



FIVE YEARS IN ALASKA

RICHARD DENNER



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ALL RIGHTS
RESERVED

FEATHER

unicorn
canker
Ketchikan
the moon
the axis
the exasperation
what can I say?
I saw them on the slope.
I saw them
climb Deer Mountain.
I called my friend

and he gave me
no answer.
I entreated him
my mouth
god
suck
flower

EVIDENCE

whereas a fortress
whereas a jade pagoda
whereas a river
of diamonds, a river
of blood

whereas the fortress
is the pagoda, whereas
the river is blood, whereas
men and women are diamonds
I ask what is there
where imagelessness prevails?

whereas some cosmoses are being
transformed, whereas some are
being transfigured, whereas
some metamorphosis continues
I ask how is this possible where
there is no imagination?



POEMS

HAS ONE
TIME TO

SEE THE
MISTAKE

THERE
AMONG

FLOWERS
OPENING

TO THE
MARBLE

LIGHT OF
CANDLES?

.

AROUND
ME THE

WALLS

MOVE

THE SKY
IS DARK

WITHOUT
A MOON

THERE'S A
DAEMON

EATING
MY LIVER

.

AT THE
CENTER

OF THE
FLOWER

LOOKING
BEMUSED

AT AN
ANGEL

RUNNING
A SWORD

THROUGH
A WORM

.

WORD
WORM

ACID
ANON

LOVE
LICK

LEAF
LEAK

ONLY
ONCE

WIND
WORD



WOODNOTES

for Luis and Jon

*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.
How hard can the wind blow?
Whips us from the east today—
whitecaps in the cove, cedar bending,
gulls motionless in the gale.
February is a boisterous 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 the *Berkeley Barb*
on Telegraph Avenue to this cabin?
The old personality breaks down, and
the world becomes pure—like Blake saw,
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 bears.
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.

Somewhere, the Governor of Someplace
makes money in real estate.

Dr. Leary attends Altamont, says
it's 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 fronds.

Tiarella trifoliata

Quileut “gwaqwlacyu'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 á 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.



LOST IN TONGASS WOODS

Which way? got turned around
drizzle, muskeg and devil's club
mountains on four sides

Let's see
I came over that rise
knelt and backed up
turned and sat down
adjusted my gear
got up
and...

Fear I'm in Death's maw
when I hear a shout
and see the beam of a torch—
Dale at the trail head with a bag of trailmix

I'm gobbling it up
when he tells me he added candle butts
in case we need to start a fire
but they're gone

All one taste

POLOOT

Alaska, who lives there?
Caribou, wolves and bear.

This grizzly airs a grudge
that everyone fears to judge.

A refinery don't smell
like *Chanel*— more like hell.

THE BEAST

Old Valdez.
275 sq. miles. Second oldest
white settlement in Alaska.
Captain Cook 1778
1794 Bligh Island
Spaniards 1798.

1800s whaling. Copper mined.
Route to the gold fields.
Blue fox farming in the 1920s.
Iron Trail by Rex Beach set here.
Young Miss Miller marries
the Maharajah of Indore.

New Valdez.
Rebuilt after quake on a new site.
Voted All-American City 1965.
Valdez rhymes with “ease.”
South Terminus of *Alyeska's*
pipeline from Prudhoe Bay.

Wrathful *Alyeska*
auger in one hand
marshprobe in one hand
geo-stick in one hand
polaski in another

I take soil samples
along the surveyed route
from Valdez to Tonsina.

I follow the Lowe River
through alder swamps
across marshmuck to bogmire.
Streams jambed with rotting salmon.

I follow a bear trail
to the cutline where I auger
twenty feet to bedrock.
I sidetrack near Kendal Cache
to collect lichens and weathered
telegraph insulators.
I note the conglomeration
from a glacier deposit.

Along glacier benches to bedrock
across rivers to bedrock
to bedrock under ridges, under
boulders, under cobbles, under sill
under sand, under volcanic ash.
I take a rest and get sick.

A caravan of *Winabegos* passes.
A woman points to a dead salmon
and exclaims, "Someone should do
something about that." Cheechakos.
10% chance of rain in a rainforest
means 10 inches of rain.

At Trans Alaska Pipeline
Point on Ground TAPS PG=361+68
I join my copter pilot.
Mustachioed Vietvet with shades
his scarf trails in the breeze.

He drops me off on a sandbar.
There's a field of devil's club
and a jungle of alder hanging
from granite cliffs between me
and my test hole.

King crab to Otterman:
glacierized graywhacky
sandy sill
silly sand
gravel
cobbles
Indian love stones
fucking rocks
over

Otterman to Kingcrab:

reading you
alluvial fan
metamorphic composition
zone theory
montage effects
colluvium
colluvium
colluvium
clear

Dhal sheep graze below me.
As the *Alouette* lands, a bull moose
into the brush.
Up the line, a grizzly and her cubs
into hiding.

From the Arctic Ocean
at Prudhoe Bay, over
the Brooks Range
across the Koyukuk River
across the Yukon River
and the Tanana, stretching

Across the Alaskan Range
this in temperatures below zero
for more than one hundred days
below forty below for weeks
dropping to eighty below
in arctic winds

From Thompson Pass
down a glacier moraine, the pipe
slouches into Valdez.

1972

TRUCKIN' THE ALKAN

"We Drove The Alkan!"
an air-polluted fantasy
a flick to see
for the dust alone
soon to appear
as a bored game

Beware the cost!
food, tires, repairs
3 flats in 200 miles

2 ea. 7.35/15s, one
7.75/15, one 6.55/15
& nothing for a spare
added = 2900
divided by milepost
424 is ideogram *Sze*—
indicates how, in the case
which it supposes, with
firmness & correctness
and (a leader of) age
& experience, there will
be fortune & no error

milepost prosyllogism
water is persistent
and hard edged
 whereas
earth is subtle
falling away and rising

Athabascan beadwork
works strong talismanic magic
given metaphysically camp context
exempli gratia
fossilized mulosk site
behind graveyard of ghost town
near Dawson Creek or now
at SE85PL & 311PLSE
corner 3 blocks north
the center of Preston

the waters of Ragging River
erased the tell-tale of the trail
be it beadgames go on

