high-pitched flute is eerie and other-worldly.

Purification and sacrifice. That's the path. I had arrived thinking the dancers danced day and night after they pierced, for four days, without food or water. So, I was relieved to find out they only danced during the day without food or water, that they pierced near the end, and that they got to sleep at night. This is surely a painful religion, but it is a religion of thanksgiving, a religion of rebirth, renewal, and healing.

To some extent, the flesh offering resembles the Crucifixion of Jesus. The tree with the cherry branches attached is the cross. The Sun Dance. The Son of God. So, there are crossovers in symbolism, and many of the dancers are Christians. However, the Sundance has its place in a tradition separate from Christianity. The dance was given to the Sioux by White Buffalo Calf Woman maybe a thousand years before Christ or maybe 500 years ago. Where were the Sioux a thousand years ago? This was before the horse. They would have used dogs to haul their belonging. Driven buffalo off cliffs and speared them. Ethnologists say the Sioux came from North Carolina, were pushed up to Minnesota, and then came a great migration in the 17th century, and with this was the fusion of the horse, the bow and the buffalo

that made the rise of the Sioux Nation on the prairie possible. But it is also possible that some of the people were already on the plains, that they had been practicing their theology around the Black Hills from time immemorial. Certain archeoastronomical aspects of their religion indicate that this is so, and the Lakota would like to believe it.

Man mirrors the universe. This is the anagogical side of the dance. *As above, so below.* The human reflects the divine. Again, the Sundance is one rite given by White Buffalo Calf Woman. She was a maiden. Two warriors saw her in a mist. She was naked. One of the warriors had lustful thoughts, and he tried to rape her. She turned him into a nest of snakes. The other warrior was humble, and she revealed the seven ceremonies to him. Then, she turned herself into the white buffalo. The ceremonies on earth unite the people to the ceremonies that are being performed in the heavens.

Among these rites is the Pipe Ceremony. The smoking of the pipe begins with loading tobacco, or other substances, into a pipe and then acknowledging the four directions, as well as Mother Earth and Father Sky, and ends with a final offering to the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka. The pipe is held by the bowl with the stem pointed outward while it is smoked, and in the last step the pipe is held with its stem pointed straight upward, out into the center of the universe. This is how your spirit is unified with the spirit of the Great Mystery. It acts as an interface between you and the divine. Not to be disrespectful, but in this respect the pipe is Jesus Christ. Black Elk said, "You killed your Jesus Christ, but we never killed our pipe."

In another way, this is very Buddhist. Wakan Tanka is like the Dharmakaya, that which is beyond quantification. Then, there are Superior Gods, like the great Boddhisattvas of the Sambhogakaya. Inyan had no beginning since he was there before any other. His spirit was Wakan Tanka, and he was the first god. Inyan felt a need to exercise his power, so he spread himself around in a great disc, which he named Maka. To create Maka, Inyan opened his veins and bled. His blood was blue and made the waters and the sky. At first, Inyan was like a soft cloud, but after giving his life force to create the world, he became hard, like the rock.

It is said Wakan Tanka gave the buffalo to man. The entire industry of the Lakota was the buffalo. Hides for clothes and shelter, bones for tools, meat for food. And to follow the migration of the buffalo and renew the cycle, the Lakota had a very time-factored lifestyle. They had to be in the right spot at the right time doing the right thing. There was a strict ceremonial sequence to be followed. The stars, to the Lakota, are the language of the spirit world, and what was happening on Earth had to coincide with what was happening in the heavens. Therefore, the Lakota

followed the sun and imitated the story in the stars as they journeyed through the Black Hills. On the vernal equinox of spring, it was their practice to collect their tobacco for ceremonies and to prepare for their journey. From their winter camps they moved to Bear Butte and from Bear Butte to the Devil's Peak for the Sundance on the Summer Solstice. Every step of the way, a star symbol showed them the path. All things are related, and each part represents the whole, the same as in the tradition of Hermetic Philosophy.

There is a Sacred Hoop that surrounds the Black Hills which is mirrored in the constellations. The Hoop is the path of a great race run between the four-legged creatures and the two-legged creatures. The Black Hills reside on both sides of the border between South Dakota and Wyoming and stretch from southern Montana to Nebraska. The whole panorama is multi-dimensional. The stories relate to the stars, and the stars mirror geographical locations on the ground, but they are not fixed. For example, the stars in the constellation of the Hand relate to the story of the Chief who lost his arm (stars which are part of the constellation of Orion). In another context these same stars are the backbone of the constellation of the Buffalo.

Anyway, back to the dance. Once I found out elders get lots of perks, and I'm an elder by the fact of my age, I relaxed. I had my own practices to do, but I was fascinated by the dance. I got a good step going, and since there is a Refuge Tree in my tradition, I did my refuge mantras to the beat of the drum and danced and did my mantras all day long.

So, I supported my son, got my work done, and at the same time made a spectacle of myself. Who is this monk? The natives were curious. I got some interesting looks. A little girl, named Megan, crawled twenty feet from her mother across the prickly grass, climbed up into my lap, and began to finger my mala. I guess she was a little tulku, a reincarnated lama, who recognized those beads. The young men wanted to know what I was about, what religion I was. I told them stories. I made comparisons between our two traditions, not suggesting the Tibetans were directly related to the Sioux genealogically, although there is anthropological evidence that the Native American culture has roots in the Asian migrations over the Bering Sea, but that the rituals contained similar elements. The idea of the flesh offering and the nature of "cutting through" in Chöd particularly interested them.

Among the dancers there is rivalry. A lot of gallows humor goes on. Someone might say, "Tomorrow, you'll be hanging" or "I'll see you hanging." The dancer next to Theo, Wade, had dues to pay from the previous year. He had to high step it. He had to dance like mad. For four days he was Lance Armstrong on steroids. Dance,

dance, dance, dance. Beautiful. And the guy on the other side of Theo, Cordel, an old rock-n-roller who is played with many of the rock bands in the Pacific Northwest, kind of a tough guy, kind of a boozier, but at his core, he's a brave heart. He, too, had cut out the year before, and he was making amends, showing that he had it together this year. I was proud of Theo. He danced steady. He told me later that he had his moments of doubt, but he did not show it. None showed weakness. There were older guys, who wore moccasins, and there was a woman, but they all danced every round.

Then, there was the young girl, Brittany, who had the role of White Buffalo Calf Woman. She is a Lakota, the adopted daughter of Don and Cathy. Part of the adoption agreement Don and Cathy made was that Brittany would stay involved in the Lakota Way of Life, but Brittany is a modern teenager, and she would like to not. She thought she could get out of her role She put up a fight. She had attitude.

Another man had brought his daughter, Shannon, and she supported Brittany's rebellion. She might have gotten into the spirit of the ceremony and danced in support of her friend, like Kyle did in support of his dad. Instead, she sat around all day looking bored. But I'll hand it to Brittany; she stayed the course, even though her snootiness got her dad a few demerits, which he paid for in flesh. Teenagers. Drama.

Lots of politics, too. Eric, who leads the dance had inherited this Sundance from his father, Vernon. The year before there had been a schism in the group. A dancer named Pauly, Eric's second-in-command, had a vision to do his own Sundance, and he had pulled out this year, and it left the dancers in a quandary as to who they were going to follow. Theo felt that since he had committed with Eric he should stay this year. He likes Pauly, but he felt he should be loyal to the group. He had been a helper for Eric and was invited to dance this year. So, he was there to dance.

Eric is married to his second wife, Angie, and she has still to prove herself competent as the medicine man's wife. Some of the older women don't think she's up to snuff, and there's gossip. There's always gossip. On the second day, she asked Melissa and Kathy if they would cook a lunch. And the girls arranged to have the food delivered early in the morning.

Melissa is a trifle skittish. She's studying to be a psychologist, and I bet she'll make a good counselor. She's the mother of four. She's a grandmother. But she is still in her 30s, which is young for a grandmother. She's a strong homemaker, takes great care of her brood, gets perfect grades in school, but she's susceptible to getting stressed out. Surprise. And her friend, Kathy, I love her, too. She's got a sense of humor. However, she can suddenly take off in an unpredictable direction. Get in her

car, drive around, looking for lost Indigenous people who need a ride home. She has heart and soul. But I could see this cooking lunch for fifty or sixty people might go askew.

So, we discussed the project with Don's wife, Cathy, who has had more experience, and she suggested Melissa and Kathy take the food that's delivered in the morning and get started, while she and I go over to Brittany's grandmother's place and prepare the rest. We'd go to a city called Sioux Nation and shop. Next morning, I met Cathy and we drove to a house trailer with about twenty junked cars scattered about, and dogs, and debris, no grass, a creek bed filled with garbage. Let's not judge it, but it was not a pristine site.

There was a car with a pair of bare legs sticking out from under it and a guy sitting on the fender talking to whomever was under the car. A group of young children were playing a game in the dusty driveway. One little girl asked another, "Are you a boy or a girl?" The other girl replied, "A boy," and the first girl said, "Well, boys run backwards, and girls run forward." That's it, I thought, now I know how it works.

We knocked on the door of the house trailer, and it opened, and we entered. Inside, there were three or four bedrooms. I didn't go back to look. A bathroom on the right, off the entryway, a living room with a curved couch. TV. Kitchen with a sink full of dishes. Kitchen table next to the wall. Three teenage girls, looking very hung over, sat on the couch with a baby and a toddler. The grandmother, sitting at the kitchen table with coffee and cigarettes. Two hulking men, one with a crew cut, dressed as a gangbanger, the other with a pitted complexion and long hair. I'm introduced to the grandmother, Sandy, but as I was standing over her right shoulder, I reached around and shook her hand in reverse fashion. When I was introduced to the gangbanger, he gave me a high five and we went through a hand jive routine. The longhair gave me a conventional, albeit limp, handshake. I was introduced to Sandy's husband, Junior, and was told he was a priest in the Native American Church. The Native American Church is not the Lakota religion, comes from the Southwest. Junior was into peyote, and there was a decidedly hallucinatory vibe to him. Right away, he wanted to tell me about a special medicine he knew of that would keep the bullets from penetrating my robes.

Sandy snapped at one of the girls on the couch, "Wake up. You can't be watching that baby if you're asleep. That'll teach you to stay out all night." The men excused themselves and went outside, and I was offered coffee and cigarettes, which I declined. Said I was fasting, and Sandy said she understood.

I excused myself, and I went to the bathroom. I lifted the lid on the toilet, and the seat fell off. The faucet was dripping, and I could see that the grout was missing

from the tiles around the sink. Obviously, there wasn't a handyman in this household. I went back to the kitchen, where I was introduced to another member of the family. A young man in his late teens, named Curtis. Crew cut, cowboy shirt and boots, silver and gold rodeo buckle. Bright eyes. Had an aura about him. I was told later that he has a mental disorder, has a problem with directions. Has to be told what to do. He does what he's told until he's told to do something else. Childhood abuse. Still, this boy had charisma.

The day before had been Cathy's birthday, and Sandy asked Curtis to sing "Happy Birthday." Curtis sang a truly heart-rending version of this song. Right up there with the one by Marylyn Monroe. It came from deep within him, like he was channeling the song from another dimension, like there was an ancient songster singing through him. Changed the whole dynamic of the gathering.

Then, we talked about the lunch for the Sundance, said we would buy some potato salad at the grocery store, but Sandy wouldn't hear of it. "No," she said, "that's not the right way. There's no spirit in that kind of food."

I said, "But we have to have this meal ready by 2:00, and it's past 10. I'll be glad to help." But Sandy said they could do it, that I couldn't help because it was the women's responsibility to prepare the meal. So, we headed for Sioux Nation in her SUV. There was a monitor on the speedometer that beeped when we exceeded 65 mph, and the beeper beeped steadily, as we sailed down the road.

At the Sioux Nation Supermarket, I again asked if I could help, and I was again told it was women's work, so I wandered over to a section of the store that had books and bought a copy of Ronald Goodman's monograph, *Lakota Star Knowledge*, which has helped me in understanding a little of the stellar theology connected to the Sundance.

A Sioux lady came up, while I was reading, and asked me what I was. I told her I'm a Tibetan Buddhist monk. "Where's that?" she asked. I told her I'm living in California caregiving my elderly mother but that my home is in the Four Corners area of Colorado, at Tara Mandala Retreat Center. "What are you doing here?" I said I was at a Sundance, that I was waiting for some women to buy groceries, that they wouldn't let me help. She said, "Well, that's not the Lakota way. If you offer to help, they should let you help." I thanked her for this information.

We bought \$192 worth of supplies. Chopped ham. Cheese. Chips. Hotdogs. Buns. Mustard. Ketchup. Mayonnaise. Pickles. Potatoes. Flour. Onions. Gatorade. Bottled water. Ice. Lard. There's a saying around there: "If it uses lard, it's good." Outside, getting the groceries in the SUV, we were approached by a young man wanting money for gas. Sandy railed at him, "Get a job. I've worked every day of my life. You

don't have to beg."

Begging is endemic on the reservation. When we first arrived on Eric's land, there was a car stalled in the middle of the road, and one of the men asked if he could have \$20 to buy a part to fix the car. A hose was blown. He had a piece of the hose in his hand. He said he was one of the singers for the dance. As I knew I was going to give something to the singers at the end of the ceremony, I decided to give it to them in advance. I knew it was a scam. The car started up, after they had their money. He knew I was an easy touch. His name was Sam, and I gave him another \$5 for cough drops later.

We drove back to the trailer lickety-split. I told Sandy that a monk is really neither male nor female. I told her what the girl in the supermarket had said about accepting my help, so she put me to work chopping pickles. Sandy made fry bread, and Cathy boiled potatoes. When the pickles were chopped, we peeled the cooked potatoes, twenty pounds of them, and cut them into small squares.

The mother of the teenage girls, who'd been putting a fuel pump on the car, came in and headed for the shower. She reappeared in flashy clothes with hair slicked back, dress tight on her ample hips, cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth, nodded at me, and went out without a word.

I cut thin slices of chopped ham off the block, and Cathy slapped on a sheet of cheese and made forty sandwiches. We had two tubs of potato salad, a pan full of sandwiches, and a whopping good-size container of fry bread. We jumped back in the car and headed for the Sundance, arriving just on time. Melissa and Kathy were relieved to see us. Everyone ate happily, while paper plates, Styrofoam cups, and napkins blew about in the wind. These people are doing what they have always done. They're a nomadic people, camping out in house trailers, getting together with their extended family to feast, leaving their garbage where it lies. The thing is, modern garbage is not biodegradable, and the people are not moving on. For the most part, they've never learned the trades of plumbing, carpentry, and electrical work. Their houses fall around them. It's a repair man's dream come true.

Junior showed me a little repair he had done in the kitchen of his trailer. He had nailed a strip of cherrywood around the edge of the counter, where a piece of the original trim had fallen off. It was neat enough, gave the counter a rustic look, but he must have put the wood on while it was still green, and it had shrunk, and a quarter inch of the plywood behind the strip showed through. I told him it was nice.

These are sociological judgements, and I am not a historian of the reservation. But I listened. An elder, known as Uncle Eli, told me he was skeptical of the politicians, given their history of broken promises. The federal government has

acknowledged it has completely screwed up the bookkeeping on the money it has collected since the 1880s, when it leased the Lakota land to timber, mining and oil interests. It owes Natives Americans billions of dollars, but the whole issue is tied up in court.

Meanwhile, on the Pine Ridge Reservation, there are three and four families living in run-down trailers or sleeping in junked cars. Something like ninety percent of the people is unemployed. Alcoholism is rampant, without there being a treatment center. Uncle Eli, who is in his 70s and has recently recovered from quadruple bypass surgery, is luckier than most. He and his wife, Caroline, run a tipi bed and breakfast. But they have their problems. Recently, one of Uncle Eli's eight sons died, and now they are caring for thirteen underage grandchildren.

I met a man who worked for the housing authority. He was at cross purposes with himself because it was his duty to kick people out of their homes if they aren't keeping them up, but his Lakota way isn't to make poor people homeless. He said, "It's like we're living in a third world country. Like a concentration camp. POWs after the Battle of Little Big Horn. We are still paying for that one. In my opinion, it's a Custer fuck by a bunch of circle jerks."

I heard another bitter saying: "The Cheyenne did the fighting. The Sioux got the glory. The Crow got the land." I drove through the Crow reservation, down through the Crazy Mountains. Things looked more prosperous there. One thing I discovered: the Lakota are a fierce, friendly, fickle, and forgiving people. They are like the French in that they are proud of their language and culture. Their language holds them together as a people. They do things the way they do them, and they aren't going to be coerced into doing anything differently.

The Sundance continued, round after round. Kyle did his best to imitate his father's step, and I danced by his side. We stood with the sun on us, so we suffered, too. The idea of the suffering is that you are doing it so the people may live. A ritual for past favors granted. A rite that draws down divine power into the pledges, the dancer being a channel for the Great Spirit. Theo could see us. We danced to support him and the others.

I saw different kinds of piercing. There's the piercing of the skin on the breast. There's a team with a scalpel. I saw one of the scalpels stuck in a tree. It was a medical instrument, but not exactly antiseptic. The patient lies down on a buffalo skin laid out at the base of the tree. The Interceptor and his lieutenants talk with the dancer who is to pierce. They draw a circle on his chest where they are going to cut, rub a bit of dirt on the spot, make two incisions, and insert a wooden peg. If the guy being pierced has had forethought, he has sanded the rough edges off his

pegs. A short piece of rope is tied to each peg, and that piece of rope is tied to the longer rope which in turn is tied to the tree. After you're done, and you've popped off, they plug the hole with a mushroom. I have heard there are cases of infection, but Theo has done this twice, and he has had no problem healing, so the mushrooms must have some power. The wound heals and leaves a small scar, about the size of the tip of your little finger. This is not exactly a science, more of an art, I would say, in the sense that there are several factors that determine a piercing.

Something to sleep on, that's a good place to begin. We spend a third of our life in bed, so having a good mattress is important when you're camping. I'm always using used stuff. I had a thin, camping mattress I'd inherited from a friend, and I took it with me to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and blew it up, and the air went right out of it, and I looked at it, and it had half a dozen patches, and I thought, "Oh, that was silly of me." We had to go to town the next morning, so I bought a new air mattress, which I could inflate with a pump plugged into the car's cigarette lighter.

I set my tent on a slight slope and had to prop the mattress up with stuff out of my pack. It was like being on a waterbed, only it was an airbed, jiggled, but I did get a good night's sleep. The Sundancers had their tents in a separate area, near the sweat lodge. My son, Theo, had plans to dance. I helped Melissa and Kyle, his wife and son, get their tent set up down the road from the arbor and the dance circle. Theo made his camp in the area reserved for the dancers.

Next, we had to cut a tree for the ceremony. First, we went to the wrong spot. We followed a car that went to the area where a tree had been cut the year before, and we looked around, and then we drove back to Eric's, the medicine man's, house. We had driven around for an hour, and just as we pulled up and parked, Eric walked out, got in his pickup, and everyone got in their vehicles and followed him, along with another pickup towing a long flatbed, out his driveway and down a reservation road. We drove back to where we'd been. Eric and his helpers climbed down the side of a hill to the cottonwood that had been chosen.

There's a young girl, who plays the role of White Buffalo Calf Woman. In some ceremonies, there are four girls, but in this case, there was just Brittany, the adopted daughter of Don and Kathy, from Ellensburg, Washington, and she took a brand-new ax and made a mark on the tree in each of the four directions. Then, a man shimmied up and ropes were thrown to him. The ropes come from the guys that are going to pierce. They must have their ropes ready. It's part of their gear. They must be prepared. They have their pipe and their skirt and their rope. Their

pipe must be wrapped with sage, and they make anklets and bracelets and a crown of sage. They mark their ropes in a special way, and there were bits of colored cloth tied to the ropes, this one with red, this one with a strip of red and blue, and so forth. Eleven men tied onto the tree, the Tree of Life.

We were parked along the road. People drove by and stopped. Little groups of people, family, connected to the dancers. People looking at one another, checking each other out. I'm a Tibetan Buddhist monk, but I wasn't wearing my robes. I wore my jeans because I wanted to help with the tree, which had to be caught. It can't touch the ground. All the ropes were attached, and a man took the ax and whacked the tree, and it fell, and while some of us used our hands to steady the tree, others steadied it with their ropes.

This cottonwood didn't seem so big, down in the gully, but after we caught it and carried it up to the road to the trailer it was more impressive. A chainsaw was called for, and some smaller trees with forked limbs were cut to support the tree on the trailer, so that the branches wouldn't drag on the ground. A few leaves touched the roadway, but the bulk of the tree was propped up and tied down, and then the caravan set off for the Sacred Circle. It was dramatic, the cars following the tree along the road across the prairie at sunset. People driving the opposite direction stopped their cars, showing respect. They knew it was a Sundance Tree. They knew these dancers were going to dance for the people.

The arbor for the Sundance was tucked behind a low hill. You couldn't see the arbor coming up the road until you were right on it. The arbor was about forty feet in diameter. Small, forked trees covered with pine boughs for shade. Inside the arbor in another circle there were tiny prayer sticks with a tobacco tie at the top. Different colors for each direction. Four gates with larger prayer sticks. Yellow in the east, red in the west, green in the north and blue in the south. At the red end was an altar for the pipes and the Tanka, the buffalo skull. In the center, a pit had been dug for the tree.

By the time we arrived, it was getting dark, and people bustled around. The ropes were removed, and the lower limbs were trimmed off the trunk. And then, there was the ceremonial process of taking the tree into the center of the Sacred Hoop. There were four stops, and we had to hold the tree above the ground. I counted forty of us, and the tree must've been forty-two feet tall. We could have used two more people. It was that heavy. At each stop, the Buffalo Girl proffered the pipe to a direction, and the medicine man chanted. To the north, to the east, to the south, to the west, and we held the tree off the ground.

After these stops, we took the tree through the East Gate, and again held the

tree, while women tied prayer ties in the upper branches, along with special objects. A bundle of wild cherry branches. The skin of a buffalo, cut in the shape of a buffalo, with the hair intact. And a cardboard cutout of a man with a hoop in one hand and a pipe in the other, which was tied in the branches above the buffalo. While the women worked, we held the tree. I heard a crackling, buzzing, crunching sound, and I turned, and above the East Gate, a meteor was burning up in the atmosphere. Crackling and blowing up.

There's a character in the Lakota lore called Fallen Star, so a falling star seemed appropriate and a good omen for the Sundance. Then, all the dancers that had plans to pierce tied their ropes onto the tree for a second time. At this point, the ropes were used to raise the tree, and everyone huffed and puffed and pulled and pushed. The men with the ropes spaced out around the circle and steadied the tree, while some packed the earth around the base. The tree is still considered to be alive at this time. It represents the axis of the world and is a symbol of rejuvenation, of renewal. The medicine man, who is known as the Interceptor, and his helpers did their ceremonial thing. The ropes were rolled up, and we went to bed. The ropes dangled from the tree, ready for the time when the piercing would begin.

Piercing is the most dramatic part of the Sundance, but it is not the biggest part. It happens near the end, but before then, there is a lot of dancing. There are different sides to this dance: a physical side, an emotional side, an intellectual side, and a spiritual side. These correlate with levels of interpretation. A literal level, the dance, the sun, the heat. Then, there's the emotional pressure on staying the course. The metaphorical or allegorical side is revealed in the stories behind the ceremonies. The flesh sacrifice that mirrors the Lakota tale of Inyan, where the first creation was accomplished through giving blood, giving life force. And there's the spiritual part. The dancing for the people. The sacrifice of something that is yours alone to give. To renew, to purify and heal, like the Chöd practice, in Tibetan Buddhism, where we symbolically cut ourselves up into small pieces with a knife and feed our demons.

The women don't pierce. But they cut pieces of flesh from their arms. They can cut one piece or one hundred pieces. Not big pieces, just big enough so they bleed. There are different reasons to give flesh offerings. It's part of the myth of rejuvenation. This is the offering that connects you with the totality, to propitiate the cosmos. Maybe you do it for your grandmother, who is ill, and at the same time you do it for the people. And then, you do it for yourself, for the vision, for the courage, for the honor, for fortitude. To return to the roots of your personality. A solar return.

The dancers don't always have extensive knowledge about the symbolic qualities of the dance; some have more, the medicine man and his helpers; but for most it is enough to know what they are doing is good for the people. It's natural for there to be a macho attitude, but I've heard that there are Sundances where a person who is just into body piercing can go and pay money and pierce. The Lakota consider this a desecration of their tradition.

Again, the piercing is not the main part of the Sundance. It comes near the end. The main part of the dance is dance. The drummers drum; the singers sing; and the dancers dance. There are pipes to be smoked and prayers to be offered up to the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka.

I was there to help Melissa and Kyle and to support my son. The Lakota culture has a division of labor. There's men's work and there's women's work. Old men were traditionally left in the camp with the women and children, while the young men went off to hunt. Old Buddhist monks fall into another category, as I will tell about later. As an elder, you get a lot of perks. Like you can wear moccasins if you dance.

And then, a windstorm came along. Blew tents over. Blew tarps away. Blew about 18 hours straight. Kept everyone awake all night. So, after getting the tree set up and a day of dancing, everyone had an exhausting night of sleep. The dancers get nothing to eat or drink. No food or water. Four days dancing in 100 degrees of heat. But the prairie was still green. There had been a thunderstorm just before we arrived. The year before it had gotten up to 107° and the ground was scorched. This year it stayed in the high 90s with a sweet zephyr, so it was tolerable in the shade. Still, with the sun beating down, I could see that Don was getting second degree burns. Theo, who has tattoos covering his back and shoulders, lucked out, because they covered his tattoos with a paste made from finely-ground pipe stone, most likely so there wouldn't be a conflict of religious symbols. This saved him from severe burns. Theo said the dancers found some sunscreen, and they used it, although they weren't supposed to, but they did because it was there, because when you're at higher altitudes, the air is rarified, and the sun burns ever so more deeply.

The medicine man decides what medicine they need. One day they got a plum. Theo said it was the best plum he ever tasted. One day there were lemons. They sucked them and ate the peels. But they didn't get much sustenance. And then, they smoke. Tobacco. It's the Indian thing. Maybe not Marlboros, and they didn't pay attention to the Surgeon General's warning. Theo, who chews, started smoking during his breaks because he couldn't spit on the ground inside the Sacred Hoop.

They smoked and they sweat. They went from sweating from their dancing in the sun to sweating in a sweat lodge. Cooler when they came out. Rigorous.

Nobody failed. Well, one dancer had a close call, nearly passed out, but he was pierced deeply. In the Spielberg TV series, *Into the West*, the young medicine man, *Beloved of the Buffalo*, pierces and dances from sunrise to sunset, but he was seeking a particular vision. The Sundance on Eric's land began later than sunrise, but it still had to do with ritual time. There were so many rounds that needed to be completed each day.

The first day, I wanted to see the dancers get started. I wasn't sure of the etiquette. I had heard all kind of things. No shoes, no jewelry. No photography. But I'd read some. I'd plowed through a copy of Maile's *Sundancing on the Pine Ridge Reservation* and a copy of *Black Elk's Sacred Pipe*, which Theo bought when we stopped at *Battleground National Monument* in Wyoming. It was important to tune into this battle scene. I overheard a man ask a young Sioux clerk at the museum if she had any more the *Custer's Last Stand T-shirts*, and she made an interesting Freudian slip. "No," she said, "we ran over them."

At the Sundance site, Kyle and I took folding chairs and went to the arbor. We found a place to sit near the entrance. The drummer and singers began on a cue. The dancers walked in procession, led by the *Interceptor* and *White Buffalo Calf Woman*, around the outside of the arbor and entered the *East Gate*. They took their places in the circle. This is where they would dance and where they would eventually pierce. Theo was on the far side. Number two, low on the totem pole because this was his first Sundance. Last year he had been a helper. Now, he was prepared for the real thing. On his right, Wade, one of the dancers who, the year previous had split before the dance was completed. Cordel was on Theo's left. Cordel is a friend of Theo's from *Ellensburg*, and he too is a dancer who had broken ranks the year before. Therefore, Wade and Cordel had dues to pay. Theo said that he was put next to Cordel to lend him support. A controversy rages around the issue of *Wasichus (Whites)* dancing in the Sundance. I heard a Lakota say they must try and keep the purity of their tradition, so that their children and their children's children will survive and prosper in the sacred manner intended by the *Great Spirit*. I heard another Lakota say that anyone interested in learning the Lakota way is welcome, and that this has always been the way.

At any rate, we were there, and we entered the arbor. The grass under the arbor was sharp because they had mowed it. The grasslands in general are beautiful, lush, an ocean of grass. The prairie, so many grasses. I looked them up: big bluestem,

little bluestem, switchgrass, Indian grass, prairie sandreed, prairie cordgrass, western wheatgrass, green needle grass, blue grama, side-oat grama, ricegrass, dotted greyfeather, buffalo grass.

Imagine tens of thousands of buffalo. Imagine wagon trains waiting two or three days for a herd to pass. The Sundance must be conceived in this context. The grasses, the buffalo, the dancers dancing for the people who follow the buffalo.

Kyle and I found a place to dance. I danced in my robes. When a round of the song was finished, the dancers raised their arms to the sky. This is called a pushup. There might be twenty pushups to a dance. And at the end of each dance, the dancers lined up at the South Gate and presented their pipes, two or three at a time, to people picked from under the arbor by the helpers. By the end of the day, all the pipes had to be smoked. The pipe is presented four times, and on the fourth presentation, you take the pipe back to your group and share it with your friends and the people in the group next to yours. This allows people to meet one another. The pipe is passed, and the expression, "Mitakuye oyasin" is said after you have taken a few tokes on the cherry bark mix in the pipe. The expression translates as "to all my relatives." The word "Lakota" means an alliance of friends.

The dancers dance in place. They are given a place and they dance there. They dance to the beat of drum. The step can be to every beat or to every other beat, so some dancers dance faster than others. Some dance higher; some dance with their feet closer to the ground. Wade danced high. Theo danced lower, but Theo had a double step. I saw only one other dancer use this step. He touched his heel and the ball of his foot to the ground, a double-action two-step. Don said he thought this step was more complicated than was needed, but he said it was important to find a step that worked for you, because you were going to have to use it day in and day out for four days. The ground gets hot. You dance, and the grass is gone, and you must dance on the bare ground. You must have a step that works for you.

While the dancers dance, they blow a flute made from the bone of an eagle's wing. Some don't like to blow the flute, because it takes extra energy, so they forget their flute. Theo looked for one. He asked at Prairie Edge, a store in Rapid City that sells Indian regalia, but they didn't have one, so he was able to say he tried. Most dancers blow the flute, which has a tinny sound when you hear it from a distance. The combination of the regular beat of the drum and the randomness of the high-pitched flute is eerie and other-worldly.

Purification and sacrifice. That's the path. I had arrived thinking the dancers danced day and night after they pierced, for four days, without food or water. So, I was relieved to find out they only danced during the day without food or water, that they pierced near the end, and that they got to sleep at night. This is surely a painful religion, but it is a religion of thanksgiving, a religion of rebirth, renewal, and healing.

To some extent, the flesh offering resembles the Crucifixion of Jesus. The tree with the cherry branches attached is the cross. The Sun Dance. The Son of God. So, there are crossovers in symbolism, and many of the dancers are Christians. However, the Sundance has its place in a tradition separate from Christianity. The dance was given to the Sioux by White Buffalo Calf Woman maybe a thousand years before Christ or maybe 500 years ago. Where were the Sioux a thousand years ago? This was before the horse. They would have used dogs to haul their belonging. Driven buffalo off cliffs and speared them. Ethnologists say the Sioux came from North Carolina, were pushed up to Minnesota, and then came a great migration in the 17th century, and with this was the fusion of the horse, the bow and the buffalo that made the rise of the Sioux Nation on the prairie possible. But it is also possible that some of the people were already on the plains, that they had been practicing their theology around the Black Hills from time immemorial. Certain archeoastronomical aspects of their religion indicate that this is so, and the Lakota would like to believe it.

Man mirrors the universe. This is the anagogical side of the dance. As above, so below. The human reflects the divine. Again, the Sundance is one rite given by White Buffalo Calf Woman. She was a maiden. Two warriors saw her in a mist. She was naked. One of the warriors had lustful thoughts, and he tried to rape her. She turned him into a nest of snakes. The other warrior was humble, and she revealed the seven ceremonies to him. Then, she turned herself into the white buffalo. The ceremonies on earth unite the people to the ceremonies that are being performed in the heavens.

Among these rites is the Pipe Ceremony. The smoking of the pipe begins with loading tobacco, or other substances, into a pipe and then acknowledging the four directions, as well as Mother Earth and Father Sky, and ends with a final offering to the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka. The pipe is held by the bowl with the stem pointed outward while it is smoked, and in the last step the pipe is held with its stem pointed straight upward, out into the center of the universe. This is how your spirit is unified with the spirit of the Great Mystery. It acts as an interface between you and the divine. Not to be disrespectful, but in this respect the pipe is Jesus Christ.

Black Elk said, "You killed your Jesus Christ, but we never killed our pipe."

In another way, this is very Buddhist. Wankan Tanka is like the Dharmakaya, that which is beyond quantification. Then, there are Superior Gods, like the great Boddhisattvas of the Sambhogakaya. Inyan had no beginning since he was there before any other. His spirit was Wankan Tanka, and he was the first god. Inyan felt a need to exercise his power, so he spread himself around in a great disc, which he named Maka. To create Maka, Inyan opened his veins and bled. His blood was blue and made the waters and the sky. At first, Inyan was like a soft cloud, but after giving his life force to create the world, he became hard, like the rock.

It is said Wankan Tanka gave the buffalo to man. The entire industry of the Lakota was the buffalo. Hides for clothes and shelter, bones for tools, meat for food. And to follow the migration of the buffalo and renew the cycle, the Lakota had a very time-factored lifestyle. They had to be in the right spot at the right time doing the right thing. There was a strict ceremonial sequence to be followed. The stars, to the Lakota, are the language of the spirit world, and what was happening on Earth had to coincide with what was happening in the heavens. Therefore, the Lakota followed the sun and imitated the story in the stars as they journeyed through the Black Hills. On the vernal equinox of spring, it was their practice to collect their tobacco for ceremonies and to prepare for their journey. From their winter camps they moved to Bear Butte and from Bear Butte to the Devil's Peak for the Sundance on the Summer Solstice. Every step of the way, a star symbol showed them the path. All things are related, and each part represents the whole, the same as in the tradition of Hermetic Philosophy.

There is a Sacred Hoop that surrounds the Black Hills which is mirrored in the constellations. The Hoop is the path of a great race run between the four-legged creatures and the two-legged creatures. The Black Hills reside on both sides of the border between South Dakota and Wyoming and stretch from southern Montana to Nebraska. The whole panorama is multi-dimensional. The stories relate to the stars, and the stars mirror geographical locations on the ground, but they are not fixed. For example, the stars in the constellation of the Hand relate to the story of the Chief who lost his arm (stars which are part of the constellation of Orion). In another context these same stars are the backbone of the constellation of the Buffalo.

Anyway, back to the dance. Once I found out elders get lots of perks, and I'm an elder by the fact of my age, I relaxed. I had my own practices to do, but I was fascinated by the dance. I got a good step going, and since there is a Refuge Tree in my tradition, I did my refuge mantras to the beat of the drum and danced and did

my mantras all day long.

So, I supported my son, got my work done, and at the same time made a spectacle of myself. Who is this monk? The natives were curious. I got some interesting looks. A little girl, named Megan, crawled twenty feet from her mother across the prickly grass, climbed up into my lap, and began to finger my mala. I guess she was a little tulku, a reincarnated lama, who recognized those beads. The young men wanted to know what I was about, what religion I was. I told them stories. I made comparisons between our two traditions, not suggesting the Tibetans were directly related to the Sioux genealogically, although there is anthropological evidence that the Native American culture has roots in the Asian migrations over the Bering Sea, but that the rituals contained similar elements. The idea of the flesh offering and the nature of “cutting through” in Chöd particularly interested them.

Among the dancers there is rivalry. A lot of gallows humor goes on. Someone might say, “Tomorrow, you’ll be hanging” or “I’ll see you hanging.” The dancer next to Theo, Wade, had dues to pay from the previous year. He had to high step it. He had to dance like mad. For four days he was Lance Armstrong on steroids. Dance, dance, dance, dance. Beautiful. And the guy on the other side of Theo, Cordel, an old rock-n-roller who is played with many of the rock bands in the Pacific Northwest, kind of a tough guy, kind of a boozier, but at his core, he’s a brave heart. He, too, had cut out the year before, and he was making amends, showing that he had it together this year. I was proud of Theo. He danced steady. He told me later that he had his moments of doubt, but he did not show it. None showed weakness. There were older guys, who wore moccasins, and there was a woman, but they all danced every round.

Then, there was the young girl, Brittany, who had the role of White Buffalo Calf Woman. She is a Lakota, the adopted daughter of Don and Cathy. Part of the adoption agreement Don and Cathy made was that Brittany would stay involved in the Lakota Way of Life, but Brittany is a modern teenager, and she would like to not. She thought she could get out of her role She put up a fight. She had attitude.

Another man had brought his daughter, Shannon, and she supported Brittany’s rebellion. She might have gotten into the spirit of the ceremony and danced in support of her friend, like Kyle did in support of his dad. Instead, she sat around all day looking bored. But I’ll hand it to Brittany; she stayed the course, even though her snootiness got her dad a few demerits, which he paid for in flesh. Teenagers. Drama.

Lots of politics, too. Eric, who leads the dance had inherited this Sundance from

his father, Vernon. The year before there had been a schism in the group. A dancer named Pauly, Eric's second-in-command, had a vision to do his own Sundance, and he had pulled out this year, and it left the dancers in a quandary as to who they were going to follow. Theo felt that since he had committed with Eric he should stay this year. He likes Pauly, but he felt he should be loyal to the group. He had been a helper for Eric and was invited to dance this year. So, he was there to dance.

Eric is married to his second wife, Angie, and she has still to prove herself competent as the medicine man's wife. Some of the older women don't think she's up to snuff, and there's gossip. There's always gossip. On the second day, she asked Melissa and Kathy if they would cook a lunch. And the girls arranged to have the food delivered early in the morning.

Melissa is a trifle skittish. She's studying to be a psychologist, and I bet she'll make a good counselor. She's the mother of four. She's a grandmother. But she is still in her 30s, which is young for a grandmother. She's a strong homemaker, takes great care of her brood, gets perfect grades in school, but she's susceptible to getting stressed out. Surprise. And her friend, Kathy, I love her, too. She's got a sense of humor. However, she can suddenly take off in an unpredictable direction. Get in her car, drive around, looking for lost Indigenous people who need a ride home. She has heart and soul. But I could see this cooking lunch for fifty or sixty people might go askew.

So, we discussed the project with Don's wife, Cathy, who has had more experience, and she suggested Melissa and Kathy take the food that's delivered in the morning and get started, while she and I go over to Brittany's grandmother's place and prepare the rest. We'd go to a city called Sioux Nation and shop. Next morning, I met Cathy and we drove to a house trailer with about twenty junked cars scattered about, and dogs, and debris, no grass, a creek bed filled with garbage. Let's not judge it, but it was not a pristine site.

There was a car with a pair of bare legs sticking out from under it and a guy sitting on the fender talking to whomever was under the car. A group of young children were playing a game in the dusty driveway. One little girl asked another, "Are you a boy or a girl?" The other girl replied, "A boy," and the first girl said, "Well, boys run backwards, and girls run forward." That's it, I thought, now I know how it works.

We knocked on the door of the house trailer, and it opened, and we entered. Inside, there were three or four bedrooms. I didn't go back to look. A bathroom on the right, off the entryway, a living room with a curved couch. TV. Kitchen with a sink full of dishes. Kitchen table next to the wall. Three teenage girls, looking very hung over, sat on the couch with a baby and a toddler. The grandmother, sitting at

the kitchen table with coffee and cigarettes. Two hulking men, one with a crew cut, dressed as a gangbanger, the other with a pitted complexion and long hair. I'm introduced to the grandmother, Sandy, but as I was standing over her right shoulder, I reached around and shook her hand in reverse fashion. When I was introduced to the gangbanger, he gave me a high five and we went through a hand jive routine. The longhair gave me a conventional, albeit limp, handshake. I was introduced to Sandy's husband, Junior, and was told he was a priest in the Native American Church. The Native American Church is not the Lakota religion, comes from the Southwest. Junior was into peyote, and there was a decidedly hallucinatory vibe to him. Right away, he wanted to tell me about a special medicine he knew of that would keep the bullets from penetrating my robes.

Sandy snapped at one of the girls on the couch, "Wake up. You can't be watching that baby if you're asleep. That'll teach you to stay out all night." The men excused themselves and went outside, and I was offered coffee and cigarettes, which I declined. Said I was fasting, and Sandy said she understood.

I excused myself, and I went to the bathroom. I lifted the lid on the toilet, and the seat fell off. The faucet was dripping, and I could see that the grout was missing from the tiles around the sink. Obviously, there wasn't a handyman in this household. I went back to the kitchen, where I was introduced to another member of the family. A young man in his late teens, named Curtis. Crew cut, cowboy shirt and boots, silver and gold rodeo buckle. Bright eyes. Had an aura about him. I was told later that he has a mental disorder, has a problem with directions. Has to be told what to do. He does what he's told until he's told to do something else. Childhood abuse. Still, this boy had charisma.

The day before had been Cathy's birthday, and Sandy asked Curtis to sing "Happy Birthday." Curtis sang a truly heart-rending version of this song. Right up there with the one by Marylyn Monroe. It came from deep within him, like he was channeling the song from another dimension, like there was an ancient songster singing through him. Changed the whole dynamic of the gathering.

Then, we talked about the lunch for the Sundance, said we would buy some potato salad at the grocery store, but Sandy wouldn't hear of it. "No," she said, "that's not the right way. There's no spirit in that kind of food."

I said, "But we have to have this meal ready by 2:00, and it's past 10. I'll be glad to help." But Sandy said they could do it, that I couldn't help because it was the women's responsibility to prepare the meal. So, we headed for Sioux Nation in her SUV. There was a monitor on the speedometer that beeped when we exceeded 65 mph, and the beeper beeped steadily, as we sailed down the road.

At the Sioux Nation Supermarket, I again asked if I could help, and I was again told it was women's work, so I wandered over to a section of the store that had books and bought a copy of Ronald Goodman's monograph, *Lakota Star Knowledge*, which has helped me in understanding a little of the stellar theology connected to the Sundance.

A Sioux lady came up, while I was reading, and asked me what I was. I told her I'm a Tibetan Buddhist monk. "Where's that?" she asked. I told her I'm living in California caregiving my elderly mother but that my home is in the Four Corners area of Colorado, at Tara Mandala Retreat Center. "What are you doing here?" I said I was at a Sundance, that I was waiting for some women to buy groceries, that they wouldn't let me help. She said, "Well, that's not the Lakota way. If you offer to help, they should let you help." I thanked her for this information.

We bought \$192 worth of supplies. Chopped ham. Cheese. Chips. Hotdogs. Buns. Mustard. Ketchup. Mayonnaise. Pickles. Potatoes. Flour. Onions. Gatorade. Bottled water. Ice. Lard. There's a saying around there: "If it uses lard, it's good." Outside, getting the groceries in the SUV, we were approached by a young man wanting money for gas. Sandy railed at him, "Get a job. I've worked every day of my life. You don't have to beg."

Begging is endemic on the reservation. When we first arrived on Eric's land, there was a car stalled in the middle of the road, and one of the men asked if he could have \$20 to buy a part to fix the car. A hose was blown. He had a piece of the hose in his hand. He said he was one of the singers for the dance. As I knew I was going to give something to the singers at the end of the ceremony, I decided to give it to them in advance. I knew it was a scam. The car started up, after they had their money. He knew I was an easy touch. His name was Sam, and I gave him another \$5 for cough drops later.

We drove back to the trailer lickety-split. I told Sandy that a monk is really neither male nor female. I told her what the girl in the supermarket had said about accepting my help, so she put me to work chopping pickles. Sandy made fry bread, and Cathy boiled potatoes. When the pickles were chopped, we peeled the cooked potatoes, twenty pounds of them, and cut them into small squares.

The mother of the teenage girls, who'd been putting a fuel pump on the car, came in and headed for the shower. She reappeared in flashy clothes with hair slicked back, dress tight on her ample hips, cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth, nodded at me, and went out without a word.

I cut thin slices of chopped ham off the block, and Cathy slapped on a sheet of cheese and made forty sandwiches. We had two tubs of potato salad, a pan full of

sandwiches, and a whopping good-size container of fry bread. We jumped back in the car and headed for the Sundance, arriving just on time. Melissa and Kathy were relieved to see us. Everyone ate happily, while paper plates, Styrofoam cups, and napkins blew about in the wind. These people are doing what they have always done. They're a nomadic people, camping out in house trailers, getting together with their extended family to feast, leaving their garbage where it lies. The thing is, modern garbage is not biodegradable, and the people are not moving on. For the most part, they've never learned the trades of plumbing, carpentry, and electrical work. Their houses fall around them. It's a repair man's dream come true.

Junior showed me a little repair he had done in the kitchen of his trailer. He had nailed a strip of cherrywood around the edge of the counter, where a piece of the original trim had fallen off. It was neat enough, gave the counter a rustic look, but he must have put the wood on while it was still green, and it had shrunk, and a quarter inch of the plywood behind the strip showed through. I told him it was nice.

These are sociological judgements, and I am not a historian of the reservation. But I listened. An elder, known as Uncle Eli, told me he was skeptical of the politicians, given their history of broken promises. The federal government has acknowledged it has completely screwed up the bookkeeping on the money it has collected since the 1880s, when it leased the Lakota land to timber, mining and oil interests. It owes Natives Americans billions of dollars, but the whole issue is tied up in court.

Meanwhile, on the Pine Ridge Reservation, there are three and four families living in run-down trailers or sleeping in junked cars. Something like ninety percent of the people is unemployed. Alcoholism is rampant, without there being a treatment center. Uncle Eli, who is in his 70s and has recently recovered from quadruple bi-pass surgery, is luckier than most. He and his wife, Caroline, run a tipi bed and breakfast. But they have their problems. Recently, one of Uncle Eli's eight sons died, and now they are caring for thirteen underage grandchildren.

I met a man who worked for the housing authority. He was at cross purposes with himself because it was his duty to kick people out of their homes if they aren't keeping them up, but his Lakota way isn't to make poor people homeless. He said, "It's like we're living in a third world country. Like a concentration camp. POWs after the Battle of Little Big Horn. We are still paying for that one. In my opinion, it's a Custer fuck by a bunch of circle jerks."

I heard another bitter saying: "The Cheyenne did the fighting. The Sioux got the glory. The Crow got the land." I drove through the Crow reservation, down through the Crazy Mountains. Things looked more prosperous there. One thing I discovered:

the Lakota are a fierce, friendly, fickle, and forgiving people. They are like the French in that they are proud of their language and culture. Their language holds them together as a people. They do things the way they do them, and they aren't going to be coerced into doing anything differently.

The Sundance continued, round after round. Kyle did his best to imitate his father's step, and I danced by his side. We stood with the sun on us, so we suffered, too. The idea of the suffering is that you are doing it so the people may live. A ritual for past favors granted. A rite that draws down divine power into the pledges, the dancer being a channel for the Great Spirit. Theo could see us. We danced to support him and the others.

I saw different kinds of piercing. There's the piercing of the skin on the breast. There's a team with a scalpel. I saw one of the scalpels stuck in a tree. It was a medical instrument, but not exactly antiseptic. The patient lies down on a buffalo skin laid out at the base of the tree. The Interceptor and his lieutenants talk with the dancer who is to pierce. They draw a circle on his chest where they are going to cut, rub a bit of dirt on the spot, make two incisions, and insert a wooden peg. If the guy being pierced has had forethought, he has sanded the rough edges off his pegs. A short piece of rope is tied to each peg, and that piece of rope is tied to the longer rope which in turn is tied to the tree. After you're done, and you've popped off, they plug the hole with a mushroom. I have heard there are cases of infection, but Theo has done this twice, and he has had no problem healing, so the mushrooms must have some power. The wound heals and leaves a small scar, about the size of the tip of your little finger. This is not exactly a science, more of an art, I would say, in the sense that there are several factors that determine a piercing.



It sounds grotesque, but it is beautiful. There is a humor about the whole process. The dancers tease one another. They psych themselves up, and if you don't like being teased, it's not the place to be. One side of the experience is to be prepared for the physical pain, and another side is about prayer. The spirit moves in mysterious ways when you are in an altered state. The dancers look for their visions. It's individualistic. Everyone is doing their own thing. There's no dogma. If you listen to five different people on the subject, you get five different takes. So, you must piece your answers together and put it to use as best you can.

When the dancer is pierced the frontal way, and the rope extends to the tree, the Sundancer doesn't want the rope to be loose. He wants it taut, so he leans back while he dances. He dances awhile, and then he moves up to the tree, where he prays. He does this four times, and the fourth time, he pulls back and pops the pegs out of his flesh. Or he tries to. Theo did it without any problem. Pulled his shoulders back and freed himself. Others had more difficulty.

There seems to be three variables. One, how thick-skinned you are, your physiology. Two, how deep the Interceptor cuts you. And three, how the spirit or randomness enters the equation. Mark, Kathy's husband, only hung from his right side because the cut on his left side was imperfect, so he was somewhat imbalanced, hanging from one side only. And the year before, he broke free on one

side but not the other, and Kathy pulled him off. So, for two years running, he had an odd experience with his piercings.

Wade tried to pull himself free three times without success, and the Eric pulled him off. This may have been to humiliate him in some way because of his earlier performance. The same with Cordel. He's a big man, but he couldn't pull free. Some say this is good. The longer you hang and the longer you suffer, the better for you and the people. Two dancers charged across the circle to Cordel and made a linebacker tackle to free him. Afterwards he said, "Now, I feel like a real Sundancer."

Another way of piercing is to pierce on the back and haul seven buffalo skulls tied in tandem around the perimeter of the circle, maybe fifty yards. Buffalo skulls are bigger than cow skulls. One of the dancers I saw do this was dancing for his grandmother, who was ill. She limped behind him on a cane. I suppose he wanted to be pierced deep, so he could drag the skulls a long way. And he did. He pulled them around four times, and then he tried to break loose, but he couldn't. A couple of the dancers sat on the skulls, and he tried again, and again. Still, he couldn't free himself. So, the Interceptor made a couple of precision cuts, and with a good tug, the dancer broke loose. People were crying, as he jogged around the circle a last time, carrying two staffs with eagle feathers attached.

Wade pierced again, on the back this time, and they brought a rope which was thrown over a fork in the tree and attached it to him, and he stood on a two-by-four, which two men lifted, while his family held onto the other end of the rope. He was given eagle feather fans, one for each hand. These he held out away from his body, and when the two-by-four was removed, he was left hanging in the air, flapping his arms like wings. He didn't break loose, and you could hear sobs coming from the audience. Then, the Interceptor and a helper yanked him down. I saw blood gush. Wade fell to his knees and held onto the trunk of the tree. Then, he collapsed, and they laid him on the buffalo skin, and his family gathered around him. I couldn't hear what was said, but I am sure they were thanking him for his sacrifice, his bravery, his fortitude. He had redeemed himself.

When Don drug the skulls, he broke loose after about thirty feet. So, it's hard to know how much is punishment and how much is the way the spirit moves. Don pierced on the last day. Some dancers psych themselves up and want to pierce sooner. Some wait until the ordeal is nearly over. On the fourth and final day, there was extra ceremony. A healing ceremony and a teasing ceremony. In the teasing ceremony, a painted clown splashed water on the dancers. She guzzled water in front of them, but they ignored her antics.

After the final dance rounds, after the Interceptor had pierced, all the dancers walked around the arbor and shook hands with the onlookers. One thing that I had been warned about early on was that no one was supposed to walk across the East Gate. And just as everything was winding down, a couple of little kids ran across that space. One ran back, and everyone said, "No, no," and then he ran across again, and I thought maybe the dancers would all have to pierce again or go to the sweat lodge, but Don caught the kids and took them back to their parents, and all was forgiven. Their timing was excellent, right at the end, like they wanted to jinx the whole ceremony.

Then, we feasted. The dancers hadn't had much sustenance, a plum, some lemons, a splash of water. But now they were offered a full banquet. Beef stew, sandwiches, salads. They chowed down, but it didn't take long for them to fill up. People hugged. They congratulated one another. They wanted to talk about their experiences, or not. They were exhausted but ecstatic.

The next day, we took the boughs off the arbor and picked up a mound trash. Then, we loaded our gear in our car and took the extra food over to Eric's. He was just getting up, and there was a pile of kids on the front room floor under blankets. We talked awhile. Said how much we appreciated everything. I told him a little about Buddhism. Asked him if it was ok that I danced in my robes. He assured me it was, and he asked if I would attend next year. I said I'd try.

Before leaving, I saw Uncle Eli. "Who is it saying the Lakota way is in jeopardy? It's the ones who leave the reservation and come back and think they can improve things by doing it the white man's way, the New Agers." He paused, and then he continued, "Did you feel that wind? That's how the Spirit moves. It can see you, but you can't see it."



It sounds grotesque, but it is beautiful. There is a humor about the whole process. The dancers tease one another. They psych themselves up, and if you don't like being teased, it's not the place to be. One side of the experience is to be prepared for the physical pain, and another side is about prayer. The spirit moves in mysterious ways when you are in an altered state. The dancers look for their visions. It's individualistic. Everyone is doing their own thing. There's no dogma. If you listen to five different people on the subject, you get five different takes. So, you must piece your answers together and put it to use as best you can.

When the dancer is pierced the frontal way, and the rope extends to the tree, the Sundancer doesn't want the rope to be loose. He wants it taut, so he leans back while he dances. He dances awhile, and then he moves up to the tree, where he prays. He does this four times, and the fourth time, he pulls back and pops the pegs out of his flesh. Or he tries to. Theo did it without any problem. Pulled his shoulders back and freed himself. Others had more difficulty.

There seems to be three variables. One, how thick-skinned you are, your physiology. Two, how deep the Interceptor cuts you. And three, how the spirit or randomness enters the equation. Mark, Kathy's husband, only hung from his right side because the cut on his left side was imperfect, so he was somewhat imbalanced, hanging from one side only. And the year before, he broke free on one side but not the other, and Kathy pulled him off. So, for two years running, he had an odd experience with his piercings.

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