

the tugwell years

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SELECTED LETTERS OF BARRY MACLEOD
1978-1986

Edited by Doug Lang and Pam Woodland

Introduction and photography by James R. Page

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Barry Macleod, 1942–1986

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foreword

Doug Lang

Every time Macleod wrote a letter he published himself. Those who received his letters kept them. When news of this project circulated after his death in October 1986, the response was immediate and affirmative.

For me these letters are wayward bus stations on a cold night, a warm place to pause for coffee, directions, good company, and free refills—and a traveler's salvation, ketchup soup for the solitary road ahead. With Macleod at my table!

It is a glad moment to have so much evidence of his generosity and character pressed between the flaps of a book. Had Macleod not started writing so late, and died so early, it's possible he'd have reached this juncture in his own time. Possible, but unlikely. For we are not talking here of a writer in the professed sense, but of a natural witness, a commentator on the struggle to be alive. Artifice was foreign to him; he took his whiskey neat, and regularly. Certainly he'd be uncomfortable holding this book in his hands, and would pronounce it an indulgence, an act of extravagant ego. Such was his sensibility, his profound humility. Such was the extent of his wound.

So why the book then? Precisely because of that sensibility, that humility, that wound. As compensation for the limits such qualities assigned him, also, as a way for the affections he earned to be expressed. I venture to guess that, beyond Macleod's initial wince and curse at seeing a book devoted to his own words, there'd be a brief yet telling grin. Surrender... in realizing he'd been outvoted.

Those who knew him most consistently throughout his last decade are those he didn't write to, his neighbours at Tugwell Creek. They had him in the flesh, the daily round of the real. This is for them. Because what they didn't get, as often is the case when you live near someone, are these archipelagoes of person that Macleod bridged in the solitude of his wind-wracked cabin, when he stoked not only his stove but also the furnace of his mind. The receivers of his letters gladly forward them now, to complete the circle.

The ordering and selecting of letters, in whole or in part, is based loosely on chronology, but also, on occasion, according to the relativity of subject. We have not intended at any point to explain Macleod. He did that in the course of living, and while his circumstances were his own, his commentaries are an open invitation to all who engage in the full range of living.

Macleod entered each of his relationships with such an individual bent that each of us knew him in a unique way. During the collecting and reading of these letters this was clear, and often disorienting. For as the tendency since his death has been to find the clearest way to remember him, it has proved an unsettling enjoyment to discover that we each knew only our part of the story. The enjoyment being that it's as though Macleod had planned it this way, as an extension of his presence, a last laugh.

Acknowledgment is given here to Barry's parents, Margaret and George Macleod. While not entirely in favour of such a project, they have provided more motivation and assistance than they are likely aware of. It's our sincere wish that they, too, discover more of Barry in the course of these writings.

"I figure if you can make them laugh and make them cry, you've got it made, because that's what life is all about ... the laughter and the tears." Macleod delivered enough of these. The sweet part is that with this book he goes on delivering them. To such an extent that those of us who may have felt we'd lost him, can see now we're still coming to know him.

Here, then, are the collected letters of Barry Macleod, 1942–1986, no postage due.

—dl/march '87

thanks and such

Pam Woodland

My gratitude for the generous sharing of letters from Al, Andrea, Bill, Don, Doug, Eileen, Gerry, Jan, and Jim is immense.

This book was originally bootstrapped into a rough form with the help of revenue from the sale of the *Tugwell Turd Calendar*. This daily calendar of quotations collected by Macleod over the years was produced and distributed by Jan and Mary Johnson.

Doug Lang and I collected the letters, and collated and sorted them into some initial order. Many revisions later they have settled into the shape you see here.

About the form: the three sections more or less correspond to where Macleod lived at the time of writing: the cabin on the beach at Tugwell Creek; his homeless period when he travelled back to Saskatchewan to visit friends and family and later, when he stayed at Jan Johnson's house for few months, deep in the west coast rainforest; finally, the second cabin he rented down the beach from Tugwell Creek.

The letters are generally, but not exclusively, in chronological order. Doug and I received copies, not originals, of the letters, most of which were not dated. And there were few envelopes. A couple of the letters I knew to be dated later are placed at the beginning of the book because, in them, Macleod provides his own context of place, character, and intent in writing.

Prior to the first edition of this book in 1989, I had never produced one on my own, let alone something as editorially tricky as a collection of letters. I made some decisions then that I would not make now.

Primarily typographical edits of punctuation. I did not alter his words. Since I no longer have the originals it's not possible to undo the changes I made. I hope the contributors found, and find, these edited versions acceptable.

Portions of some letters were written to more than one person and only one version has been included. Versions were selected partly with the aim was to have the contributors represented as evenly as possible. I'm not sure when Barry reconnected with Andrea, a very important person in his life. We received few of Macleod's letters from her estate, but they are among the most heartfelt. She died of cancer about two weeks before Barry's own death from non-hodgkins lymphoma.

I excerpted portions of the letters that were treated as vignettes or stories that were also included in a collection of writings that Macleod had intended as part of his own book project. Barry titled those items and I set them off typographically from the letters themselves.

Jim Page scoured his archive of photographs and contributed almost all of the images included here. He also wrote an introduction for this edition that helps provide a context for readers unfamiliar with Barry or BC politics. A huge thanks for this.

Within the text, the photos are placed more in the spirit of what's written rather than in chronological order; I've arrange the two photo divisions in linear sequence, however. For the most part.

More thanks to Page: it was through him that I met Macleod in 1976.

Jim also introduced me to another friend of his, Bob Harwood. What a treasure this man is! His all round encouragement and support of this project has been critical in my getting this revised volume of Macleod's letters into proper book form.

Three people who are vital to the letters are no longer with us. Andrea Walker, Wayne Carson (Sundog), and Gerry Brydon are well and lovingly remembered here.

Who knows what Macleod's response to this collection would be? He'd have some complaints, I'm sure. No doubt about it, if he were still around, it would be a very different book. And he sure wouldn't have all these pictures of himself!

—pjw/march '09

introduction

James R. Page

With the passage of time, it may be prudent to attempt to place these letters in their proper social and political context, for the era is quickly fading from memory. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the deeply polarized politics that characterize British Columbia had taken a strong swing to the right. Recession stripped the economy of jobs; even the middle classes began to feel the pinch. The right wing Social Credit government under Bill Bennett—son of party founder W.A.C. Bennet—ran the province’s economic and social policies for the entire decade and then some. That meant hard times for those who fell outside the mainstream conservatism of the day, who could not compete in a “free enterprise” system defined and controlled by those in power. In other words, things were pretty much as they have always been, with a few more hurdles and roadblocks for the underclasses.

These letters begin approximately four years before Barry Macleod lost his longtime job when he tried to unionize the workers of Safety Supply Company in Victoria, BC. Macleod, who once said that he had been fired from every job he’d ever had—quite a statement, considering his long and convoluted career path—was always a conscientious worker, well liked by his fellow employees and even some of his bosses. But time and again, employers found excuses to get rid of him: Human Resources in Saskatchewan, for contacting the media about managerial abuses within the welfare system; the Post Office in Vancouver, for his failure to fake submissiveness in front of hard line, unreasonable managers.

Those postal supervisors, many of them former military careerists, peered into his eyes and saw something that frightened them, and his fate was thus decided. It didn't matter how hard he worked; they told him he had a bad attitude. "What kind of disease is a bad attitude?" he asked me at the time. I just snorted. I had a bad attitude too, but kept it more under wraps and thus survived the periodic postal purges longer than Macleod did. Read his reminiscent letter to me about our time at the Post Office. It sounds like exaggeration—who would believe such insanity might exist there? But it did.

That was in the pre-Tugwell days, when we met under postal supervision and developed a friendship that endured for twelve years, until his death in 1986. In those days Macleod was living in a rented house in Vancouver, with cardboard and newspapers stuffed into holes in the walls as a buffer against the traffic noise on Knight Street. The landlord dropped by only to collect the rent, never to participate in repairs or renovations. Barry began to think of Vancouver Island as the next logical step in his personal westward migration, and within a year he moved to Victoria, and eventually to windy, wave-battered Tugwell Creek, west of Sooke, on the exposed southwestern coast of Vancouver Island, where literally and figuratively he made his last stand.

The Sooke Road into Victoria is twisty and treacherous, and would become Macleod's daily, hour long commute. He used to rant to me about incompetent drivers braking on every curve, never getting out of second gear. He would, of course, take those turns at top speed, and as far as I know he never lost it, never hit another vehicle or a deer. Pushing the envelope, getting way out toward the edge without falling off, was one of his talents.

At the time I couldn't grasp the extent of his isolation out there, especially after he lost the job at Safety Supply. Whenever I visited him, there were always people around, although admittedly sometimes only two (him, and me). We spent more than one grey Christmas together, sitting at his round table gazing through the cabin window at the shifting panorama of water, clouds, and distant mountains. Good companionship. Days that would never end.

I have to say a word about The Game. Cosmic Football is mentioned more than once in these letters. This was a board game, formally known

as Photo Electric Football and marketed by Cadaco (Chicago) in the 1950s, that Barry had played as a child. He liked it, but put it away when he reached a certain age—and then resurrected it in university, after he and his friends had discovered marijuana. Now the game assumed cosmic proportions, and he played it a lot, but left it in Saskatchewan when he relocated to Vancouver in 1973.

One night when he was raving about the game to me and how great it was, I told him I really wanted to try it out, and this culminated in his phoning a buddy at 3:00 a.m. asking him to put it on the next Greyhound to Victoria. The call was not appreciated, but the game did arrive: battered, tattered, and fully functional. I have to say that next to chess it was the greatest game I'd ever played. Soon after that Barry and I formed the Cosmic Football League, purchased a trophy, enlisted Jim Keefer and Doug Lang as our official opposition, and won the first Cosmic Bowl in 1977 in a marathon best-of-five series.

Alas, it was the only time we'd ever beat them for the trophy. When they defeated us to take Cosmic Bowl II, Barry had an engraver inscribe their names on the little plaques provided: J. Reefer and D. Lung. We laughed and laughed. It was a Cosmic joke—the best kind.

The universe, of course, always has the last laugh, and here we are more than three decades later, and he's gone. This is what remains, the wonderful outpouring of his great mind. Stirring up echoes for those who knew him, and offering more than a hint of the man behind them for those who didn't. There's plenty here to delight and provoke; the words still hold their charge. In the old days—before email—a letter from Macleod was a treat. When one arrived, I would rip it open and immediately read it aloud to whoever was present. We'd laugh and laugh. Have I already mentioned this?

So tear open the envelope, pull up a chair, and get ready for a blast from the past that feels eerily like the present, except with different players, hair styles, and music. But it's real life, not a commercial presentation, not some concocted bullshit story about an imagined time and place: it's real. Tugwell exists. And Macleod, who always knew that it mattered, wrote it down and got it right.

—jrp, april/09
Victoria, BC

contributors

The following people kindly contributed the letters in this collection.

Don Anderson, Regina, SK

Gerry Brydon, Winnipeg, MN

Eileen Cristine, Fairview, AB

Jan Johnson, Sooke, BC

Doug Lang, Vancouver, BC

Al Maxwell, Sointula, Malcolm Island, BC

James R. Page, Vancouver, BC; Gold River, BC; Whitehorse, YK

Andrea Walker, Regina, SK

Bill Watson, Saskatoon, SK

Pam Woodland, Vancouver, BC

THE TUGWELL YEARS

part one
A STATE OF MIND
AUGUST 1978 - MAY 1983



a state of mind

“And where is this tugwell creek place anyway?” they ask. Well you just point at the rainbow and say, “See this rainbow?” “Yeh, yeh, we see it.” “Well do you see anything at the end of the rainbow?” “No, we can’t see anything.” “Well, that’s where it is...”

Andrea,

Got your letter today, a drizzle drip fresh wet green Friday, rain slick radials winding curve sssshHH to the post office and back, and then in the mid-day gray damp tar-paper shack I read your love and tears letter, no-name black fluff lying on my chest, and I re-read it giving the cat a prrrttt pet for you and it gave a mumble rumble purr back for Andrea, and I’m pulling for you, kid, fingers crossed, toes crossed, heart in a knot, and I could be wrong but I was sure that boing boing even crossed her purr for you.

“AND WHERE IS THIS TUGWELL CREEK PLACE ANYWAY?” they ask. Well you just point at the rainbow and say, “See this rainbow?” “Yeh, yeh, we see it.” “Well do you see anything at the end of the rainbow?” “No, we can’t see anything.” “Well, that’s where it is...”

... a state of mind, surrounded by a landscape of lunatics. It’s the place dreams go to retire, probably the only place on the planet where you don’t participate in life and are not punished for it. A secret place, where the years cease to exist; a place with seasons so subtle that each shift is like turning over on your other side when you’re sleeping, a land of radios, all the video productions are done in the old fashioned

way, inside your head. A place where friends aren't other people, they're spirits, they're the essence of all the little nuances in life that give you a little smile when you come across them. You find them after a few years of walking the beach, like seashells that catch your eye, and you pick them up and keep them.

And they never change. And they never compromise, so you always have them just the way they are. And every once in a while someone from outside will arrive with a new hairdo and new clothes and three promotions and two house flips and tell you all about it, their eyes doing a sociological frisk, and after they've left you try to remember if they really had a beanie with a propeller on top of their head or if you just imagined it.

Page,

Your humble correspondent has recently completed a trip abroad. Three days of cloud and rain ... twenty-four beer and three packs of Decade (buy two ... get one free!) but I bought them because it was so close to Decadent. The subtlety of advertisers eventually ensnares the best of us. Nonetheless five milligrams of tar is not enough for my cancer-demanding soul. The summation of the trip was soap boxed on the deck of the "Evergreen State" ... huge transport of Winnebagos, campers, fat people with cameras, freckled blue-eyed kids, and funny little rats that bark. The scene ... no the summation. My young companion (a snide reminder that even at thirty-five it's possible to have re-runs) exclaimed in a loud voice to all in attendance that "my idea of fun is not standing around with a bunch of Gawd-damn Fat Fuck-ing American Pigs!" I nodded with embarrassed nonchalance and we retired to the cafeteria where we sat bitterly drinking Olympia Beer from paper cups.

WAS OUT VISITING GORDIE AND JUNE A FEW WEEKENDS AGO. He's been doing carvings on the beach and leaving them there. They are signed Aguyin BC. He goes under this name now, adding a mystical Indian connotation I thought, carvings by Aguyin. Also presented were long insane soliloquies reminiscent of Peter O'Toole in *The*

Ruling Class only funnier, more real, and with a touch of hysteria lurking beneath the surface. This was interspersed with puzzling anagrams such as “I came to Sooke to die!” A week later the tap started dripping and Gordie couldn’t stop it. The next day when June came home from work he was gone.

Mother’s Day

I PAID MY RENT MONEY TO FRANK THIS AFTERNOON. He’s such a weathered grizzled old fart that when his face crinkles into a thousand lines, it’s like a pat on the back.

It looks like the rent is going to be a \$125 a month forever. I’ve often thought of sending him away to landlord school.

When we finished transacting our business, we sat around and bullshitted. I told him the only bumner living out here was driving that West Coast Road.

Those tight winding curves, the ups and downs, the cars in front constantly braking at every little curve.

Frank laughed and said, “You know what the worst day of the year to drive it is? It’s Mother’s day! They’re all out there taking their Goddamned mothers for a drive!”

*The first human who hurled a
curse instead of a weapon was
the founder of civilization.*

—Freud

Pam,

Goddamn son of a bitch fuck-faced motherfucking scumbag cock-sucking cuntlapping piece of shit!” screamed the founder of civilization; a million years ago and forever unrecognized:

Telephone — Alexander Graham Bell

Electricity — Thomas Edison

Civilization — ?



“It looks like the rent is going to be a \$125 a month forever. I’ve often thought of sending [Frank] away to landlord school.” [1979]

? And we owe him the most, don’t we? We groom. We huddle together in groups. We sit on our own stool. We try not to offend. We pee in secret and never admit to peeking at our own shit in the bowl, although I did this morning, and if you’re interested it was a reasonable shade of brown with no blood flecks, a civilized shit, not a wet porridge shit, a through a screen never hit a wire shit, not a pale yellowish half sized turd laying limp in the bowl wrinkled from the effort of crawling half dead through the escape bung hole, but a civilized shit, a shit my parents could be proud of if they’d only lower their sights a bit, a decent porcelain framed working class shit, a superior North American shit, using more water to drop into than an Ethiopian gets to drink in a week, the same texture of shit that civilized people eat every day at the office, by the spoonful, or the handful, the proud ones putting a plug of it inside their mouth next to the gum and letting it dissolve there, they don’t want to be seen chewing. This is called compromising. It is a civilized act. And our unemployed French brothers in Quebec were told a few years ago by our leader, the

head shit, to “mange la merde” and they did, French shit, it looks like croissants, and being French they smack their lips after they eat it; they’ve been doing it for centuries except for a brief period when they went on a diet with Rennie until they caught him sneaking a brown one from the bowl recently, it’s hard to stay away from, the withdrawal is worse than cigarettes or junk, you become cranky, your friends don’t like you as much, you get into trouble at work, with your family, you begin to withdraw, and you resent the reminders, “Did you eat your shit today, dear?” or “Excuse me, you didn’t eat all of your shit. Are you not feeling well?” or a pulsating rock beat booming from your TV screen encouraging you to “chew poop” and for the kiddies “Cabbage Patch Shit,” little imaginary droppings just for the kids to snack on, it’s like smoking licorice cigarettes, getting in training for the real thing later on, and when you’re not busy eating it you can listen to it, and watch it, or read about it, “The Browning of America,” “Future Shit,” “Mega-shit,” “The Holy Shit,” “The Shit Manifesto.” Steaming heaps of it everywhere.

All right. OK. Never mind. I think that was what could be called a false start. Bear with me. Just a second. It’s hard to wind down. Doo-doo, ca-ca, what’s the matter with me? Nothing. “You’re a good shit Macleod.” I’ve been told that, you know. “You think your shit doesn’t stink?” I’m proud to say that I’ve never been accused of that. I know it stinks. I even poke it with a stick. Now that I think of it I figure I’ve had 20,000 shits in my life. 20,000 times. What if I would have done anything else 20,000 times? Played 20,000 musical notes, written 20,000 poems. Or begged forgiveness 20,000 times. My sweet mulch. Hell-a-lew-ya. And I haven’t filled my will out yet because I’m afraid if I do, I’ll die.

AND SPEAKING OF DEATH, I’m pulling out of the shit trip now, an old friend of mine died a violent death last year, an old friend from the neighbourhood, my background, the thing I’ve never been able to rise above, I must have been too sensitive and didn’t know it. But the thing of interest about his death is that I mentioned it to another old neighbourhood buddy whom I’d known since I was six years old, and he said, “Yeh, they say the good die young. But in Vic’s case they made an exception.” And we both burst out laughing and I remember thinking

at the time, Jesus, so that's it, that's his epitaph. His memorial service. A quip. A burst of laughter. And we'd been to war together. All of us. Drunken fathers. Street fights. Car thefts. All sorts of adventures. We went through life without love and kept our spirit, spit in its eye, there was a bonding there, I still felt it when I went back, and yet there it was, a quip, a cheap laugh, in recognition for a life.

AND THE WATER IS WARM NOW BUT MY DRINK IS STILL COLD. So, Doug writes me and gives me shit for not writing. How does he know what I'm doing? So I've, in guilt, because what is my life worth anyway, in guilt I've decided to attempt a book. A real book. I have to overcome my tendency to write non-stop for a day or two and say that's good enough. I have to sit down and take a year, to painfully construct everything slowly, like building a house, with no lessons, no hints, no courses, and it was only the other day that it occurred to me to draw up an outline, a plan, character sketches; I've always just sat down and written something and it just ended and that was it. The time that is wasted in vacuum land is incredible. I know the same thing is happening to Richard with his art. You spend years wasting your time because you have no direction. What a simple thing. An outline. Lesson one in writing class. I just thought of it two days ago. But the book will be about the Tugwell years. I have file folders full of notes, and stories, and incidents. I will use a composite for the characters, and with your permission will use a character called "the Lady of a Thousand Faces." So Betty will get into the book but will be called by another name, and will be a composite anyway, partially her, partially you, partially others, and the Lady of a Thousand Faces will change depending on circumstances or events, when you wake up in the morning another person is lying there, the early morning light casting shadows on her cheekbones creates a changeling, or in the lamplight at night, or when talking or gesticulating there are subtle changes, or depending on the mood or dress, and then finally her eyes change colour; that's when you know she's leaving you, when her eyes change colour. She will be famous for her cryptic comments and independent attitude.

And the artist, a Creek Elf, who has been pushed further and further from life over the years. He has the appearance of a French



“So Betty will get into the book but will be called by another name, and will be a composite anyway, partially her, partially you, partially others ...” [With Betty Rumble, 1977]

peasant and is totally immersed in his work and when he comes out he is a frantic philosopher of life, “It’s bullshit! It’s bullshit!” and then he can’t stand it and immerses himself in his art again, and anything more than poverty is a sell-out, and I am going to dump all of my prejudices on this character, who is Richard, so I will have the freedom to get it all out and not feel like a reactionary, dump it all on his shoulders, make him the buffoon, I chuckle to myself when I think of it. He will have a hatred of “Yankee wetbacks” and the “menstrual mafia” and on and on. I love it. I will purify myself by destroying his character, but he will be blustering amusing, and the artist’s woman, English working class, a rock of strength and caller of his bullshit, although with a dark side, and of course Aguyin Bornashit, a mad genius, a creative suicide, a tragi-comic character with a gentle side, a fragile flower, a creator of fantasies to the point where he loses touch with reality, paranoia sets in. I think I will have him commit suicide in the book, and his long suffering wife who becomes destroyed by the



“And the artist, a Creek Elf, who has been pushed further and further from life over the years.” [With Richard, 1980]

role change, working to keep things going while he cleans, cooks, etc. But she becomes beaten with her bank job, worn out, all she ever wanted was a little house with a white picket fence. And a supporting cast like Sundog, from the last century, makes everything right down to his own nails, with a philosophy of life that stands as a counter-balance and is wise in its Indian-like simplicity; and a farm welfare mother, dotty type, working on a science project that will explode myths about the gravitational pull on the earth, and she takes sightings on hill tops at dawn on certain days of the year, all her calculations are done by pencil and paper, she lives in a constant hub of activity, Flash the wonder horse, dogs, cats, giant suppers on special occasions; and a six-foot-eight homosexual called Omar Chiffon, modeled after Brydon because he told me never to write about him, and the Poet Lady, and all the other characters that I have notes about here, and we are all at the furthest point west, each individual ending up here for their own reasons, all looking at our ticket stubs, and the contacts with reality will be through UIC interviews, Aguyin’s interview at welfare when he had no teeth, Sundog having a kid and raising it to be a poacher so he can take care of his old man. All this in the



“... And the artist’s woman, English working class, a rock of strength and caller of his bullshit, although with a dark side ...” [Pia Carroll, 1979]

computer age, the wagons circle, Aguyin saying, after a walk on the beach, “You know if I lived in Russia man, I’d have something to do when I got back home.”

AND RADIO COMMERCIALS FROM REAL LIFE like the one I heard the other day: “When I drove to work the other day I just couldn’t stop thinking about whether I’d turned off the iron or not. Well now I’ve bought a new Sunbeam self-adjusting iron and it turns itself off if I forget.” And so on. These are real things, they will be counter balanced in the nether world of Tugwell Creek. I want a gritty tragic-comedy storyline. I have to make copious notes as to an outline, and work out a style and transitions. My instinct is to write like I write letters, free and flowing and not stilted like the shit I submit for publication, but I may have to reach a happy medium, and also I don’t know how to deal with the first person character of myself or whatever. But I might as well give it a try and if I don’t have the discipline or talent, let’s find out. Let’s call in the markers. And if I do, I’ll pull out of here and press on with it, soak it up, even if it goes against my grain, because there is nothing here anymore except to sit alone on dark nights with nothing

to read but labels—“Let art and the science of the distiller come together in making this premium Canadian Rye Whiskey. It is distilled from choice rye grain and aged naturally in the old fashioned way, creating a smooth whiskey for Canadians with discerning taste.”

Well I wouldn't like to be thought of as a Canadian with discerning taste now, would I?

signing off
 from reality
 free Tugwell
 the land of
 alienation
 honour
 madness
 and
 Sunday
 night
 hot
 bath
 water

Anthropological Digs

I WAS SITTING ON THE BEACH THIS AFTERNOON with the wind whipping through the pages of my library book. It was called *The Horizon History of Africa*.

There was a photo of a cave drawing from 2000 BC drawn by pre-historic Saharan bowmen. It was not primitive, but almost Picasso-like and the rhythm and excitement of the drawing was heightened by the greatly exaggerated stride of the archers.

It was not just a cave scratching. It was art.

The person who did those drawings could have been my friend Richard who lives by the creek and does drawings on rocks, then leaves them in tidal pools.

Or Aguyin, who carves faces in fish floats and leaves them lying on the beach.

Three thousand years ago a filthy long-haired man with a sloped

forehead who didn't like hunting stood scratching the wall of a cave.

A man just like my friends.

The greatest happiness is to scatter your enemy and drive him before you, to see his cities reduced to ashes, to see those who love him shrouded in tears, and to gather to your bosom his wives and daughters.

—Genghis Khan

Pam,

Doug was over the other week for three days. He hitchhiked out and arrived silently at the door, the smell of the road still on him, it gave him a bit of an edge that is covered up by the noisy blare of the city.

We were like two film editors talking about cutting movies, talking writing, the reality, being true to the presence of the subject, all the little things that can be left out to make it cleaner, etc. We sat up until 5:00 a.m. the first night, then acted like authors the next day, drinking at a ringside table in Buffy's watching the fights from Atlantic City on the colour TV, leaning back in our chairs working on a glow, eating peanuts between expert asides," the black kid is quick but he doesn't like to get hit... "then more writing talk, more drinking, and the next morning a mushroom walk to Kirby Creek playing stickball with rocks and wooden beach bats, broadcasting our own game like I used to do when I was a kid, "AND NOW BATTING FOR MUDVILLE ... NUMBER 18 ... ELI WALLACH ... WALLACH...." Then more talking and picking up the conversation the next morning first thing just where it left off the night before, the interaction, bouncing the ball back and forth with someone who knows what you're talking about without you having to explain it.

So four years of writing school in three days because I want to get to the point, what I'm trying to say, who I am, I don't need exercises, homework, someone's theory to follow. And after two hours of listening to all of Doug's new songs, one of which is about me called "Blue Barry," anyway after two hours of his new stuff... "I just can't get

enough of myself,” he said. And I handed him the Tugwell book, about thirty pages so far, and he read my stuff lying on the couch sipping whiskey, set it down and said, “It’s crap.” “Come on. Be honest,” I said. We both laughed. I knew it was wrong because I couldn’t feel it. Like music you know. But I was planning on spending a year on it, maybe more, and the characters change and evolve and more fiction comes into it as they take on a form of their own, but Doug prefers the clean hard hitting day to day vignette reality style stuff, and I understand that too. And when it gets down to it we’re both right but I think what I have to do is just write it to suit myself in whatever style appeals to me and forget about what the publishers want and wait for someone to come along who likes it and let them publish it.

But whatever it is, whenever, if ever, one thing I know for sure and that’s to make them laugh and make them cry, because that’s all life is about anyway. The laughter and the tears. All the rest of it is just the shit part—working, saving, buying, cooking, cleaning, sewing, sleeping, comparing, sighing, lying, flying, farting, belching, puking, shitting, flushing, marrying, cloning, divorcing, speeding, needing, bleeding, graduating, constipating, contemplating, tv, rv, cb ... maybe....

Remember the old adage “The best things in life are free?” Well, there’s got to be some truth to that, otherwise the assholes would have it all, and we know deep down inside that they haven’t.

LAST SUNDAY AT 3:00 A.M. THERE WAS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR. It was a woman about six-feet tall, with a motorcycle helmet under her arm and tears streaming down her face. She said, “I’m pregnant and I’m having labour pains. I was riding my motorcycle to the hospital and it broke down. Do you have a telephone?”

Unreal. “How close are the pains?” I asked trying to remember the book on obstetrics that I’d read in the stock room when I worked for the Medical Care Insurance Commission. Should I boil water? Do I bite the cord? As it turned out she calmed down once I told her that I’d help her. It’s amazing how much mileage you get when you’re gray and sound like you know what you’re doing. Look at Pa Cartwright. Watch Page when he gets older. As it turned out, I think she was experiencing false pains, living alone down at Muir Creek missing her

mama, and so on. She was expecting twins. I figure she should name them after me. Barry Barry.

I HAVE A NEW FRIEND NAMED ANNE who lives on Otter Point in a cabin overlooking the ocean, high up on some rocks. She has a kid and a fuzzy little dog named Ben. Ben leaves little doggie droppings around the cabin. I named them Bennets. Even a little dog has the BC spirit.

REMEMBER SUNDOG ON GORDON'S BEACH? Last month his right side went numb. From his head to his toes. Half his face. Half his penis. He went to Painless Patterson, the doctor in Sooke, and had tests. And later he went to Victoria for a milligram. They couldn't find anything wrong.

One morning some people arrived at his door. An Indian was with them. The Indian asked if those were his boots outside the door. Sundog left his boots outside the door because his feet sweat and he liked to air them out. The Indian said, "Don't you know that you should never leave your boots outside because someone can put a spell on you through them." Sundog looked at him and didn't say anything. "I'll bet you have a numbness in your body," the Indian said. "Well ... uh ... yeah...." "I can cure you," the Indian said. He went outside and brought the boots into the cabin. He held the boots in his hands and then set them down. He closed his hands into fists and held them over the candle. When he opened his hands the candle flamed. Then he washed his hands in the basin. And left a black ring around it. In the bottom of the basin was a ball of mucous like substance. He pulled it out and showed it to Sundog. "This is what was causing your problem. Now you have to purify yourself."

They went outside and the Indian stripped and waded into the icy cold ocean. He told Sundog to do the same. Sundog stripped and put one foot in the water. It was unbearably cold. The Indian told him to come right in and Sundog walked into the water up to his waist. The Indian told him to submerge himself and hold onto a rock at the bottom. Sundog did, and when he grabbed the rock, there was no longer any cold.

That afternoon the Indian left.

The next morning, Sundog's numbness went away.

IT'S MIDNIGHT, THE FOGHORN IS BLOWING, a damp chill is coming in off the water. The stove is crackling, cedar popping, humming with heat. Moments like this I forget that I don't fit. I think the key is to get into a position where I'll never be reminded of it, shack, stove, crackle, pop, foghorn, radio blowing some funky CBC clarinet from the corner, glass of cheap wine on the table, soft white Sally Anne socks on my feet curled under the chair like a pair of sleeping cats, sitting here laughing and crying, typing this letter.

The Nobel Prize

THE NOBEL PRIZE CAME TO TUGWELL CREEK TODAY.

Richard was telling me that when he was walking on the beach this morning, he suddenly thought of an invention.

"What was it?" I asked.

"I don't know. You know how sometimes you think of an invention but it doesn't come all the way out, so you don't know what it is. It started to come out and I got so excited that I frightened it. So it went back in."

F. Stop Fitzgerald

PAGE ARRIVED IN HIS RUSTED OLD CAR with the tattered maroon seat covers, carrying a giant backpack that could have housed a family of three.

And kleenex. Boxes and boxes of kleenex.

Ever since I've known him the kleenex has been there. He must get hay fever from life itself.

But he's easy to allow for.

He needs extra sleep.

He gets cranky for small intervals and when he gets really bored he just walks away and comes back later when things have changed.

We spent four days sitting at the kitchen table looking out the



“When he left, all I said was, “See you around,” because I didn’t know how to tell a person with all women friends and a runny nose that I’d miss him.” [Jim Page at Barry’s, 1979]

window at the gray. A gray Christmas. We had a Christmas bowl football game, and a game of chess that he bullied me into. At dinner I had to drink his bottle of wine, too.

We talked about his new-found love from Whitehorse.

I gave him the benefit of the doubt because I respect his opinion, but she seemed too straight.

When he left, all I said was, “See you around,” because I didn’t know how to tell a person with all women friends and a runny nose that I’d miss him.

So instead I’ll just wait to see the migration of the wide-angle lens through the caribou herds, and that first northern flower reaching through the tundra, searching for spring.

Dear Nearly Normal [Page],

Well, WAC finally bit the dust ... God pulled on his bootstraps. What can I say? If I were a public figure I’d eulogize him as the man responsible for making BC what it is today. However, speaking as a faceless mass it would seem like good common sense to drive a stake through his heart.

I understand that an empty taxicab pulled up to the funeral home and Bill Vander Zalm got out ... heh! heh! ... I’m only partially joking.

BETTY CONTINUES TO LAVISH ME with adoration and affection ...

I have a theory that it’s because in my long underwear and a dim light I remind her of her father. She in turn accuses me of “sapping her youth.”

As for the likes of you and I ... Conrad summed it up when he observed of life that “the individual intensifies his essential being and rides it to his doom.”

Dear Doug,

Was taking in the sun today, very idle, reading, when some very high flying sea gulls flushed their little feather toilets. For the first few seconds I tried to understand how it could rain from a clear blue sky. For the next few hours I wondered what a man’s life has come to when seagull shit feels like rain drops. Successful, I suppose.

RE: THE COSMIC MARSHMALLOW ... Richard and I achieved higher levels of cosmology in preparation for the bowl. We lived every



“The bowl did not and never will live up to the cosmology of the pre-bowl games. Think back. The best games were individual games. The Zen puzzle has been destroyed by the creation of the Cosmic Trophy.” [With Jim Keefer, Doug Lang, and the Cosmic Trophy in Barry’s apartment in Victoria, 1979]

emotion at every level. During the bowl game we duplicated these emotions, only on a superficial level. There was no pressure, merely a superficial pressure. There was no cosmic feeling, merely a superficial feeling.

I suppose on an earthly level the imposition of pre-season games would build a familiarity of animosity. The bowl did not and never will live up to the cosmology of the pre-bowl games. Think back. The best games were individual games. The Zen puzzle has been destroyed by the creation of the Cosmic Trophy. There is no point in winning it. It has to be won again and again and again. It was my fault. I created the false god trophy, but we all played our parts—to the hilt. Page became the first Philistine to be stoned to death. Keefer even became the heavy, lurking in a darkened doorway, his cigarette a dull glow...

Well, I know how to make it right again. The trophy must be won back, one more time. It will then be melted down into a gnarled little

cosmic frisbee. It will still be a trophy, but it will look like a cosmic hubcap. You know the one. It rolled off the front wheel of God's Rolls Royce when he turned a corner too fast one day, long ago.

And once in a while during a game, you and Keefer will reminisce about the cosmic bowl, like two tired old Nazis trying to relive the glory days of the Third Reich. Whenever that happens, we will bring out the little cosmic hubcap, no name, no nothing, maybe a little stand of twisted baby deer ribs. We will have a one game series, anytime, just like the Grey Cup or the Super Bowl, except it will be a higher calibre of play, quieter too, just like a cosmic frisbee cutting through the air ... here, want to throw it?

'Twas the Night Before Christmas

I WENT UP TO AGUYIN'S TODAY. He was sitting in the dim kitchen light drinking. He said it was because he was excited about Christmas. He poured me a drink and like Charles Dickens began to tell me about his Christmas dream.

I HAD A CHRISTMAS DREAM LAST NIGHT. It took place on Christmas Eve. All of the hungry people, the sick, the poor, the unemployed, were all summoned from their shelters toward a light streaming from the western sky. They left their cardboard mattresses. They came from under their newspapers. They came from the abandoned cars. Some even came out of the basement suites. They gathered under the light and peered up as they clutched their worn tattered rags to their shivering souls. But their hearts were warmed as they were bathed in the blinding light. Suddenly their bodies began to glow and they gradually started to rise until they became multi-coloured tapeworms. Some were colours that had never been seen before. Then they were interwoven into a prayer mat of mystical patterns. It floated away and slowly disappeared into the darkening sky. There are some people that believe they went to heaven. But on Christmas morning do you know where it was found? On the doorstep of the Minister in Charge of Welfare! And all that Christmas day you could hear him greeting his guests

with “Merry Christmas! Come on in. And be sure to wipe your feet!”

*I saw forty
turn Aguyin*

Dear Nearly Normal [Page],

Aguyin had number 4-0 on Thursday April 2nd. Born a day late and a dollar short . . . Richard and I decided to buy an ad in the personal column of the Victoria paper—“Happy Birthday Aguyin, the last one is always the best, love Orville Wright.” At the time we felt that Orville Wright was probably his closest spiritual affiliate. We laughed, but didn’t do it of course, because the pleasure is in the thought and not the action—a typical Tugwell gift.

Later in the evening the gift-giving fantasies began to twist. I decided to buy him a bottle of Pinch. We would sit and drink in the kitchen of his Alcan Time Capsule, the bottle would go around, my revolver would be in the middle of the table, one round of .50 magnum ammunition would be in the chamber. At any time during the evening Aguyin would be allowed one spin of the chamber, he would cock the pistol, hold it to his temple, and pull the trigger, the ultimate birthday present for Aguyin, a chance to buy it.

Richard was much healthier about the whole thing. He wanted to take Aguyin to Seattle on the jet foil, first class all the way, take him to a nice bar and buy drinks all evening. Then later on, he would get up and go to the bathroom, and slip out the back door leaving Aguyin there, drunk and broke in a bar in Seattle for his birthday present.

The reality of the situation turned out to be reasonably wholesome though. A friend of Aguyin’s from Victoria baked a cake and left it at work for me to deliver. I talked Pia into checking her candle stock and we dug out forty of the little wax reminders. I kept Aguyin away from the door as Richard fired them up in the porch of the trailer. I hit the lights . . . Richard and Pia entered . . . the glow from those forty candles was breathtaking. The heat alone was impressive. They set it down. Pia



“Aguyin had number 4-0 on Thursday April 2nd. Born a day late and a dollar short....” [With Aguyin on the deck of the cabin, 1980]

asked him to make a wish, he looked at June, then his little gray head bent over the cake. The candlelight flickered on his wrinkled face, his sunken cheeks filled with air, and Whooshh!! ... Out they went. But he didn't die.

LATER I WAS RECOVERING FROM THE PREVIOUS EVENING'S festivities through casual periodical reading, when there was a knock at the door ... halfway through *Mother Jones*. My God! It's Keefer!! It's been nearly a year since he's come out here. He's drunk; he has a mickey of Bacardi and two illegal marijuana cigarettes. His explanation, “Had to get out of town man, and this was the only place I could think of.”

Sure. We light up, drink up, and digress into a pseudo-philosophical discussion, showing our concern about the human situation.

Keefer keeps using words that I don't understand but he still hasn't wised up that I'm not hip to them, the momentum of his thoughts carries him through.

I expound on my concerns; Keefer presses me for concepts. I don't have any, anymore. I feel that I've shot my best wad intellectually years

ago. I've lost interest. I try to explain it, he shows disappointment, I clarify, he misinterprets, we knock off, drink, return to it. He leaves in a 1981 huff for a midnight drive back to Victoria in search of a Big Mac, and the truth, I assume.

Guess Who's Coming for Dinner

I WAS WALKING IN THE DARKNESS TOWARDS MY CABIN. Richard stepped out of the shadows, "Hey Macleod, want to have supper with me? Pia's going out." Sure, why not? It's cold, his stove is already going.

Richard and I sat around the stove and talked about death. He showed me a library book that he was reading called *Death: The Hidden Meaning*. I went berserk. "Bullshit! I don't care how well it's presented. It's the end and if you're not ready it's a drag because it's over. No heaven. No hell. No coming back as an animal. No new life. No ghosts. Nothing man." Richard kept stressing that death was an artistic expression but soon fell under my onslaught. Then he lost his temper too, and ended up throwing the book in the fire.

"You killed Death!" I screamed at him. He laughed.

Later we had chicken for supper. It had been killed and came back as a full stomach.

Saturday Night Fever

THIS WEEKEND I WAS SITTING OUT FRONT WATCHING A TUG pull a log boom out of Muir Creek.

Wally's wife walked by on the other side of the sea grass; she stood watching the tug for a while.

Then she turned and saw me sitting against the cabin.

She waved.

I waved back.

She said, "Jesus, good thing I wasn't taking a piss or something, eh?"



“Then she turned and saw me sitting against the cabin. She waved.” [1979]

I laughed.

She laughed.

She left.

I smiled to myself. Not a bad Saturday night.

Neighbourhood Watch

AGUYIN AND I WALKED OVER THE TUGWELL CREEK bridge on the way down to my cabin. Something flashed in the moonlight by the side of the road. We walked over to see what it was. It was part of a truck bumper.

Aguyin said, “Hey! Maybe somebody went off the bridge.”

“Aw... Nobody went off the bridge. Let’s go.”

We got to my cabin and I started breaking up some kindling for a fire. Aguyin paced up and down.

He said, “I’ve got to go out and check the bridge. Where’s your lantern man?”

I told him that it was on top of the fridge and he grabbed it as

he hustled out the door. I got a fire going and turned the damper down on the stove. I was looking in the fridge for something to eat when Aguyin came bursting into the cabin.

“There’s a truck in the trees,” he gasped, breathing hard, “On its side. It went right over the side, man. I’ve got to phone the cops.”

“No! What do you have to phone the cops for? Don’t phone them man.”

He walked over to the phone and picked it up.

“Hey! Come on man. Don’t phone them.”

It was useless. It was yet another one of Aguyin’s faces. One that no one but Richard and myself had seen. It was the face of the concerned citizen. The original neighbourhood watch. There was one thing that Aguyin could always be depended on doing and that was to observe and report.

He phoned the RCMP in Sooke and we went out onto the road and waited for them in the dark. They arrived in about twenty minutes, their flashing lights kaleidoscoping on the treetops. We flagged them down and they pulled over to the side of the road.

There were two of them. They got out of the car but left the flashing lights on. I let Aguyin handle everything, since it had been his idea. We climbed down the embankment, the RCMP slipping with their city shoes, going slow, trying not to get their pant cuffs muddy. I led the way with my lantern.

When we got to the truck, they pulled out a flashlight and began shining it around inside the cab of the truck. I couldn’t believe their flashlight. The lens was cracked and the batteries were so low that they could only cast a dim yellow softness onto the scene. In comparison my lantern was like a car headlight. I wondered why they didn’t have proper cop equipment.

Inside the cab were a few broken beer bottles and not much else. Obviously the guy had been drinking, missed the curve on the bridge and left the scene so that he wouldn’t get an impaired driving rap.

One cop reached through the shattered back window and said, “I’ve found a driver’s license here Bob.”

“What’s his BCDL number, Ken?” replied Constable Bob.

I wondered what they were talking about and then realized that BCDL stood for British Columbia Driver's License number. I fleetingly wondered if Constable Bob realized I had cracked their code.

We climbed back up to the road and Aguyin began recreating the accident, showing them the skid marks, estimating the speed, lining up the trajectory.

Searching in the bushes, he found more parts that had broken off the truck and gathered them up to take home for his own personal evidence. Constable Bob and Constable Ken were transfixed as Aguyin walked up and down the road, gesticulating and lecturing. He was on stage with the flashing lights from the police car providing special effects for him.

Constable Bob finally dismissed us with a "Thanks a lot, fellows."

We started back to the cabin, following the lantern light.

Aguyin turned to me and said, "Did you smell Constable Bob's after shave?"

"No. I didn't get that close."

"Gee . . . he smelled just like a whore," Aguyin said.

*The social representation
of boredom is Sunday.*

—Shopenhauer

Sweet Kay and Crazy Al,

Last night there was a giant black ant in the tub. Not an ordinary black ant, but one of the big ones we get out here once a year when it gets hot. I picked him up and squashed him between my fingers, then dropped him into the toilet bowl. Suddenly, I felt something on my ankle. I looked down. It was another big black ant. I grabbed him before he could bite me and threw him into the toilet bowl. He had two feeler type things and he began swimming in a doubled over side-stroke style. I watched for a while. He didn't seem to drown but kept himself barely afloat with this bent over sidestroke. I flushed the toilet and the dead one went down the drain but this one swam even harder.

Then the flush was almost over and the round sucking swirls at the end of the flush pulled him around and around like a whirlpool and then down out of sight. Then as the water came back up again so did the ant. He made it to the surface and went back into his bent over feeler waving sidestroke again, but much weaker than before. I guess when your brain is that small, you can't think of a reason not to live.

Shoes for Industry

YESTERDAY I DROVE PIA INTO SOOKE. We passed a couple of garbage bags beside the road.

Pia turned to me and said, "I went through those you know."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I found one red shoe. Size seven. But I couldn't find the mate. Damn!"

Jesus, they come over from England and just go crazy.

There's so much here, for everyone.

Soon there will be red shoes for all of us.

The Seminar

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR WOKE ME UP LAST NIGHT. I looked at the clock. It was 2:00 a.m. I looked outside. It was pitch black. I went back to bed.

A rabbit had been eating from Richard's garden for the past two weeks. No one had tried to touch him or scare him away, so he'd become part of the scene.

This afternoon Richard and I stood in a misting drizzle, talking. The rabbit walked around our feet, its nose tweaking.

Richard said, "I dropped some acid last night and knocked on your door."

"What for?"

"I thought you might want someone to talk to."

I smiled and looked down at the rabbit.

He said, "I guess you weren't home"

I didn't reply. He shifted position. The rabbit hopped nervously to the side.

Richard peered at me, "How many mistakes do you think a person makes in a day?"

"I don't know. How many?"

His eyes darkened. "A lot. I've been counting them lately. You see, a mistake can be anything. Whatever. I was watching Pia this morning. How many mistakes do you think she made?"

I thought, oh no, the guy drops one tab of acid and spends the rest of his life counting mistakes.

I shrugged, "How many?"

"Twenty-five! She made twenty-five mistakes, man."

I felt compelled to come to her defense. "How many mistakes did you make?"

A sad look came over his face.

He looked down at the ground for a moment, then looked up and said, "Eighty-six."

We nodded at each other, turned and went back to our cabins.

The rabbit hopped back to the garden and disappeared behind a large lettuce leaf.

First you do it for your own enjoyment. Then you do it for a few friends. Eventually you figure, "What the hell, I might as well get paid for it."

—Irma Kalish, comparing writing to the world's oldest profession

Page,

I have taken a box in town to avert the horror of commuting. Corner of May and Moss, cherry blossom trees, two blocks to the ocean, old block, old people, quiet, dim, reasonably depressing. Merely moved my books and mattress in. Thought I'd spend my extra time writing a short story, "Waterfalls Are for Losers." An existential autobiography... it took three pages to get the loser out of bed and into the street, haven't looked at it since. Decided that I can't do anything if



“The rabbit hopped back to the garden and disappeared behind a large lettuce leaf.”
[1980]

I have to work; that conveniently makes it “their fault,” which it might be anyway.

2:30 A.M., FITFUL NON-DRUGGED SLEEP, stage three, when GNAW!
ECHO! GNAW! reverberates from the bathroom. Please God, let it be
the radiator cranking up. I pad into the bathroom, that familiar re-
frain is coming from under the tub. I return to my mattress, my eyes

remain open, CRUNCH! CRUNCH! CRUNCH! from behind the kitchen cupboards. I began to wonder about myself.

Next day I report the sound of rats to the caretaker, or the dangling puppet of May Enterprises, depending on your politics. He informs me that there are no rats in Victoria and I was either (1) imagining it, (2) or it was the radiators cranking up. I pressed him for his service record, number of rat attacks, duration, weapons used, etc. As suspected the pompous little snot had never seen a dropping in his entire life, other than his own of course. I launched into a fairly sane, if disjointed monologue, summarizing my rodent credentials. He looked at me with revulsion. No action.

To thwart what I felt was a possible slide into the valley of the damned, I began to tape the late night gnawings. It took a week for the rats to break through, into the kitchen cupboard under the sink. That very night Daddy Warbuck's toady presented me with a rent increase. How did he know the rats had broken through? I confronted him with the large hole in the wall. He suggested it might have been sawed through. I suggested that rats do not use saws, but what had actually happened was I had chewed through the wall myself to make it look like rats had sawed through. He didn't understand. I immediately switched satire for rage ... he began to understand. I painted a picture of a rat-infested nightmare, little old ladies with their faces eaten off, every wall a symphony of gnaws.

He promised to check with his masters for permission to do something then tried to regain his dignity in a strange manner. He said he felt sorry for his masters because they couldn't raise the rent higher. Not enough return on their investment; rent controls are causing the rental shortage and so on. Standing under my Karl Marx poster (in colour) I corrected his every fault for one and a half hours. I finally dismissed him with a yawn just before turning my back on him forever. Karl was smiling at me.

I SEE A GIANT BILLBOARD STRETCHED across the highway. It reads DEPRESSION II ... the ripping of cloth ... and Macleod drives through ... a honk of the horn and a hearty fuck you ...

The only problem is, every time I buy a new car I lose my job ...
Twice lucky?

*... and Christmas went
out with the tide ...*

Dear Don,

So it comes to pass at Tugwell Creek ... it seems that in the twilight of Macleod's years he has become seasonally adjusted ... again. I guess that I wanted a union more than the company did. Everyone was traumatized by my execution, and they all felt horrible about it. But they still get paid every second Friday and I'm not doing anything except applying for UIC.

The line-up at the UIC office would have warmed your heart, you chubby little commie. It snaked across the room before it spilled into the street in a ragged twist. There were the young scruffs, loud and uncaring; they didn't know any better. There were even a few older ones this time, wearing business suits, glaring with angry eyes. But I didn't feel sorry for them. They had supported the beast while it fed on them, now it had indigestion and has to shit them out onto the street. Mostly though, we were made up of strings of defenseless breakfast sausage.

I read for one and a half hours while I waited to be called by my "employment counselor." They came at intervals and called for their wards. One of them was a chatelaine lady, full make-up, no rings, a sparkling smile. She was my age, too—probably desperate. I fantasized about being called by her. Once we started talking she would find me fascinating, totally unlike anyone she had ever known, maybe we would fall in love, maybe I would end up getting a job at the unemployment office.

A pasty-faced Foster Hewitt look-a-like with glasses shattered my reverie with "Mr Macleod?" I rose to meet him. He asked, "And how are you today?"

"Top drawer ..."

He led me to his desk. We were surrounded by five counselors; each counselor had an unemployed prop leaning against their desk. My counselor was bent over his squares and secret tabulations on the back of my form. He didn't speak, and he didn't look at me. I looked past him at Miss Chatelaine. She was interviewing a laid-off bus boy from

Pagliachi's restaurant. Her phone rang; she talked for a long while. It was a personal call; her life sounded full of vague meaning. The kid sat subdued, head down, her manicured fingers swept through the air as she spoke, weaving a symphony of unconcern under the nose of Pagliachi's bus boy. Her perfect lips glistened, and parted, and glistened. I looked away.

My counselor suddenly tossed the paper across the desk to me. He pointed at the bottom lines. I picked it up and read "... employee has good work record, blah, blah ... and could find work ... blah, blah." I looked up at him questioningly. He merely nodded in reply. I sat without speaking.

"So ...," he mumbled, "Where's Tugwell Creek?" and I thought oh shit here it comes, the how can you find a job when you don't live in town routine?

"It's between Sooke and Jordan River on the West Coast Road."

"Must be a long drive."

"Yeah ... about an hour. But when I lived in Vancouver it took me two hours to get to work riding the bus."

"Oh yeah? I used to live in Vancouver ... it took me an hour to drive to work. I lived in Burnaby. Where did you live?"

"I lived in Burnaby, too."

"Really? Where in Burnaby?"

"A block from Oakalla Prison, across the street from the cemetery."

"Oh ... that was in South Burnaby. I lived in North Burnaby. I was in the import-export business for twenty-four years. I got out just in time. I was up to half a bottle a day, and I didn't think anything of it, you know, 'cause all my friends were up to a bottle a day. He trailed away. I waited; there was no more. He seemed lost in thought.

I finally said "Yeah, it's a terrible thing...." He sat silently. I thought, Jesus, is he drunk or what? With some of these old guys you can't tell if they're still boozing or if they quit too late and don't know what's going on anymore.

I decided to wait and let him make the next move. My gaze drifted back to the Chatelaine lady. She was still on the phone. I was beginning to loathe the sight of her now. My counselor interrupted with, "Ever been to Toronto?"

"What?"

“Ever been to Toronto?”

“No....”

“Don’t ever go. It’s a shithole. Montreal! Now that’s a town. You’d be talking to a buyer and he’d say, ‘Which bar do you want to go to for lunch?’ And we’d walk down to Place de Ville and go into one of the bars and talk and drink. But in Toronto it’s all business, all they care about is money.”

He waits for my response. I remain silent, waiting for him to go on. “Ever been to Los Angeles?”

“No, never have.”

He appears confused for a moment, searching for a common thread, little knowing that I’ve been left in the bar in Place de Ville, sunk into the deep black naugahyde booths, watching the long haired French waitresses, ice clinking delicately in my glass.

“Well, LA is like Toronto. San Francisco is a better town. They have more zest for life in San Francisco.”

“Listen,” I interrupted, “a guy at work told me I should ask to get on the list for the dockyard. Is there anything you can tell me about that?”

He laughed. “There’s no list for the dockyard.”

There was a long pause. We both reflected on the gravity of the situation. He started up again half-heartedly, “Well, my son worked at the dockyard. They laid him off after six months.”

He seemed on the verge of tears. I reached over and touched his arm. I said, “Is there anything I should know about? You know, reporting in or something?”

He seemed distracted again, “No. Nothing. If you have any problems be sure to come in and see me.” But he didn’t give me his card, nor did he tell me his name.

He walked me back to the front area, “Nice talking to you, sir,” he said as he shook my hand. Sir??? I peered into his watery blue eyes. They were miles away. He was back talking to a buyer in Montreal again. I felt vaguely depressed.

I left and smoked my after-interview joint as I wound back down the twisting West Coast Road. The glow from the headlights melted into the pastel winter, leaves fell to the roadside, floating suicides, I drove into the driving rain, deeper and deeper, until I ceased to exist.

Page,

So, it's been an endless stream of phone calls to the union, visits to the department of labour, as Macleod fights for justice. I've been weeks without UIC and another four to go, but to make a long story short they are all out of justice this year and I don't mind because I roll with the blow as I hit the scrap heap. Having done this before, one learns how to fall.

Standing in line at the Unemployment Office the other day, I had a vision. I ripped my clothes off right there in front of everyone, and underneath was a costume with a cape. Meek, mild-mannered Barry Macleod turned into Unemployment Man! I leaped onto the counter and turned to my troops, that raggedy little band of losers, and hollered "Follow me!!" Then lead the rabble through the office as we tore it apart searching for justice. I can see Unemployment Man flying across Canada, searching for work, flying through windows of government offices, landing in the middle of the floor, tossing my cape over my shoulder:

"Hi! I'm Unemployment Man! Any government jobs here? No? Well I guess I'll just fly to Sudbury and see if there's work in the mines...." And away!

Or, a small girl walks with her mother down the street, a shadow crosses the sidewalk, she looks up....

"Mommy! Mommy! Look up in the sky! Is that a lawyer?"

"No."

"Is it a social worker?"

"No dear. It's Unemployment Man, flying across Canada actively seeking employment."

Or, we might find Unemployment Man in a rowboat pounding on the hull of a Polish fish boat....

"Comrades, I hear there are some jobs here. There aren't in my country...."

You sometimes wonder if you have to have a wife and two kids at home before you can emigrate.

The couple who run the Deli in Sooke light up when I arrive for my gristle with a smiling "It's Unemployment Man! How's it going Unemployment Man?"... etc. Their thirteen-year-old daughter has

taken a liking to me (I know). She drew a cartoon of Unemployment Man and they gave it to me as a gift. I was almost touched—life as a symbol.

LAST WEEK SUNDOG AND I WENT TARGET SHOOTING with our restricted revolvers. We drove back through the logging roads, winding through the devastation, down fading trails. He had pistol targets and beer cans. We fired over three hundred rounds, dirt splattered, beer cans danced, gunfire echoed over the hilltops. The whine of the ricochets gave musical expression to the powder burns on our hands.

Once when we were walking back from our targets, I was about ten feet ahead of Sundog. Suddenly I wheeled in a half crouch, pointed my gun at him, he was caught trying to bring his revolver up, but I had the drop on him. I said “POW!” He smiled. I turned away. We didn’t say anything about it, but I knew from that moment on that he liked me. I guess I have a way with people.

Back at the cabin we warmed by the stove, cleaning our pistols at the kitchen table, sipping scotch....

Sundog said “There’s nothing like cleaning your gun and sipping scotch, is there?” I’m ashamed to admit that I agreed with him. It really was a good feeling.

Lang,

Explain politics to me. I just don’t understand it anymore. Bill Bennett rousing the faithful in his holy war for resource control. The only resources BC had he gave away, BRIC. What’s he talking about? And that Lougheed millionaire asshole. I read where he was on TV for an hour, threatening to turn the tap off because the oil companies were asked to front a little bread. What the fuck is he talking about? He wasn’t on TV for an hour complaining about the working class being strangled. If I was the PM, the sky above Alberta would be filled with paratroopers. Break down the legislature doors and spray them with machine gun fire. What an asshole, probably has his own army anyway. Can you imagine what the Alberta Army looks like?

Sweeping across the prairies, thousands of dust plumes, just like

Rommel's Panzar Corps. But wait, they get closer. Why, it's thousands upon thousands of big black undulating Cadillacs, power glide man. Sooooo smooth, rising and falling. A giant steer horn is mounted on the hood. Behind the wheel is a fat piggy businessman, a fold in his stomach accommodates the steering wheel. He wears a western shirt, string tie ... a ten-gallon hat. There is some spittle at the corner of his slobbering mouth, the obligatory big cigar penetrates his fat lips.

The rear half of the caddy has been modified to hold a twin-barreled .50 calibre machine gun, manned (?) by a lithe sixteen-year-old longhaired blonde wearing a skinny string bikini, her little breasts jiggle with each recoil of machine gun fire. And so on.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT TUGWELL CREEK. Eight rats have bitten the dust so far this season, three in the last week alone. Three poisoned. Four shot. One trapped. I've traded the old M-1 in on a six-shot .22 revolver. It has a replaceable cylinder that will take a .22 magnum. It's got a lot of punch, actually. Anyway, I've been catching the at-rays under the porch in a mink trap. That trap has changed the whole psychology of this war. The tide turning with Rat six. I checked under the porch one Saturday morning and the scurvy bastard was sitting in the cage and he went fucking crazy. Running everywhere ... pushing through the holes in the side with lightning moves. I cocked the revolver and tried to get a bead on him through the opening in the mesh. He immediately lunged out at my outstretched arm and I shot him in the face. It was brutal, but from then on the psychological tide had turned. I became hardened. It was like *Taxi Driver*, fuck with me? I'll shoot you in the face man ...

Five days later I got number seven. It was pitch black; there was a driving rain. I shot him by flashlight twice. Notch two for the pistol. Two nights later I was sitting at the kitchen table, 1:30 a.m. reading and eating popcorn, listening to jazz, when I heard SNAP!!! coming from the porch. It was the first one that I'd caught in a trap. Broke his back. I wanted to shoot him anyway but wrestled myself back.

MOVING UP THE HILL. Aguyin left for good a few weeks ago. He dragged every possession that he'd accumulated into the yard. He heaped them into a pile and lit them on fire. A scorched-earth policy.



“He walks in circles in the yard, with a lump in his lung, a sock on his arm, and a song in his heart. He exists.” [Visiting Aguyin (left) with Pam (centre) and Betty, 1980]

Great symbolism. Then down the hill with his flute sticking out of his shoulder bag. This was really it. Going to live in Mom’s garage and carve. Never going to come back. Ever...

He came back Saturday ... very subdued ... very different. There’s a haunted look on his face now. He’s finally found out that there’s nowhere to go. It’s ironic; a man with all that talent, and all he can do is be creative about his own self-destruction. Last week he had a lump in his lung, this week his stools are getting smaller. He wears a sock on his elbow for the arthritis. He walks in circles in the yard, with a lump in his lung, a sock on his arm, and a song in his heart. He exists.

Page,

Last Monday I went to the unemployment rally at the legislature that was to coincide with the bringing down of the budget. It was the first time that I was ashamed to be unemployed. The political ignorance

was simply astounding. A few hundred unemployed were bussed in from Port Alberni and Campbell River. A soup kitchen was set up. Soup and a bun. I thought, “What about cake? I want cake too. Hey, Grace! Where’s our cake? HEY GRACIE!!! WE WANT CAKE!!!” People were not amused. This was a serious rally, Page.

The demands were UIC at ninety percent of your salary until you found a job, a six-hour day for eight-hours pay, roll back all increases and taxes, a minimum wage of \$7.50 an hour, and so on. Really. These \$14-an-hour union assholes only know how to respond to unemployment by demanding more money for being unemployed. And demanding it from millionaire business persons. I half expected to see a counter demonstration of empty busloads of working people.

I decided to be a freelance unemployed person and sit in the gallery as a citizen of BC, like you can on the prairies. There’re no fucking iron bars on the door there. There’s no guard at the door. We used to demo right into the building; Red Al would come out and speak, we’d boo, he’d leave, we’d go home. These fuckers make you feel like you’re in Chile.

As it turns out...

“No admittance to the gallery without a pass.”

“Uh? Where do I get a pass?”

“Sorry, they’re all gone.”

How about ... leering from under my sombrero, “Passes? Passes?? We don’t need no stinking passes!” POW! POW!

So back to the fringes of the demo. A white haired ruddy cheeked check-shirted old fart hands me his pamphlet, and WOW! The CP!! The real CP man, the old timers! “Thanks man!” He lights up. I read their program. It sounds like the type of program the NDP should adopt, good decent common sense. And then coming through the crowd, a familiar voice, “World Socialism!!” Hey! I’ve heard this guy on San Francisco at night, “I’m calling from Victoria, BC Canada on behalf of world socialism....”

“Hey! I’ve heard you on the radio man, give me your sheet.” And he lights up saying, “Yes sir!! Cash registers and guns will just be scrap heaps in museums when world socialism comes...”

I read his eccentricities on the walk across the lawn back to the car. I can’t demonstrate too long or my meter will expire. I reached the

sidewalk and a hundred year old James Bay guy with a cane (you know the type, “Good old Bertie ... he still gets around you know”) and his wavery old voice says, “What are all these people doing in front of the legislature?”

“Oh, it’s just some unemployed people.”

“There sure are a lot of them. Haven’t seen this many people here since the Queen came.”

And so ended the first demo of the depression.

Mr Prime Minister:

I HAVE BEEN UNEMPLOYED FOR SOME TIME NOW, as have a number of my neighbours in this community. It is apparent that the situation is not going to change for the better in the immediate future for a number of debatable reasons. I am confident that you are aware of the social toll that a depressed economy exacts.

Now I don’t pretend to have the answers for a situation that is largely out of the control of the Federal Government, just as you don’t pretend to have the answers.

However, I do have a suggestion that may have the impact of a modern-day “new deal.” I leave it to the appropriate government departments to implement the logistics of the program, but quite simply it is this: If you will give me my Canada Pension now, I will promise to commit suicide in five years.

Hoping this meets with your consideration.

The Last Buffalo

SUNDOG IS THE LAST PIONEER. If he needs a new door for his cabin, he makes it himself.

Then he’ll make his own hinges, his own nails, his own lock, and his own key.

He makes his own clothes.

His own alcohol.

He is totally self-sufficient.

One day he told me, “Drop me in any forest, or on any mountain with a knife and some matches and I’ll come out of there in two months weighing twenty more pounds than when I went in.”

Last year he had a chance to prove himself. He went on a tour of the USA by bus. Greyhound had a special fare, anywhere in the US in thirty days by bus for \$99.

He arrived in Chicago early one morning and checked into a hotel. He slept all day, then went out to get the lay of the land.

He went into the first bar he came to and had a few drinks.

Then another bar.

And another.

When he walked out of the twenty-fourth bar he had no idea where he was or where he was staying.

He flagged down a cab and asked the cabbie how many bus stations there were in town.

He was told three.

He asked to be taken to the nearest one. When he got there he began walking from the bus station and went into the first hotel that he came to.

He walked up to the desk clerk and asked, “Do you have a Mr Carson staying here?”

“The clerk checked the register and said, “Yes we have.”

“Can I have my key please?”

*Poverty and degeneration have never
ceased to be what they were before Marx’s
time; and what he did not want to admit that
they were despite all his observations: factors
contributing to servitude not to revolution.*

—Camus

Dear Government Job at Last [Page],

Aguyin and June have left in a trail of tears, as the system starts dismantling at the bottom on its way up to the lower portions, maybe even pinching some middle-class asses.

I remember looking at that sad wrinkled face as it said, "I went crazy up there man, so now I have to go away." And we sat around the table one last time. I poured them both a drink, raised my glass and said, "Well, it's been a slice." And Aguyin said, "Yep, a big one." And June started crying. Later that night we all went up to say good-bye and walked back down the hill as June was crying, crying, crying into the darkness.... I guess after five years, even when you're nobody and aren't paying the big mortgage payment, even then you feel that it's your home. But they don't count these as tragedies. If you can't fly to Ottawa and protest interest rates and complain about your mortgage, if you can't do that, you're not a tragedy.

I walked up a few days later, looked out at the rock garden, walked through the clean forest. It was like a cemetery. And in a way I guess it was. Because he isn't going to be Aguyin anymore either.

And the weeks fly by like weekends. Soon I will lose my home too. And the only difference between Aguyin and myself is that he wants to shoot himself and I want to shoot some of those fuckers even while the mindless wad pick their noses watching their TVs sucking on their beers sitting on their asses with their bootstraps dangling loosely around their ankles while they vote vote vote, Jesus fucking Christ Page I can't stand it anymore.

Sorry, no further tirades. I'll be mature and pretend it's going to get better. If I was working I could pretend that it was not happening. If I was younger I wouldn't care. If I were dumber I'd think it was my fault. If I were rich I'd think it was their fault.

IT'S CAT-MATING SEASON AT TUGWELL. Meow! Meow! Outside the cabin at night. I was talking to Sundog this afternoon. It appears they meowed at his cabin last night. He burst through the door, stark naked in the moonlight, pistol blazing, cats running everywhere. He missed them all but shot one of the tires on his truck. I guess if you liked cats you could say that it served him right.

I GUESS I'LL PUSH ON A LITTLE CLOSER TO THE BOTTOM. Have discovered a new creative job search method. Because it now costs \$4.00 to go to Victoria and back, I've had to cut down to once every second Friday. I arrive at 12:30, drop my UIC card off at the office,

move on to Glen's Fabulous Sandwiches where I have a Fabulous Sandwich and read the paper, looking for a job, then off to whatever matinee is playing, *Montenegro*, *The Border*, *Missing*. Large popcorn is now \$2.50 . . . don't ya wanta shout?

Doug,

About a month ago Wayne was running his chainsaw when it kicked back and cut his face in half. A chainsaw makes an ugly serrated cut. Now he looks like an extra from *Dawn of the Dead*. The cut came at a bad time because he'd just received a reply from the "37-year-old blond seeking male companionship" whom he had spotted leaning against a lamp post in the personal column of the Victoria paper. He had her name, address, and a rendezvous time. He put a pin through his left nipple after freezing it with ice cubes, then he forced a gold ear ring through the crunching gristle. He put on a clean plaid shirt, used a friend's bathtub, bought a bottle of wine and headed for Victoria in the pick-up, wearing his red see-thru nylon bikini briefs that he always wore on his first fuck.

The closer he got to her house, the more nervous he became. Finally, he stood trembling on her doorstep. The door swung open. He stood there speechless. She wasn't thirty-seven at all, more like forty-seven. And she wasn't five-foot-six, more like four-foot-six. She invited him in.

And all of a sudden he didn't feel like forty anymore, more like fourteen. And he didn't feel like six-foot tall anymore, more like five-foot-four. She snatched the bottle of wine from him and put it in the fridge.

They moved to the chesterfield. She wore a fortrel polyester transparent vinyl ensemble. She smelled like the inside of a new car. She crossed her legs; one foot came to rest on Wayne's thigh.

"That's a nasty cut you have there," she ice-broke. He tried to reply but his voice cracked. He began to mumble about a headache. He'd forgotten to take his medicine. "I'll give you the medicine you need honey!" breathed the polyester lady. He edged toward the door, his earring unexposed. He lost the bottle of wine. There is no moral.

Jim,

Just spent two weeks helping the Dog bring in his winter's wood. We got seven truck loads of fir. Not bad, eh? He needed help because he's sustained an injury while puttering in his shop. It was a nasty gash between the thumb and first finger. You know, that webbed area. It was gushing blood. The Dog wrapped it in an oily rag and drove into Sooke hoping that Dr Patterson would be there. It was 4:00 p.m. on Saturday afternoon, so Patterson was staggering drunk already. He poured antiseptic on the wound, splashing it all over the floor, and onto the Dog's pants. He froze it and started to sew it up while mumbling, "They call me Painless Patterson." The freezing hadn't taken yet and the Dog yanked his hand back, which caused Painless even further mumbling. "Guess the freezing hasn't taken yet." And kept on sewing. The next week the Dog went back to get the stitches taken out. Painless seemed puzzled. "Did I do this?"

A NEW CHARACTER HAS MOVED to the Sheringham Point area. His name is Tom. He is the Electric Messiah. His eyes are so shiny that he wears sunglasses all the time. Not to keep the light out. But to protect us from his eyes. I'm told he floats through the forest at night wearing a flowing white nightgown and carrying a kerosene lantern.

One day he told me, "You know Barry, they tried to keep me in the loony bin until they could find out what drugs I'm using to maintain my level with God, but I wouldn't tell them my secret, but I'll tell you, if you promise not to tell anyone...." I promised. And he told me.

*She stood there with the immense winds that blew clear
down from Saskatchewan knocking her hair about her
lovely head like shrouds, living curls of them...*

—Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Page,

About a month ago the Dog stopped by on his way back from a naked morning stroll to Kirby Creek. He was a bit put out that no one saw

him, skin oiled with paba, golden earring glistening in his nipple. He informed me that he was on day II of an X day fast which consisted of salmonberries/water/coffee/cigarettes.

We decided to check out the marijuana farm. A long slow walk. The Dog salmonberried all the way, walking, picking, eating, walking, picking, eating. We went in the back way off the road and forded the creek. We walked down the trail. The Dog was about six feet behind me munching on his berries when suddenly!!! in front of me a big black head poked out of the bush. It looked surprised. I froze. It had the red wild eyes of a spooked horse. Then two big black shoulders poked the head out a little further. I could hear the Dog behind me, crunch, munch, munch. I put my arm out and said "Hold it man, a bear" and started to take a couple of steps backwards because I'd read in a library book that you walk slowly backwards if confronted with a bear. At this point the Dog and I collided. The bear crashed out of the brush and onto the trail and shit was it big!

It ran the other way and in a flash the Dog was running after it leaving me standing there hollering "Hey man! Hey!! Don't do that!! Hey man!!!" I could hear the bear crashing down the trail and I ran after the Dog finally catching up to him at the bend in the trail. So it was win/place/show for the bear/the Dog/and I. And the following epilogue:

"Shit! Did you see the size of that?" he said.

"Yeh, fuck.... How come you ran after him? Are you out of your mind?" I puffed.

And the Dog dropped even more of his wood lore on me with "Hey, you always run at them when you see them. It scares them away."

I said, "What do you do if they run at you?"

"Oh, well, you just run the other way then."

Page,

I gather from your address change that love has once again left you standing on the corner of life. Have you ever considered that there may be something wrong with you? Maybe something serious. You

know one of the myths of our time is that women are romantics. They are not. In a woman's eyes a man's sensitivity will never be valued the way his strength is. Of course, unlike us, women don't discriminate. Even though they may hate us and think we're insensitive they won't let on. They'll marry us and punish us instead. We are the real aliens on this planet Page. Women always know that if worst comes to worst, they can re-evaluate themselves by having a child, they are in direct succession with life. We merely provide the smells of pipe tobacco, fix the toilet, and if we're lucky, get to be little boys for short intervals.

God, nothing happens here. One day the water is blue. One day it's gray. Sometimes it's sunny and sometimes it isn't. Sometimes I sleep in and sometimes I don't.

ABOUT A MONTH AGO I BOUGHT A FORTY OF SCOTCH with my UIC cheque. A lady poet from down the beach arrived that evening with a book of poetry from a university anthology that had accepted four of her poems. Three were great. I asked her if she wanted a drink of scotch and she said "sure" (just like she always did). Well, we drank the whole bottle. I could barely keep up with her. We even drank the token two beer that she had brought over in a brown paper bag. Before she left she stepped on my glasses and shattered them into a thousand shards. She said it was the worst thing that she had ever done. I was stunned. I thought they were still on my face, and maybe they were. I told her it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. The night went on. The next morning I went outside to squint at the ocean. The top hinge fell off the front door, rusted out from the salt air. I didn't care. As far as I'm concerned now the big guy in the sky can just kiss my karma.

The View Fights Back

WEDNESDAY, THE GROUNDSWELLS BOOMED IN ALL DAY. They sucked and slurped as they withdrew back into the Pacific grey. Then they built. Rising. Rising.

Then they charged like a thousand railroad trains. The sonic boom shook the stove. The kettle cringed on the warmer.

Then rolling right over my barricade, past the cabins on both sides, and through the front door. Then sucking and slurping out to sea and withdrawing to build again. Then rushing back, pounding me with a shower of beach stones and debris.

By 4:00 a.m. Thursday the bed was shaking. I lay in the darkness, unable to sleep. At dawn the wind was screaming down the strait like a banshee. Waves were breaking over the rooftop. My living room window cracked with a bullwhip snap.

The spray stung my face as I covered the windows with plywood. I stayed outside. Trees were coming down into the creek. My barricade was smashed up like it was kindling. The swells came in with a vengeance. Rolling. Rolling. Without let up.

I made it down the road to see how Sundog was doing. We stood in his doorway, hunched over, yelling in the wind, when a series of three giant rollers loomed offshore. The first one slapped the corner of his cabin like a whale's tail, almost knocking it off kilter. The second one took out the windows, and the third clutched and grabbed at our legs as we ran for the safety of the road.

Friday. I climbed up on my roof to piece together what was left of the chimney; there was a seashell on my rooftop. A symbol for my Tugwell years. Wholesome.

Saturday. A howling screaming wind haunts the black abyss of my cabin. Tonight yet another storm rages. My barricade is gone. My windows are fragments of tape and glass and stone chips.

Next week there are eight days of ten- and eleven-foot tides. Ten point five is on my doorstep. I will not survive.

A thousand freight trains will come right through my wall. Shards of glass and log boom debris will shatter my brain and a tide of scotch will suck my body out to sea.

Dear Nearly Normal [Page],

As I sit here in my long underwear, the oven door is open and the oil stove is going full blast, but it's still cold. I have on my work boots and a heavy wool sweater, a glass of very cold scotch lurks by my right hand, the wind is howling outside and has been for over twenty-four

hours non-stop. The creek is a raging torrent. The alder that leaned across it tore loose and went past Richard's cabin at 50 mph just missing the wall of his cabin as it rocketed out to sea. It sits out there now like a freighter, going back and forth with the tide.

The beach between Frank's place and the creek is gone now. Gravel trucks have been coming every day for a week with fill to save his cabin from being swept into the sea. A slide closed the road last night down by the swamp. The bridge at Kirby Creek is washed out. The road to Port Renfrew has been out for two days now. The rain and the grey has gone on for so long that it is unbearable.

The roof leaks in a half a dozen places. It's always cold, or drafty, or damp. I'm running out of wood and the fridge quit working last week. At night the cabin creaks and groans. The ocean pounds incessantly... the wind screams... a rat gnaws in the wall at the end of the bedroom. It is so cold that when I move my head on the pillow it wakes me up because the pillowcase is so cold where body heat is not touching it. And in the morning the grey, the cold, the wind, the swells rolling in, the floor covered with the bodies of the fleas that died during the night after coming in from the beach. Lighting the stove, starting a fire. A breakfast of toast, or sometimes nothing at all, and another day of cold drafts. More grey. The relentless rain. And I'm thinking that I'm sick of it.

But we're all going down together. Aguyin told me today that they were down to their last \$60. Pia is working only one day per week now. Richard and I had popcorn for dinner the other day, with life as our movie. Not bad. He's going up to Tofino tomorrow to see if there's work in the fish plant there. Yesterday Frank put the whole place up for sale. He's tired of it too. So now we're all tired of it at the same time...

ENOUGH. HOW DO YOU LIKE HAVING FROSTY NOSTRILS PAGE? It's pretty colourful standing around the funky old Whitehorse post office with the other no fixed addressers... hoping for mail. Have you had that ache in the middle of the forehead yet? You know the one—after walking two blocks into the wind. Makes this prairie boy homesick thinking about it.

An apology for the use of the typewriter. So cold, so impersonal...



“The roof leaks in a half a dozen places. It’s always cold, or drafty, or damp. I’m running out of wood and the fridge quit working last week.” [With Pam (left) and June, surveying the storm damage, 1981]

but so fast ... I don’t even have to stop and think. But at least I had the decency to double space. Just like I do inside my head.

The Word

YESTERDAY FRANK TAPPED ON MY KITCHEN WINDOW, grizzled face peering through the pane. I went outside. He sat on a beach log.

“I sold your place, Barry. I didn’t want to, but the family out voted me.”

“How long do I have?”

“Oh, a couple of months. Jesus, I really hate to do this to you. You know, a man gets down and it just seems like one thing after another.”

“Hey, it’s OK. I had a pretty good run out here for the money.”



“At dawn the wind was screaming down the strait like a banshee. Waves were breaking over the rooftop.” [1981 © pjwoodland]x

“Yeh. Maybe something good will come out of it. Goddammit, I wish I hadn’t quit drinking.... I’d like to get drunk now. Ah shit, it wouldn’t do any good....”

“Naw, I guess not,” I said, when I really wanted to say, “God-dammit, man, you were the only landlord I ever had that was a human being and these were special years, you magnificent old fart,” but I didn’t.

Frank rose wearily to his feet and started to shuffle back to his cabin. “I won’t keep you from your breakfast.”

“OK... see you Frank.”

So this was it. I knew it would come some day, but I didn’t expect it so soon. It’s always different when it really happens. This was my home, the only one I’ve ever had. I had a spirit here.

That night the tide was out beyond the rocks. A stretch of beach bared itself in the moonlight. I walked that sidewalk of sand all the way to Otter Point and back. I looked at the sky and wondered how fast the earth was moving.

My dear Page,

I was thinking the other day. You know how cats have to have their own special food all the time, Pamper, Puss and Boots, or whatever. Anything else they turn their noses up at, especially if it's a cheaper brand. In fact, they won't even eat the food that we eat, it's not good enough for them. Well, what if there was an animal called a pamper. It would be fat and juicy and a little larger than a gerbil. It would be very timid, and the cats could go out at night and hunt these pampers ... stalk them ... and pounce on them ... and the pamper would be terrified ... so then they could toy with them and then kill them and eat them and they would taste fantastic. So the cats could hunt their pamper instead of getting it in their dishes. Maybe it would improve their personalities.

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU GET THE NEWS up there or not but the Socreds are once again treating us with contempt. Peter Hyndman, Minister of Whatever, took trips to Arizona on our tab reasons unknown (probably buying condos) and also showed \$300 dinners with the editor of the *Vancouver Sun* with \$38 bottles of wine (four of them) at the same time. Now, unless he flew back here for his meals, it was impossible. Also the editor of the *Sun* said he's never had a meal with this guy in his life and splashed the story across the front pages. Anyway, he paid the money back for the meal so now it's OK.

Then they caught the Minister of Energy on a trip to New York with a \$360 bill for a limo that was on call twenty-four hours a day just parked out front of the hotel in case he felt like going somewhere and \$400 in theatre tickets. Well he paid that back too so that was also OK.

Then they caught Hugh Curtis also in New York. They fly down to talk to business interests for some reason and he had \$1,500 in theatre tickets, but he'll pay that back too so it's also OK.

Now it doesn't piss me off that the Minister of Energy has travel expenses that average \$100 a day for every day of the year for a total of about \$37,000 a year and just because I could live comfortably on that for five years has no bearing on my confusion. What I want to know is can I rob the corner store in Sooke and if I get caught can I just give it back and nothing will happen to me? Can I lie to the welfare people



“Pam was out last weekend and seemed healthy in all ways.” [With Pam, 1980]

and get assistance, and if they catch me I’ll just give it back and I won’t be charged with anything? Can I shoplift and just hand it back if they catch me before I’m out the door? Huh? Can I? I wish they’d taught me civics in high school....

PAM WAS OUT LAST WEEKEND and seemed healthy in all ways. She dropped off some turd calendars and they were done just great. I phoned Rumpel on Friday night to see when I could pick Pam up and she said she would monopolize her for all of Friday night and all day Saturday at least and since I didn’t feel like hanging around Victoria all day Saturday we compromised on 3 p.m. Saturday afternoon. Christ, it was like two divorced parents arguing over custody of the child for the weekend.

LAST WEEK I WENT UP TO UNCLE MATTHEW’S to collect a dollar owing from a couple of cribbage games. He paid and thanked me for bringing it to his attention in a sarcastic tone of voice. I didn’t say anything but it wasn’t the dollar at all, it was the fact that he fucking lost

and payment was recognition of such. But I let it go because we were just two human beings, one attracted to materialism and the other to symbolism, and never the twain shall meet. Strange—until this moment I always thought of a twain as something that Elmer Fudd would take on his holidays. Anyway, we smoked a couple of flower tops and it's been a long time Page... too long... and shortly afterwards I left for the laundromat in Sooke. I got in the car and turned on the key ... took off the emergency brake ... rolled down the hill while trying to punch in a radio station with no static. On to the highway. Wrestled awkwardly with the seatbelt. Went through all the gears. Opened the air vent and tried to adjust it properly ... by this time I was at Gordon's Beach. I felt like I was the pilot in a 727 going through takeoff procedures while the airplane was rolling down the runway. God it was wonderful to be wasted like that again.

SO ... HUMMINGBIRDS ZIP BY MY WINDOW these days like tracer bullets, and I now greet friends on the road by driving at them in their lane, swerving away at the last moment. So far, the Dog is the only one who waves. The rest have stopped coming around. And so it goes....

Career criminal Kenneth Gordon Collison has committed seventeen armed robberies this year. Collison, thirty-nine, was a member of what Vancouver Police had nicknamed the "over-the-hill-gang" because of his age. Most armed robberies are committed by men in their twenty's....

—*Vancouver Sun*, 26/8/82

Eileen,

Ate your last chocolate bar today. So, a new link to take up the slack. My birthday went by surprisingly easy—probably because no one knew about it. How did you know about it, by the way? How did you get that cake into that little can? How did you know that I love marijuana cigarettes? Did you steal the typing paper from work? I hope so.

That package was the high point, although I've already read the books. The low point was Frank's present. He came by and told me that he's selling the cabin for \$45,000, but I'm not to worry about a thing as I won't have to move until I find another place. I'm not worried. I would have run out of money later this winter anyway, so it would have amounted to the same thing. After he left, I called my possessions into the kitchen for a meeting. I loosened them up with a joke ... then told them not to worry.

I went into Victoria this afternoon to drop off my UIC card, renewed my membership in the UIC Tanning Team. I strolled over to Market Square to browse through the bookstore when I heard a voice, so clear, so powerful, so pure, that I thought "My God! They've set up a sound system in the square." But upon arrival found that it was just a guy playing acoustic guitar with a woman in cut-offs. And they're sitting on the steps with an open guitar case filled with dollar bills and she's singing "Barrel-House Blues" "Ohh daddy ... momma want to barrelhouse all night long." She is so good and so growley that it makes you ache inside, the sound just rolled out of her, body swaying, eyes closed, and she was as good as anyone I've seen or heard. Ever. And later she played a flute to his guitar; it was the class act of the century.

LATER, YATES AND GOVERNMENT, I was waiting for the light to change, watching the old newsstand guy across the street sitting in his lawn chair having his leg rubbed by an old wino with white hair. Suddenly, the news guy yelled "Get away, get away!" and he slapped the wino on the side of the head—SLAP!! The wino staggered back and the newsy started rubbing his legs, with "Get away, you're goddamn drunk. Get away from me." Then the wino put his dukes up and started bobbing and weaving in front of the newsy who clung to the sides of his lawn chair yelling "Get away ... get away." The wino got in an overhand right, also a slap, but on the top of the head ... SA-LUP! The newsy covered up and yelled louder "Get away get away." And began looking around for help. The shoppers hurried by, their role is to shop, not stop. I couldn't do anything because the light was still red. Finally, a hippy stepped in between them and demanded to know what was wrong and the two old guys started babbling their stories

like two little kids being chastised by their mother. The hippy listened to both sides, made his decision, and sent the wino away, trailing petulance with “You hurt my leg” and “Well you slapped me.” Ah... the sandbox of life.

LAST WEEK MY FRIEND KEEFER and his too-good-for-him woman came out for the day. Somehow it got around to me showing her your poem “Satori.” She went crazy. I showed her the others. Each time she went crazy with “This woman is fantastic. These are GREAT! She’s really got a handle on it, she’s better than Susan Musgrave!” and so on. The only reason that I repeat this tidbit is because it’s only fair. If a football player can score a touchdown and have 60,000 people cheer him, why can’t you get a hurrah through the mail?

*Yesterday I was a dog. Today I'm a dog.
Tomorrow I'll probably still be a dog. Sigh.
There's so little hope for advancement.*

—Snoopy

Page,

So, boredom and isolation drive me to the written page. As in social isolation and spiritual boredom. Two things remain to be done before I leave Tugwell Creek for the depths of the depression. They are (1) to take the Tugwell Creek sign off the bridge and put it in my scrapbook, and (2) crawl underneath the bridge and scratch the following in the cement:

Is it the mist or the dead leaves
Or is it the dead men — November eves.

WATCHED THE ADAPTATION of Mailer’s *Executioner’s Song* on TV over at Richard’s last weekend. It was like the whole thing had taken place in a blizzard. Did you take it in? Another example of the written word being the artistic master of film, for a number of debatable reasons. Nonetheless, an adequate job done by all except I would have pre-

ferred a more powerful execution scene. You know, Gary's heartbeat on the soundtrack, a slow sweep from behind the executioners, etc. But I suppose Schiller wanted to show that just because he was the first one there sucking for a buck, then sucking on the book, then sucking for the TV movie, he didn't want to seem like a money grubbing sensationalist. I thought his sense of pride showed through.

Afterwards I lay in bed and thought about execution as a social function. Because of a childhood psychosis, I find the thought of one hundred businessmen being machine gunned into a ditch vaguely interesting. But the cold mechanical hypocritical executions of the state lead to fantasy. So, I am thinking about starting a pressure group to change the mode of execution at the SPCA. And since the standard government approved snuff in Canada is hanging, I would like the executions at the SPCA to be done by hanging; little kittens with nooses around their necks plunging through the trap door with their little paws tied together; German Shepherds twisting in agony; no-necked gerbils twirling slowly on the gallows squeaking frantically through their little black hoods. Come on! Let's be fair! Do you think they'd go for it? I wonder why not?

AS WE DEPRESS, PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE VERY SURPRISED at being left behind. They will be searching for a representative. Our choices:

NDP: Represent the middle class, good party for teachers, when elected create a new class of overpaid civil servants.

Liberals: Represent the upper-middle class, they make Machiavelli look like a prince.

Conservatives: Represent the rich and the ignorant.

wcc: Their oddball fascism appeals to those who know something is wrong but don't know how to make it better. The National Enquirer of political parties.

I hate to use these terms, but we are morally bankrupt. So where is God? Well last Sunday I found out he was helping a defensive lineman for the Edmonton Eskimos win a trophy as the best defensive player in the game.

Those are your choices, Page.



“Now if you wish to come over and play this game, come before April 30th. After that I’ll no longer be here.” [1981]

*... woke up this morning
and the blues were falling down
like midnight rain ...*

Dear Nearly Normal [Page],

To negate your curiosity ... there is no dancer ... but there is a dancer that she painted on my door. There is no love—but there is a tragedy revisited. I left her—now she’s leaving me. Hundred dollar phone bills—re-running the gauntlet of emotions. An experience that left me with the echoes of shattering glass. It was like playing a game of championship handball in your head after your brain had been lying in a hammock for eight years. Now we don’t even communicate. I live with the terror that she might phone because I have nothing to say. And I know she won’t phone because she feels the same way about me.

So it went—Radical Feminism extracts its pound of flesh. It re-

stores my faith in humanity; past sins are punished eventually. Makes me wish I was a Catholic, instead of a Zen drunk.

I tacked my census form to the back door. They never came back for it. It hangs rainsoaked, wind wrinkled, rotting, just like the statistic it represents. Now they won't even record me, man.

Age-pay,

There is a video version of *Dawn of the Dead* at Johnny Zee's Video Emporium in Sooke. It's called Bezerko. There is a joy stick that sends the individual involved (me) in eight different directions and a fire button that when pressed the guy whips out a gat and blasts away in whatever direction you choose. The playing field is a maze of rooms and hallways; escape doors lead to the outside world. Put your twenty-five cents in and there you are with yellow zombies lurching around these rooms trying to make contact with you. You can run around them and blow them away fairly easily; if they touch you, it's drapes. If you run into a wall you get electrocuted. After you blow away a few zombies and are just starting to relax and have fun a voice over says "INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT! ... STOP HIM!" Then a yellow ball comes bouncing out of a wall... boing! boing! boing! POW! POW! Bullets go right through it ... BOING! It comes through walls man, it kills its own zombies if they are in the way, it follows you everywhere and when it catches you, zap! You're dead. So out a doorway—Blip. You start over. Now if you kill all the yellow zombies, when you come back you're surrounded by orange zombies. The voice over intones "KILL HIM! KILL THE HUMANOID!" and POW! POW! the orange zombies can shoot back man. Then if they don't off you, an orange ball comes out boing! boing! even faster than the yellow ball. Bullets whizzing everywhere. The voice saying "STOP HIM! KILL HIM!" a little computer voice "KILL HIM." Cold and unemotional, it's weird man. And if you make it out a door, it says "CHICKEN."

Hardly anyone gets by the orange robots. You have to be a cool killer with lightning reflexes and anticipation. I get by the orange robots Page. I hold the top score on Bezerko, and if it remains unbeaten on March 15th, I win \$25.

When you return after killing the orange guys, the voice over says “BRING OUT THE WHITE ROBOTS” and these white robots appear, firing machine guns, lead is flying everywhere. What a trip, the greatest, if I was a little kid I’d be robbing my old lady blind for the quarters.

Now if you wish to come over and play this game, come before April 30th. After that I’ll no longer be here. Everything is sold. I’m out on the beach after that. I look forward to the challenge.

I WAS OVER AT THE DOG’S YESTERDAY. A dead crow was hanging from a branch by a shoelace tied around its neck. So ...

“What’s that?”

“That’s my scarecrow. It keeps the crows away.”

“Does it work?”

“Yeah, for a while, then you have to hang another one.”





"My instinct is to write like I write letters, free and flowing and not stilted like the shit I submit for publication...." [Envelope addressed to Jim Page, 1982]



“... a state of mind, surrounded by a landscape of lunatics.” [Above, Barry looking at the view from the porch of his cabin, 1980.] “Aguyin saying, after a walk on the beach, ‘You know if I lived in Russia man, I’d have something to do when I got back home.’” [Bottom, playing nicely with Aguyin, 1980]



“Aguyin and June have left in a trail of tears, as the system starts dismantling at the bottom on its way up to the lower portions, maybe even pinching some middle-class asses.” [With Jim (left), and Suzanne Dupas (right), visiting June (back to camera) and Aguyin (not shown), 1980 © pjwoodland]



“Betty continues to lavish me with adoration and affection ... I have a theory that it’s because in my long underwear and a dim light I remind her of her father. She in turn accuses me of ‘sapping her youth.’” [Above, with Betty Rumble (checked shirt) and Pam Woodland, 1980; below, on the beach with Pam (left) and Betty, 1981, (right) 1980]



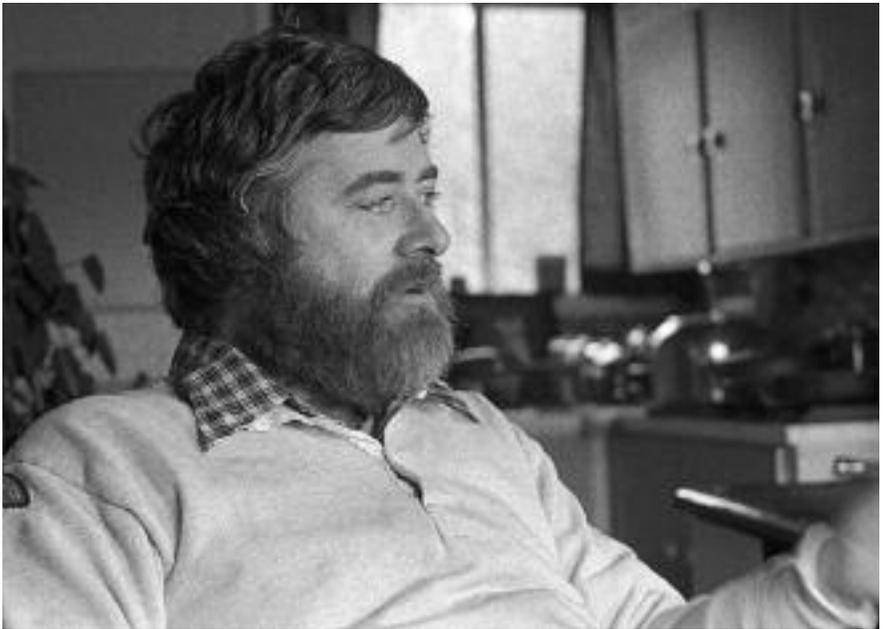
Above, Barry leading the way, location unknown, 1978; below, “We had a game of chess that he [Jim] bullied me into. At dinner I had to drink his bottle of wine too.” [Barry and Jim Page playing chess on beach. 1980 © pjwoodland]



Above, Barry with his
Austin Mini [1978]

“Aguyin’s been doing
carvings on the beach and
leaving them there. They
are signed Aguyin BC.”
[Right, carving by Aguyin,
1981]

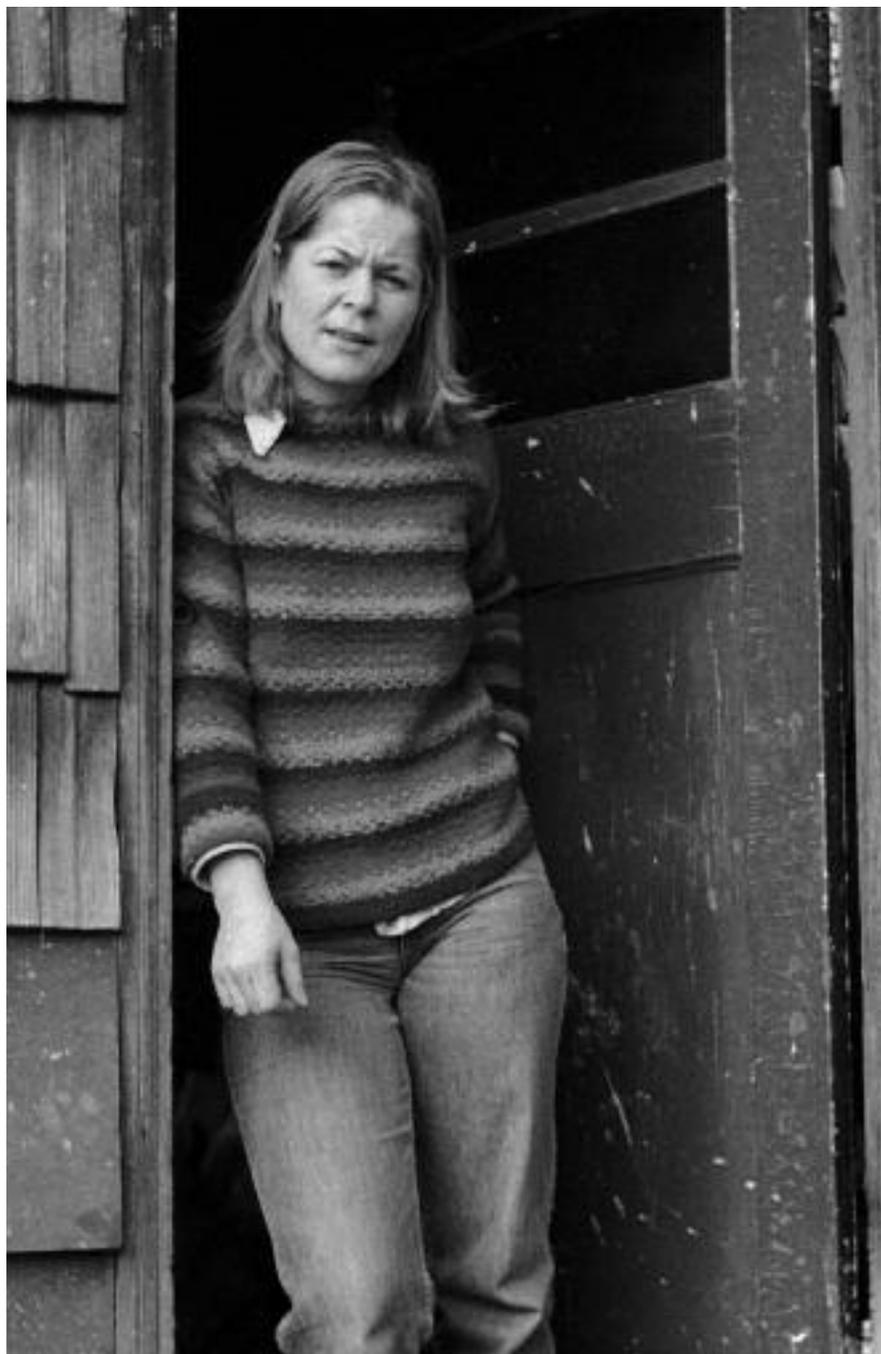




“Remember the old adage ‘the best things in life are free?’ Well, there’s got to be some truth to that, otherwise the assholes would have it all, and we know deep down inside that they haven’t.” [Above, Barry at the Sooke Mall, 1980]; below: “The roof leaks in half a dozen places. It’s always cold, or drafty, or damp. I’m running out of wood and the fridge quit working last week.” [1980]



“Richard peered at me, ‘How many mistakes do you think a person makes in a day?’” [With Richard, 1981]



“Pia is working only one day per week now. Richard and I had popcorn for dinner the other day, with life as our movie. Not bad.” [Pia Carroll, friend, neighbour, Richard’s partner, outside her cabin door, 1981]



“The beach between Frank’s place and the creek is gone now. Gravel trucks have been coming every day for a week with fill to save his cabin from being swept into the sea.” [Above, with Aguyin, looking out at the storm damage, 1981]; below: “Tonight yet another storm rages. My barricade is gone. My windows are fragments of tape and glass and stone chips.” [Housekeeping after the big storm, 1985]

part two
THE LAST CANADIAN
JUNE 1983-DECEMBER 1983



the last canadian

*I wove a single trail of existence to the wood pile,
the last Canadian, then back inside, sweeping snow
from my pant fuffs, stomping it from my boots,
echoing prairie sounds into the cedar rafters....
My hands are cold. My ears are cold. My feet are
cold. I can see my breath. I am inside.*

*everyone was glad
to see
me...*

Dear Nearly Normal,

It was ninety degrees the day I went back to the old farm. All you could see was nothing and all you could hear was wind. The house is falling down now, nearly a hundred years old, still has wooden nails in it. It seemed so much bigger when I was a kid. A two-storey house, a one-storey kitchen, windows on the west and north only. Someone had abandoned it in the 1880s and my great grandfather fixed it up and moved in. He stopped there in the spring because he knew the neighbours. That summer he went to Swift Current by horseback to check out the scene. It took him four months, there and back. I never knew him though.

This old guy I knew in the valley told me that his grandfather walked out there from Manitoba. In those days there was a thinly worn trail across the prairies. When you saw someone coming from the other direction you began to veer off the trail about half a mile

before you met him. By the time two people passed they were about a mile apart. They circled warily and returned to the trail.

Anyway, I left the farm and went to the graveyard, two miles north of Sintaluta, Saskatchewan. Tombstones on the prairie. My uncle is buried there, drank it all up and got tired of living, at fifty-six. I knew him though.

Drove up to Prince Albert, watched dust devils twist whirlwinds across the summer fallow. Passed two old farmers beside the road, their trucks facing opposite directions. Two weathered old farts sitting on the side of the road, talking, surrounded by miles of flat. Reminded me of a Dali painting, if he had been born in Indian Head.

North of Melfont the army worms were so bad that the highway was black in spots where they crossed the road. The trees were bare; they'd eaten all the leaves. Every seventeen years, a peck on the cheek from God.

The week before I arrived my Grandma got up to pee at 5:00 a.m. When she grabbed a sharp left to position herself for the bowl, her dusty old hip snapped. She hit the floor like a sack of potatoes. Now, the telephone is in the bedroom, on the far side of the bed, on a table. It took her three hours to make it to the phone. That's how long it takes when you are eighty-one ... and alone.

"The time just went by so fast," she told me at the hospital. Yeh, I thought, we're all on an escalator, moving the same speed, in the same direction. The human race, as handicapped at the track today, it's overcast and we have a fast track. Here's how the program stacks up today folks: 0-20 years, seven furlongs, with apprentice jockey up; 20-30 years, five furlongs with a whip optional; 30-40 years, three furlongs without the use of blinders; 40-50 years, two furlongs but bunching near the final turn; 50-60 years, one furlong. The horses are running their own race now.

LEFT GRAMMY AND WENT NORTH of Prince Albert to see my friend Paul. Forty acres, forest, total isolation, two kids now, addition built on the house. Nice mess, neat kids. His mother was in the hospital, the big C. It all felt like continuity to me.

Then down to Saskatoon to see my musician buddy from hard times Vancouver. Thirty-nine years old, drinking hard, driving fast. Living with a nice looking woman. She has two kids ... they ride bikes

already. Bill and I sit up and drink. The kids go to bed early, his old lady later. We embrace on the sidewalk at 3:00 a.m. as my cab waits patiently. He stares at me for a long time. He is surrogate lover/father/companion/whatever, but for the whole evening it felt like he was a boarder in that house.

On the way back to the motel the cabbie stopped on the street and said “Hey! Look at those two guys duking it out.” On the other side of the boulevard two younger drunks were approaching each other from their respective vehicles. We watched this prairie ballet for a while. Growing weary I inquired “Is this on the fucking meter or what?” It was. We left.

The next day I rode my hangover down from Saskatoon on the bus. Hundred above. They ran with the back door open to cool the motor down. The driver had a red and white plastic transistor radio hanging from a hook; it blared country music for the whole trip. I read *Diary of a Dirty Old Man* by Bukowski and felt like a movie.

Nearing Regina, 4:00 p.m., headlights in the dust, fifty-mile-per-hour winds that never stop. All day... all night... all the next day... and the next night. You felt like you were standing next to a diesel engine twenty-four hours a day. My lips began to crack on the sixth day.

LAST FRIDAY MY EX-BOSS AT WELFARE, over steak dinner paid for by him, offered to spring for the publication of the *Social Credit Joke Book*. If I send him a manuscript he will have a cartoonist do various cartoons and submit them for my approval. How much money may you ask? Thousands, he said. Bizarre.

LAST SATURDAY 2:00 A.M., THREE MILES EAST OF REGINA, a friend I haven't seen in seven years puts his car key in upside down. It takes half an hour to get it out. He finally went into the house for pliers. God we were high. Laugh, not a worry in the world. His car is an automatic and won't go forwards until you drive in reverse for a while. Sort of like loading a rubber band. We drove all over the God-damn prairie in reverse for hours, but it never went forward. “Nothing works in Saskatchewan,” he said as tears streamed down our faces. I'll never see him again.

The next day I went down to the valley to see the lady that gave

me the afghan. She told me a story about when I was a little boy. She was in the house making dinner. I was on the other side of the screen door with her daughter who was three years older than me. I was repairing a fishing rod. I find this hard to believe. I've never repaired anything. Maybe I was different when I was a kid. Anyway, as related to me—the daughter says “Dinnertime! You better wash your hands.” I replied, “I'm not washing my hands.” She said, “Well, you're nothing but a dirty little boy.” I replied, “If you don't shut up I'll shove this fish hook down your throat.” I wish I were like that now....

In the holding pen at Regina airport a kid next to me played with a plastic airplane. He flew it all over my *Time* magazine. When we were called to board he sailed his airplane across the room. It crashed into the tiled floor almost immediately. I took this as a sign. Filing out with the others I thought, “So these are the people I'm going to die with.”

AFTER WE TOOK OFF I BEGAN to think of a woman from years ago. A stab from the past, so to speak. I spotted her name in the Saskatoon phone book by accident when looking for Bill's number. On her own again, using her own name now. I wrote it down. After drinking with Bill all night, back at the motel I'm thinking, “I should call her.” Three a.m., drunk. Decide not to. Phoned the desk clerk for a 7:00 a.m. wake-up call. I'll phone her then, catch her getting ready for work. Visualize her answering the phone. Wondering if her hair still falls down to her ass. Every time I hear Dylan sing “Girl from the North Country” I think of her. I don't phone.

Sitting in the Saskatoon bus station, thinking I should phone. Sitting in the Regina airport, the plane is an hour late. I think, “I should phone. I can cancel my ticket, rent a car, drive back to Saskatoon, catch the flight out the next day.” I imagine the whole day unfolding, but I don't do it.

Just inside the Alberta border the co-pilot announces “Please fasten your seat belts. Winds in Calgary are at fifty knots and gusting. We are expecting turbulence. See you on the ground.” Sure. I popped my last Valium and nearly choked on it. Couldn't work up enough spit. Even though my palms continued to sweat I felt more relaxed. The problem was that I wondered who I was.

We land—Victoria. Fifty above, drizzling rain. I waited for my bag and felt like I didn't live here either.

*I must soon
quit the scene.*
—Benjamin Franklin

Bill,

I recently spent some time in Vancouver and got to apply for two actual jobs that were vacant, and although I didn't hear from either one of them, it was almost exhilarating to be allowed to throw my hat into the ring. On my last day there I left my room on Powell Street; a room so small that you had to swing the door out of the way to get in and then swing it back in to squeeze around it. The place felt dirty but it was hard to tell because the light was a sickly piss yellow that cast a shadow on everything. I looked into the mirror above the sink but I couldn't catch my eye.

I went down the street to Grant's cafe, a sleeper of a place that had been supplying my meals for two weeks. It was 9:00 a.m. and every loser in the world was already there getting a head start on God knows what. They sat in rows on stools and from behind they looked like those stuffed animals that used to sit on the shelves at the carney games and you threw baseballs at them and if you knocked them over you won something that was worth even less than they were.

A few people crouched in booths, huddled over newspapers and coffees. A kid that looked retarded came in and sat at a booth. He didn't order anything. He pulled a lighter out of his shirt pocket and sat holding it with his hands. Our eyes met. He looked away. Then he got up and went over to an Indian who was sitting at the counter with a cane tucked underneath his arm. The Indian was twitching and teetering like Ray Charles on a piano stool. The retard talked to the Indian for a minute and then he went back to his booth. The Indian turned on his stool, picked up his cane, reached over and rapped it on the side of the retard's booth.

"Hey! Don't I get two thanks for two cigarettes?"

The retard looked over at him and said, "You want me to thank you twice?"

If you didn't look at him the retard's voice sounded exactly like Robert DeNiro in *Taxi Driver*.

"Yeh, I want you to thank me twice."

“Why don’t you come over and sit here.”

The Indian lurched to his feet, pivoted on his cane, hurled himself into the booth and started talking.

“You know how I got out of the fucking hospital?” he shouted, “I carried my wheelchair down the goddamn fire escape and rolled it down the fucking freeway.”

The retard didn’t respond, but watched warily from behind a cloud of cigarette smoke. The Indian shouted on. It didn’t seem to matter if he got a response.

“You know, my old lady was ten years younger than my old man and she died first. Can you fucking believe that? She died in ’68 and he died in ’75.”

“I hope my old man dies first,” the retard said quietly.

LATER THAT DAY I WAS LYING DOWN ON the grass in wino park, killing time while I waited for the bus to Victoria. A young guy was sitting on a small rock wall tuning his guitar. An older gray haired woman walked by, long shapeless print dress, white cadaver legs with random patterns of purple splotches on them. She stopped when she got to the kid, looked down at him and said, “So, what are you going to do, David?”

He looked up momentarily and said, “I’m going to go to New York City.”

“Oh yeh? And how are you going to live?”

He smiled and said, “By playing my guitar on the street just like Woody Guthrie did.”

She walked away with a snort of disgust. Then she stopped near where I was resting and hollered back at him, “Listen! You can’t play, you can’t sing, you can’t even dance for Christ’s sake!”

David didn’t look up.

She yelled louder. “You know what happened to Hank Williams. He died when he was forty-one.”

“Twenty-nine,” I said.

She turned to me and never skipped a beat. “Was it twenty-nine?”

“Yeh.”

“Oh. Well, who was that guy that was in the plane crash and now his face is like sausage?”

“I don’t know.”

She walked away and fired one parting shot at David.

“His face was like sausage David!”

I wondered if David thought she meant me, but he never looked up and kept tuning his guitar. After a while he started to play. Then he began to sing softly. She was right. He couldn’t play and he couldn’t sing.

I SAW AGUYIN WHEN I WAS THERE. He’s changed his name to Gordon Dirtpoor. He wants to have a t-shirt made up that reads jobless on the front and godless on the back. He has a gun that shoots rubber tipped darts that stick onto the target. He sat in front of the TV and shot Margaret Thatcher twice while she was speaking to the House of Commons. We spent a whole afternoon smoking dope and watching Margaret speak to the Canadian people with two darts sticking out of her face.

ON THE POLITICAL SCENE, the Socreds have brought in legislation abolishing rent controls. They say that this will make landlords compete in a free market and while this will initially result in higher rents for those who have a place to live, in the future everyone will be better off.

They’ve also brought in legislation that will allow them to lay off civil servants. This has caused the civil servants to form a Solidarity movement with ties to the BC Federation of Labour. They are not to be confused with their brothers and sisters in Poland, nor are they to be confused with the working class. It only seems to include people that have union jobs that pay more than \$20,000 per year.

They’ve abolished the Human Rights’ Commission. The ex-head of the commission spoke at a Solidarity rally in BC Place. She was rewarded with thunderous applause when she said “... human rights are not for sale ...” Last week she accepted \$35,000 in an out of court dismissal suit that she’d filed.

The NDP is of course in the forefront of the struggle. Dave Barrett was removed from the legislature for whining. He was warned three times, but he kept whining, so they attempted to carry him out bodily. But his chair tipped over and they had to drag him out the door and



“I saw Aguyin when I was there. He’s changed his name to Gordon Dirtpoor. He wants to have a t-shirt made up that reads jobless on the front and godless on the back.” [With Aguyin at Pam’s in Vancouver, 1984 © pjwoodland]

deposit him on the floor in the hallway with the Socred Speaker of the House running out screaming at the media “No pictures! No pictures!” However, it doesn’t matter because the *Vancouver Slum* newspaper took a poll and found that sixty-five percent of us don’t know what’s going on in the legislature.

Now Solidarity is calling for a General Strike. According to a *Slum* poll, only twenty percent of workers will support a General Strike. However the figure might have been higher if twenty-four percent of the respondents hadn’t already been out of work.

But it looks like the civil servants will go out. They will have the support of no one but themselves. This seems fair, since they have never represented anyone except themselves. They certainly will not have the support of any of us that need and use the liquor store.

And now I come to the part of this tirade that I really like. A *Vancouver Slum* poll showed that if an election were held today, the Socreds would win. I love it.

I WAS READING IN THE PAPER the other day that the head organizer of the NDP election campaign said that, “We probably erred when we thought that people were concerned about unemployment, more developed polling techniques might have helped avoid that error.”
WHAT THE FUCK DOES THAT MEAN?

Last week Bill Bennett spoke to a stiff-armed, screaming crowd of the Employer’s Council of BC. He explained his restraint program by saying that “No one should be guaranteed a job for life and there is no reason why government employees should be shielded from the harsh realities of recession.” He said one in three forestry workers is jobless and one in five persons employed in service and manufacturing is out of work. That is 33 percent, 24 percent, 20 percent. Yesterday the headline in the *Victoria Times-Colonist* blared UNEMPLOYMENT IN BC DROPS TO 12.7 PERCENT.

Well, you can believe them. Or you can believe me. Anyway, a friend has gone away for two months and left me his place rent free. It is a-way back, tucked into the middle of the rain forest. It’s very cold and at night it gets so goddamn DARK that it feels just like a mental illness.

it’s so cold in this house...

Eileen ...

That I have to type this letter just to keep my fingers warm. This morning when I pushed the front door open, icicles fell, shattering like crystals at my feet. And outside is the snow, soft, quiet. I wove a single trail of existence to the wood pile, the last Canadian, then back inside, sweeping snow from my pant cuffs, stomping it from my boots, echoing prairie sounds into the cedar rafters. And later, settling into the black rocker, woolly feet facing the crackling fire, wine, actually, it is minus ten at night and up to minus one during the day and no end in sight. The typewriter is so cold that it feels like it’s been in the fridge all day. My hands are cold. My ears are cold. My feet are cold. I can see my breath. I am inside.

Richard went to Victoria last week and got a seventeen-minute



“A friend has gone away for two months and left me his place rent free. It is a-way back, tucked into the middle of the rain forest. It’s very cold and at night it gets so goddamn DARK that it feels just like a mental illness.” [2006]

haircut from a gay barber that Gerry turned him on to. He cut Richard’s hair using only a pair of scissors. He talked for the whole seventeen minutes and when he had finished Richard had a gay haircut. Richard said it was the most interesting seventeen minutes that he’d ever spent.

Just returned from five days in Vancouver. Whiskey voices, snowflakes, swizzlestick Buddhas, alcohol ballets.

Bill,

It’s dark tonight. I am surrounded by the drizzle of impending doom. I sit hunched over my typewriter waiting for something. Anything. Even the US marines. Liberation. So sweet. So elusive. Until now the exclusive domain of women. GRENADA WE LIVE AGAIN! It’s nice to see the US liberate those who live under the dictator’s thumb. Today

Grenada. Tomorrow Guatemala. Honduras. El Salvador. Chile. Paraguay. The mind boggles.

Remember the Alamo? A few hundred brave souls. Davy, Jim, Sam, fighting against thousands of Mexican soldiers. Now we have a few hundred brave Cubans. Juan, Jose, fighting against thousands of American soldiers. Will there be a movie? I can see the director raising the megaphone to his mouth:

“QUIET ON THE SET! OK RONNIE! THIS TIME YOU’LL BE ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE FORT. YOU’LL STILL BE THE GOOD GUYS, THOUGH. OK! CAN WE HAVE SOME FOLIAGE OVER HERE? NANCY? WILL SOMEBODY WAKE UP NANCY. WHO GAVE NANCY THE VALIUMS? OK! BRING IN THE CHOPPERS. LET’S ROLL EM!!”

I WAS IN VICTORIA LAST WEEK and spotted a clean-cut young lad standing on the corner of Douglas and View. He was holding a sign that was five feet high. It read:

WANTED—A JOB TO SURVIVE
 Qualifications: building technologist
 working drawings
 architectural drawings
 estimating
 bartender/waiter
 Phone Larry 382-3872

I guess at this stage of my life I’m halfway between Larry and somebody whose father gets them a job.

IT REMINDS ME OF 1958 IN REGINA, Saskatchewan. Jobs were scarce then too. There was a neighbourhood kid named Dutch who came from a lower working class family. He used to hang out at the pool hall with us and was just a cut above everyone else in brains and personality. He had his own language for everything. One day he came in wearing a natty three piece suit and did a stroll and turn by us with “How do you like my new front boys?” When the Royal American shows came through town Dutch got a job running Oscar the Mouse,



“I guess at this stage of my life I’m halfway between Larry and somebody whose father gets them a job.” [At Pam’s, 1984 © pjwoodland]

which was a gambling game that consisted of a large revolving table with different coloured holes which paid different odds. Dutch would say, “All right folks, get your bets down. Round and round she goes and where she stops nobody knows. Which hole is old Oscar going to go down this time? Get your bets down ladies and gentlemen.” And then he would dump Oscar the Mouse out of a box and the mouse would crouch there, terrified on the revolving table, with the lights and the screaming crowd, and then it would run for the safety of one of the holes and would pay off two-to-one or whatever. Dutch told me they went through hundreds of Oscars because they died like flies from the pace and the poor treatment, but the general public never thought of it because there was a giant cartoon of a mouse above the game and this gave it a Disney-like respectability. Anyway, Dutch left with the circus and Oscared all over North America. I saw him a few years later and life on the road had changed him. He was a lot harder than anyone should have to be at twenty years of age. You know, they went through them so fast in those days. A hundred Oscars and one Dutch, just like they were nothing.

LAST WEEK GRACE MCCARTHY, the millionairess head of Human Resources was interviewed in the *Vancouver Sun* on how to save money in these troubled times. I quote: “I wait until discount hours to make long distance phone calls, save paper to be used for scratch pads and seldom throw away a pencil until it is really down to the last bit of lead.” In a way I guess she’s right. You really do have to wear it down to the nub.

*... the fact that man continually reads that
emptiness itself may betray the working
of spirit, that the void may be alive.*

—Gerald Nicosia,
A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac

Al,

Last week poor mad lonely Aguyin’s mom finally bit the dust. Apparently it was so quiet in the next bedroom one morning that Aguyin went into her room to see if everything was OK. She was lying there in bed/death gray promoted/promoted to glory, while in the doorway looking down at her stood her son/still life/doomed to despair—both of them free at last. And after a lifetime of living, like a good mom she left him enough pin money so that he will be able to live while he too waits to die. Now like a grown gnarled *Oliver Twist*, the old gray-haired orphan is cast out onto the story set of life. He’ll come back to the Tugwell mental asylum and rent a cottage on the grounds, spending dreary gray winter drizzles not hiding from reality but sort of crouched as if expecting a sudden blow. He told me last summer that when the old lady died he was going to move as far down the West Coast Road as he could go and change his name to Paul Bearer so the rest of his family couldn’t find him.

SPEAKING OF DEATH, I sure hope that my friends make sure that I am cremated and left on the coast before they can ship me back and stick me in that prairie, beard shorn, wearing a suit, with a handkerchief in my breast pocket stuck to my car keys....

*God's only son indeed.
Who wasn't?*

Andrea,

The basement of the Presbyterian Church, I spoon in my soup, a church volunteer sits across the table talking to me with a piercing eye. "I think people should come in and do some work first, then they wouldn't feel like it's charity, don't you think so?" "Oh, yeh. We talk about it all the time." Next to me Hugh is talking to another one, "I'm a single parent and I couldn't afford to get over to the mainland for my kid's birthday so I bought this as a present to myself," and he displays a cheap Korean radio with every attachment in the world on it, alarm clock buzzer, ear phones, am, fm. And it even has a little flashlight in one end about the size of a pencil eraser. He doesn't explain that the court won't let him see the kids because he is such a drunken fuck-up. The churchies hover around us wringing their hands, sucking guilt from our pores with their week-old bread and baloney and bowl of salty slop.

It's the luck of the draw in life. If I'd been from New York instead of the prairies, I could have been a dead junkie by now. The only heroin I got to taste was what Art Pepper dusted my bacon with on those nights that the full moon hurtled past at breakneck speed. But Art ended up sucking on gas tanks to get high, and he was reduced to playing in the park after dark, where that abstract sadness just seemed to get lost in the night air.

Art is dead now. Junk shot and boozed out. And even Macleod is beginning to fragment. I can still remain detached from it but I can't get over the sound it made when it happened; it sounded just like a taco being crunched on a television commercial. Jesus, I couldn't believe it. It was my life disintegrating, and it sounded just like a fucking taco.

Last week I browsed through the books at Howie's House of Bargains. Kerouac was down to a dime.

IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD the revolution continues to whirl about unnoticed. A Victoria group called "Angry Wimmin Rising" has moved

into the breach. The spelling of “wimmin,” as we were told in a commune, is to free them of any taint from the hated male scum. I feel fairly progressive politically so I began to wonder if I could become a “Min.”

Anyway, a guerrilla force hit the city hall newsstand last month. They were described as “three short-haired women.” One fell to the floor and mimed giving birth, presumably as a diversionary tactic, while the other two shit-bombed the *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines. They were in and out in two minutes, angry shouts, a few slogans, a quick spray bombing of the front window. Another heady burst of consciousness is injected into the community. Shit, I’ve always felt psychodrama goes over poorly when put on stage.

AS YOU HAVE HEARD, we have chosen “restraint and recovery” and re-elected the Socreds. The NDP can’t understand why they’ve lost. Well, there are several reasons:

- 1 They don’t stand for anything.
- 2 They are liberals and we already have a Liberal party.
- 3 They have become irrelevant.
- 4 They don’t understand that the lemmings were pushed.
- 5 There is more to politics than scoring a \$35,000 job after the election.
- 6 Poetry is more revolutionary than politics anyway.

*Don’t shoot untill you can see
the whites
of their lies...*

Jan,

Saw an old drug dealer friend in Victoria this afternoon. He was gulping vodka by the fistful from his ice covered bottle and it was drugs drugs until I become catatonic. The smirk on my face was the only indication that I was still alive. A hippy came in from the grey. They sat by the table and he slipped into the time worn laid back drug

dealer *savoir faire* and he looked great. Great facials, great dialogue. Obviously very comfortable in the role, sitting in the midst of all his funk, speakers, Peruvian tapestry, Aguyin carvings, etc. The only problem was that there was no applause. You know, he reminded me of a junkie drummer that I once knew. He started a brilliant drum solo, and then he dropped his sticks. He picked them up and started again and it was even more brilliant. But he dropped them once more. This time when he picked them up he mumbled an apology. He started to play again, and he was OK this time, but you could hear the band starting to come in and cover for him.

Enough nonsense. The CRD race is on again here. Don Rittaler, Ray Nestman, and the head of the Legion Cliff Binge. Do you want your chicken coop guarded by a skunk, a fox, or a weasel?

The civil servants are on strike here vs. the restraint legislation. The glove has been thrown down. Do the unions run this province or does the government? I have the feeling the government does.

Street Violence

I LEFT PAM'S PLACE DRUNK. I leaned on the bus stop sign on Broadway, wearing a navy pea coat, collar turned up, black toque, scruffy, with a mean look in my eye.

Everyone that came by avoided me and I could feel their fear alert alarm.

The next day I told Pam about it and she said, "You'd probably feel afraid, too."

And I thought, my God, it's true.

I'd be afraid of myself if I met myself on a street at night.

Page,

Remember the post office? I was sitting here earlier tonight and they floated through my mind. Remember Ratso on the round table who used to train horses in Ireland. When I met him in the cafeteria, he



Jan Johnson. Barry stayed in Jan's house for several months while Jan was in Malaysia. [Jan in 2003]

introduced himself with "I'm skitzo phrenic yew no." And he looked like Mickey Rooney's speed freak brother with his cow lick and his sunken cheeks and his wild wild eyes. And remember at Christmas time the parcels came by four feet high and Ratso would just drape his body over them and limp wristed with his arm outstretched he would brush them randomly onto the floor or he would crawl under the machinery and reach out to tug at our pant cuffs and we would have to kick at him to get him to stop, or remember him hanging on the back of a wagon that was being towed past and Ratso hanging on with one hand leaning back so far that his head was inches from the floor, eyes wild tongue lolling out of his mouth and being acknowledged by the crew with "Hey Ratso! ... Hey! Look at Ratso! Jesus, why am I on perpetual probation and that fucking loony gets away with murder around here...."

And remember Jack the liberal hack with his Van Gogh and his brush cut who worked in the federal election for Ron Basford and I laughed at him and said "... and working in the Post Office was your reward?" And he responded with a flash of anger "This was all I asked for!" And he always slunk up to his locker for a belt from his vodka bottle and he lived in the West End with a seventeen-year-old runaway boy from Manitoba and his favourite pass-time was lying in bed on Saturday morning sipping scotch and reading *Screw* magazine.

And freckle faced Gloria from down east who wore a Ban the Postal Code button the size of a car headlight and she played chess like an Arab terrorist. She'd greet me in the morning with "Good morning comrade..."

And the round table crew on evening shift with you and I and Ratso and Dan and Velma, the nice young couple, and remember Velma was very strong and Dan had just kicked junk and was having to drink all the time just to take the edge off it. And Yukon Eric the metal sculptor with wild trapper hair and beard ensemble and he was always complaining about the Canada Council grant fag that was always trying to sleep with him. And I thought we should get matching t-shirts with our names on the backs just like the mouseketeers. We would perform on our elevated platform with basketball hook shots into the wagons, or a package from the RCMP lab being hurled against the heavy metal backdrop of the third class chute. It was always the RCMP and South Africa that went down III. Sometimes Dan, with a strong young arm, would hurl one full strength and it would break open rattling and echoing down the chute.

One night you were telling me about living in Toronto and what a shit hole it was and we talked about the people working in the Post Office that were from Toronto and they all seemed a little scruffy, and I spotted a parcel for Toronto and handed it to you and you smashed it upside down and hurled it into the backstop of the third class chute and raised your head and yelled across the machinery noise "EVERYTHING FOR TORONTO GOES DOWN THE THIRD CLASS CHUTE TONIGHT!!!" ... and everyone nodded in agreement. There were never any questions. The mail used to move on a moral level then.

*The harvest is past,
the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.*

—Jeremiah 8:20

Gerry,

Glad to hear you've pulled yourself up by your bootstraps. Winnipeg! They speak French there ya know, and you could go to Saskatchewan on your holidays, you'll be able to cross country ski, and get into snowball fights, and watch the jets play hockey, go down to Portage and Main and try to stand straight up and down, visit Richard's parents, visit Adele's parents, see the house Burton Cummings was born in, talk about the weather every day, get into fist fights with mosquitoes, go for walks in dust storms, meet prairie poets with freckles and silly grins on their faces, watch the en dee pee sell out again, hide in doorways from real rednecks, get beat up by an angry Indian, listen to the wind rattle windows, watch the trees tango, feel your heart leap with the first thunder crack, watch the sky light up with psychedelic fork lightning whap whap whap like a billion flash bulbs going off, go for walks in rain that falls like dum dum bullets and bounces three feet off the pavement, see streets flood in six seconds flat, watch people blow their nose by pressing one nostril shut and shooting a stream of snot into the dust, learn to eat peas off the side of your knife, pour your coffee into your saucer to cool it, and make sure you SLURP it, freeze your ear lobes, pee steam and watch it cut into the snow like acid, join a gay curling team, arm wrestle a Prairie Warrior Woman, learn to identify crops by name, and they've even got a naked little gay guy on top of the legislative buildings. You've got it made.

SOOKE NEWS: Randy got a job driving a bread truck in Victoria, Sandra is insane again but looks better this time, Wendy will be picking up all the garbage between here and Victoria on Sunday, the hardware store is going belly up, Hum wrote a letter to the *Mirror* and complained about the typos again, Wayne's lonely, Richard is going tree planting next week out near Port Renfrew, they're building a fire

hall in East Sooke with a government grant and are hiring eleven women to build it, the golf club is opening as a bar called Alexander's in case there are any yuppies around, the Salvation Army is moving next to the library, moving sale coming up with everything on for fifty cents, Marny is sucking up to Sinclair, Sinclair has one hundred new enemies, the mill closed forever, the ceramics hobby shop by the bus stop folded, Hum got caught eating the grapes at the grocery store, "I've been watching you for two years" he was told. He stormed back into the guy's office and gave him \$2 figuring that was how many grapes he'd eaten for the last two years. David's leg is healing nicely, and Barry is in a corner.

The Gestapo

YESTERDAY I WENT INTO VICTORIA to check out the job creation projects since Victoria has been recently declared a disaster area.

There is more unemployment now than during the great depression. For every one person applying for UIC in Victoria, there are three applying for welfare.

I found that they won't tell you what jobs are being created so that you may decide which one to apply for. Instead they red flag your file to show that you are interested in one of these jobs.

Don't call them. They'll call you.

After my "interview," I went around the corner to the Chinese cafe for breakfast. It was coffee break time for the government workers. Six women sat behind me on their break after a hard morning at UIC. I tried to read my paper and lose myself in the troubles of the world, but the scent of six different perfumes assaulted my nostrils.

Remember the old *Dick Van Dyke* show with Mary Tyler Moore as his wife? Mary was pleasant enough but her voice had almost a shrill whine to it. Almost, but not quite. Not an unpleasant voice, but when you first heard it, you thought, "Gee, I'm glad that woman isn't a nag." Well, all six of these women had voices like that.

They prattled on about what they'd bought last Saturday when they were shopping.



“I am writing to you tonight because I have nothing to read, nothing to do, and it’s Saturday night.” [1979]

They gossiped about office politics and what so and so had said to so and so.

They exchanged compliments about their clothes.

After a half hour, their polyester clothes rustled up the aisle and

their perfume followed them out the door as they clack clack clacked on their high heels single file like paper clip storm troopers.

Oh sweet Jesus, these are the people who decide whether I'm worthy of participation in the human race.

*Every murderer is probably
somebody's old friend.*

—Agatha Christie

Gerry,

I am writing to you tonight because I have nothing to read, nothing to do, and it's Saturday night.

And since I have nothing to write about, let's discuss "The child is father to the man" theory. Or how your basic character has been formed by age six. Your "style" has emerged to some extent already. An interesting example is a gentle giant named Edward Klemper, about six-foot-eight, 285 pounds, who is now locked up somewhere in California. When he was fourteen he murdered his grand parents.

"I just wanted to see what it would feel like to kill Granny," he said. In his early twenties, he snuffed his mother, and ate her liver, or something like that. Then he would knock off young women once a month and perform perverted sexual acts on their dead bodies.

But the interesting thing about the guy is that when he was seven years old, his sister was teasing him about having a crush on his teacher, and said, "I'll bet you'd like to kiss Miss Appleby."

The little kid answered in a serious tone of voice, "Oh no! I couldn't do that because then I would have to kill her."

Woooooo! Seven years old! And a tinker toy of that magnitude missing already. Where does that fit into the psychoanalytical hodge podge? Is there really a bad seed? You see, even in the first two weeks of life, babies diver in generalized sensitivity. Some will cry at a sudden sound, or cry if there's sunlight in their faces, all kinds of things. So even from the very first day there is an ingrained hereditary factor showing itself. So then right from scratch what happens is the parent has a conscious or unconscious attitude towards the baby and then that becomes a factor in personality development. And we're only

at week two here ... i.e. cranky baby ... nuisance; quiet baby ... good kid, etc. So then the kid reacts to the reaction towards it. Then the parent has a new set of reactions that deal with the result of the original reaction.

Sorry to be so simple, but you get my point. Then come environment and social training and so on. But you know all that, ex-child, proto-adult. But the point I'm trying to make is we are much more fragile than you can possibly imagine and I can't understand what possible set of circumstances or combination of factors could ever create a seven-year-old response like little Edward's. Perhaps an early Freudian imprint or fantasy withdrawal of some sort that eventually blurred reality. I understand the killing part, how the mind compartmentalizes actions like that. But the affection, love, sex, death number, at age seven. Woooo! How'd ya like to have a kid like that?

IN A LIGHTER VEIN, I remember when I met my buddy Patton in grade two. He exhibited a lot of later behaviour at that time also. We were the same age as Edward, only more easy going, as I remember. Later, his temporary wife would say, "I always worry about what you two might do when you're together." We were like the two guys in *In Cold Blood*. Neither one of them would have killed anyone by themselves, but the combination of the two of them became a whole other story. Two half-twistos became a whole unit. We merely brought out the best of the worst of each other. I fact, I just remembered. Fifteen years after we met, Patton was in a bar in Regina trying to pick up a woman. Somewhere in the conversation, she said to him, "Do you know Barry Macleod?" Surprised, he said, "Yeh." "I thought so," she said, and turned away. It was like two people made up a different race. I miss that fucker.

Anyway, the example of early manifestation was in grade two. I was standing by the swings at recess time watching a kid I didn't know (Patton) pushing Darcy Bergan, the class retard, on the swing.

Darcy was yelling "Higher! Higher!" and the kid would push the swing higher.

The higher it went, the more excited Darcy would get, "Higher! Higher!" Darcy screamed, becoming shrill, the drool starting because he was getting over-excited.

Patton left the ground as he grabbed the swing on its way back, and

he hung suspended for a moment, and then he shot it back into its arc again. Darcy was screaming “Higher!!!” with the wind whipping his hair and the spittle flying back in a slipstream. The swing swept out, went higher than the bars, and Darcy just flipped over backwards and dropped straight down to the ground. It seemed like he bounced in the dust and then he just lay there without moving while the swing whipped back and forth, continuing its arc over his motionless body like a horse running in the steeple chase after its jockey has been thrown.

Patton walked over to me and said, “You heard him yelling to go higher, didn’t you?”

“Yeh, I heard him.”

Our eyes met. Nothing more was said. Two teachers ran out of the big double doors of Connaught School. Darcy lay moaning on the ground. It turned out that he’d broken his collarbone and his left wrist.

“Did you see it happen?” one of the teachers asked us over his shoulder.

Patton and I shook our heads.

On the afternoon recess, we ran into each other and walked over to the girls’ side of the school ground. We stood watching them on the swings. You could see their panties when they pumped the swing out into its arc.

“Audrey’s got pink ones on today,” Patton said with a smile.

We laughed and laughed, matching colours to names, and they glared back at us. And now that I think of it, women used to like us as individuals later on, but never when we were together.

Patton continued to have this thing about panties all the way through public school. When we were in grade five, our teacher was Miss Freethy, a tall, big busted, arty type with dyed hair and lots of make-up. She looked like a hooker. Patton and I had to sit at the front so Miss Freethy could keep an eye on us and keep us from disturbing the rest of the class.

One day when Miss Freethy was reading to us, Patton started to slide slowly out of his seat. He just kept getting lower and lower until he slid right out onto the floor. Miss Freethy didn’t notice and kept on reading. Patton slid under the desk and lay on his back looking up her

dress. I started to snicker and she looked up from her book. Patton was supposed to be sitting in front of me and she noticed right away that he wasn't in his desk. She looked around the room for him and then she must have heard something when he tried to slide back from underneath her.

She looked down and he was lying on his back looking up her dress, with a little smile on his face. She jumped up, pushed her chair back, and started kicking at him with her high-heeled shoes.

"You little pervert!" she yelled as her high heels flew out from under her desk.

Patton scrambled back into his desk.

Miss Freethy glared down at him, "I should send you down to the office."

But she didn't. I guess drawing it out wasn't worth the hassle and the class wasn't hip to what happened anyway so there was no teacher loss-of-face involved. In fact, I thought she had a little smile on her face as she sat back down and continued to read to us.

When the bell rang and we were walking down the hallway together, Patton said to me, "I think Rita likes me."

What a guy. "I think Rita likes me." He was ten years old.

You Can't Win Without a Ticket

I HAVE A FORTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD WELFARE MOTHER friend who lives near here in a run down farm house. Last month she got a book of "Win \$600 a Month for Life" lottery tickets in the mail. She had a strong feeling about the numbers. She is very metaphysical.

It's been a rough year for her.

The chickens have gone hungry. They peck at your feet when you walk across the yard.

Flash the Wonder Horse has hoof rot and there's no money for the vet.

The dog just had five pups.

Her kid is hanging around with a kid who is into the occult.

Even though she couldn't afford it, it was a way out of this mess,

so she sent a cheque away to the lottery people in Vancouver. It cost \$10 for the book of six tickets. The draw was last week.

Yesterday she got a letter from the lottery people.

It was her cheque— stamped NSF.

So, you win some, you lose some ... and sometimes you get a feeling.

*Children begin by loving their parents.
After a time they judge them.
Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.*

— Oscar Wilde

Eileen,

I was into Sooke for groceries the other day, and two women came down the aisle looking so out of place that they might as well have been from Alpha Centauri. One had swept hair and eye shadow with painted lips and polyester clothes, in her early twenties with three kids milling about her like puppies on a romp. The other one looked like a better-looking older sister with a cut between the bridge of her nose and her left eye. She was wearing tight tight pants and jet-black knee length boots with silver spurs on them and she strutted up and down the aisles in her high heels.

Later in the liquor store the two space ladies were riding herd on those kids just like Chatelaine cowgirls. Spurs ended up with two gallons of wine balanced on top of twenty-four beer. A local beer gut Sooke Forest Products alcohol-simulation-life-style type said, “Hey, set your booze down over here on the counter,” being half small town helpful and half curious to see what it felt like to talk to someone who struts in silver spurs. His eyes moved up and down taking her in like she was a poster in front of the Quadra theatre. Just then the kids started to wail and shriek at two hundred decibels and everyone’s fantasy was exchanged for annoyance and snide remarks about temper tantrums, but the two space ladies held their heads up through it all, just like royalty. They breezed out the door and into an old Honda with a dented fender and a smashed bumper and they rattled

away in a car full of jet-black boots and crisp polyester with kids and booze everywhere. I guess they were going back to Alpha Centauri, the planet where you can't get drunk until the kids fall asleep.

HERE IT'S JUST GIANT FERNS and dripping west coast rain forest with twisted metal and junk lurking everywhere, bicycles fucking, amputated legs, shitty typewriters, spider webs peering through rusted bed springs, vague gnarled forms watching my every move; it goes without saying that the cats are a couple of whining assholes.

I was reduced to labouring at Sinclair's with Richard and Peter, shoveling cement, building rock terraces for \$5 an hour. The wall was starting to look like Chinese art when Sinc decided to hire a giant machine that began hurling boulders into the hillside at a cost of three weeks wages for the rest of us. He was yelling and screaming like a madman, placing two-tonne boulders, changing his mind, having them moved. It was like having a work of art ruined by a shower of meteorites. Needless to say the artists involved went home and have never returned to this day. Now Sinclair is applying for a need grant to repair the damage that he caused.

Sandra has her parasite again. The health inspector took a sample of her water yesterday. Tap water, that is.

Sambo has disappeared and it looks like doggie heaven this time. He's probably up there barking at the angels this very moment.

Dexter launched his half-finished boat last weekend and it immediately began taking on water. They pumped all night to keep it afloat. It might have been the trauma of not having been in the water after four years of life. It must have thought it was a trailer.

Gerry, Gerry,

Received your letter the other day, forcing me to respond once again, as my Saturday night special must have crossed it in the mail somewhere over Alberta.

I received *Open City*, *Hejira*, and your letter, but the envelope was wide open. Was there anything else in there? Did you send me half a dozen joints that were removed by the postal authorities?



“The two people that you saw—an older you, a younger me. A little bit of a warp in the mirror of life. You were seeing us in our prime, Brydon.” [Barry, in his prime, during a hike with Jim Page, 1977]

You sounded a little melancholy in your letter. This is healthy Gerry. It’s nature’s way of easing you into despair. We’re basically like salmon spawning anyway, with a little random selection, parental projection, social complexions, etc. thrown in for good measure. It’s how we deal with the pain that gives us character, the angst, the mental James Dean slouch, projecting the tired look of someone who’s forgotten how to perform miracles. It’s the only direction to go. All the shoes are filled.

THE TWO PEOPLE THAT YOU SAW—an older you, a younger me. A little bit of a warp in the mirror of life. You were seeing us in our prime, Brydon.

You’ve still got some tread on your tires yet. That was a good decision to stop selling things. It’s like inflicting tiny paper cuts on your psyche each time out. Best to leave that type of thing to the gum chewers with their ego-hustle-scam-drive as they walk around with a

hundred dirty jokes in their back pocket, passing them out in every shop as personality substitutes.

I thought your book review was tainted by your present state of mind, if I may be so bold as to review your review. Myths don't bite the dust. People do.

Also, there's no long list of things you were going to do for me, no list at all. I've even forgiven you for introducing me to new people. That little human floodgate number that you pulled on me, remember?

ONE THING PUZZLES ME, THOUGH. How come you keep sending me these women's booklets? Women women women. Did I tell you about my idea of sending a story to *Room of My Own* using the name of Penelope Giles. Then if they published it, I'd write an expose in *Monday Magazine* called "The New Sexism." Then a week later, Doug would write to Monday, saying "Re: Macleod's article on the new sexism. So what else is new? Other writers and myself have been writing under women's names for years. It's the only way you can get published." I'll bet they'd have to call an emergency meeting over that one.

I thought feminism was going to free us all. Instead we have these strange mutants running around, damaged beyond repair by the upheaval in their lives, ending up practicing sexism as an approved form of political lifestyle.

But to be fair, I have a few questions. What did the vagina-like symbol on the cover represent? Do you know? My favourite was Ruth Taylor. She was described in the contributor's section as "currently at sea in a beautiful pea-green boat and is betrothed unto the high priest of the Yeti ..." I loved her poetry too, "You are my vaginal bruises, my yeast infection, my pregnancy scare, my G-spot detector."

Also of note was the Haiku poetry of un-young Lim:

in the frozen waterfall
I see sudden
palaces in the north

I'll pass the book on to Denise in Victoria, as I did with the last one

you gave me, saying “Here! Here’s some more women’s shit for you to read.” And she’ll accept it without comment and add it to the stack of women’s books that are scattered around the house. “It must really be limiting to only be allowed to read books written by women,” I tell her. She takes it well.

*Hey won't you bring me
another tomorrow
right now...*

My dear Page,

So ... snow capped fucking mountains. Rippling blue bullshit ocean. And some kind of turquoise horseshit sky with little puffy white goddamn clouds. What a great day.

And all day long the Swiftsure \$5,000 spinnakers have been drifting out of the fog. They’ve been wallowing through my world. Two days ago I ventured to Victoria for a haircut and later wandered down to the Inner Harbour to check out the Swiftsure scene. There were rows and rows of sailboats with flags streaming from their halyards, deck bunnies in bikinis, some were even reading books, and the male spawn of the rich stripped to their suntanned torsos, littering the docks, eyeing the tight bottomed Swiftsure groupies as they strolled by with their pampered faces drawn to the bright sunshine, when through the crowd strode a tall woman with a brush cut and a slash of lipstick, her pant cuffs tucked into their socks, looking at no one, head held high, on parade, with a giant dog larger than a great dane on a leash ... his tongue hanging out in the afternoon heat and his balls drooping and swinging to and fro behind him as she led him in and out of the crowd. And I thought “Jesus, that’s the men of the world she’s parading around the harbour.” And a chill went down my macho spine. Everyone else was talking and walking and strutting and hustling, being seen, being part of the event.

And across town people go without groceries because the unemployment cheque was a day late, or three days late, or the welfare cheque fell through. And nobody jumps into their cutoffs and strolls

past them soaking up the sun; nobody wants to be part of their event. No. You have to go across town to see these fucking people and their floating toys. Those grotesque extensions of their personalities.

But I'll tell you one thing Page, they tend to bunch together. They don't spread themselves thin like the poor. You know if I started to make molotov cocktails out of every one of my empty wine bottles, the revolution could be won in four months.





“Friday. I climbed up on my roof to piece together what was left of the chimney; there was a seashell on my rooftop. A symbol for my Tugwell years. Wholesome.”
[1981]



“But whatever it is, whenever, if ever, one thing I know for sure and that’s to make them laugh and make them cry, because that’s all life is about anyway. The laughter and the tears. All the rest of it is just the shit part....” [1981 © pjwoodland]



“And I love it, we entertain each other, our reality being more interesting than regular real life, and that’s what it’s all about now, isn’t it?” [Outside Richard’s cabin, 1981 © pjwoodland]



“So it comes to pass at Tugwell Creek ... it seems that in the twilight of Macleod’s years he has become seasonally adjusted ... again. I guess that I wanted a union more than the company did.” [1981]



“They rang up my order. Ching. And then, most blessed of miracles: no Merry Christmas. Maybe they thought the dog food was my Christmas dinner.” [1981]



“Setting up, soaking up some sun, the soft surge of the ocean making circular motions on my temples, and later a blanket of fog, soft white, rose in front of the mountains.” [At Sandcut Beach, 1980]



“Now my mental stability goes up and down in random intervals. Down is down and up makes it all the way to medium.” [1985]



“And I get such a kick out of Doug, he thinks we are going to be famous someday and he doesn’t understand that we are just famous to each other...” [Left, during a visit with Jim Page in Vancouver, 1983]

“You know, I used to walk on the kitchen floor of a clean typing page with mud all over my boots and not give a shit about the dirt tracks... but lately...” [Below, 1981]





Sundog: "Drop me in any forest, or on any mountain with a knife and some matches and I'll come out of there in two months weighing twenty more pounds than when I went in." [Sundog's Sea Witch, 1985]



“There’s no long list of things you were going to do for me, no list at all. I’ve even forgiven you for introducing me to new people.” [From letter to Gerry—above: Gerry and Eileen, 1980 © unknown]; below: “Somehow it got around to me showing her your poem ‘Satori.’ She went crazy. I showed her the others. Each time she went crazy with ‘This woman is fantastic. These are GREAT! ... she’s better than Susan Musgrave!’” [From letter to Eileen: Eileen and Barry, 1980 © unknown]



“It’s midnight, the foghorn is blowing, a damp chill is coming in off the water. The stove is crackling, cedar popping, humming with heat.” [Above, 1981 © Pia Carroll; below, 1986 © pjwoodland]

part three
THE USUAL RAT PROBLEM
JANUARY 1984 - OCTOBER 1986



the usual rat problem

There is of course the usual rat problem. I've had about four hours sleep in the last three nights. One even leaped off the cupboard onto my bed before rebounding across the floor. You know you've hit bottom when the only living thing to bounce on your bed all year was a rat.

Page,

I was listening to the radio earlier this evening. The DJ said, "Do you remember this song?" and he played a few bars of "Young Love" by Sonny James. Then he came back on and said, "If you remember this song, you're old enough to have rectal cancer. See your doctor tomorrow for a check up...." Jesus.

NOW I HAVE A PLACE TO LIVE for the first time in nine months. You can't imagine the feeling. As I unpacked each box of my meager belongings, I was filled with the same joy as a child opening Christmas presents. The place is smaller than the one at Tugwell, but in some ways even funkier. It has the same interior roof that Thoreau's cabin had. There is of course the usual rat problem. I've had about four hours sleep in the last three nights. One even leaped off the cupboard onto my bed before rebounding across the floor. You know you've hit bottom when the only living thing to bounce on your bed all year was a rat.

Last week Richard and I went over to a swamp to cut up two fir logs that had washed up on the beach. It was dark before we finished and drove my car in to pick them up and got stuck. Since Richard is



“Now I have a place to live for the first time in nine months. You can’t imagine the feeling.” [Barry’s second cabin, his Mazda out front, 1986 ©pjwoodland]

stronger than me, he pushed, I drove. We’d almost made it up when his knee popped and I turned to see him in my headlights face down in the mud and the muck. I threw open the car door and ran toward him. He was writhing in pain and said that it hurt so bad he wanted to puke. I helped him to the car but couldn’t get his leg in, as it was just like a broken leg when I touched it. I ran down the beach on my bad ankle, over the rocks in the moonlight, to the Dog’s for help. We got the car out and helped Richard into his cabin. His knee was already swelling up and he couldn’t walk. He had to use an oar for a crutch for two days and his leg still doesn’t bend. So, if anyone from the compensation board asks you what a leg is worth in the new depression, you can tell them it’s worth sixteen rounds of fir.

Sweet Sweet Carol and Good Old Don,

I used to have a friend in Vancouver named Maxwell who was magnificent when he was drunk. One night he hopped a freight in Kamloops

or wherever it was and hung on the rungs with cold fingers and hopped off forty miles down the line or he would run across a Weld in the moonlight, naked, running from his devils, and weaving back to our cabin up north losing his glasses under the Skeena River Bridge where he sat crouched eating his dog and suds burger like an animal. Then weaving through the bushes and roadways back to the cabin in the dark and later back in Vancouver with his girl friend's astrological suicide trips and dropping by to tell me how he couldn't stand it anymore and me asking "Do you want to stay here for a while?" And he would just happen to have his clothes in the van. And even before I met him he stepped off the curb on Hastings Street right into the side of a bus and lay out cold on the sidewalk with people walking around him until he came to and staggered on drunk and blinking in the afternoon sun.

He was magnificent.

HE LIVES ON MALCOLM ISLAND now in the Queen Charlotte Strait. He sent me \$50 for the fare and asked me to come up and see him for old times sake. I was afraid of two things. That his new old lady had changed him and that we were going to drown. I had a premonition the day before I left that we were going to drown.

On the fifth day we had to take his sixteen-foot inflatable across to Port McNeil to make a booze run. This is it, I thought, and even told Maxwell that we weren't going to make it. He smiled. My life jacket didn't fit but I figured it didn't matter anyway. When we got half way across, the motor conked out. I began to row while Maxwell tried to re-start the motor. It wouldn't start. There was a strong current and I had to bust my pot-bellied forty-one-year old gut just to keep the boat on course. We were veering to port and I had to correct for it all the time. I thought it was the current until I saw that the inflatable was deflating.

"Hey Maxwell, the boat is sinking for fuck's sake. Just like I told you man."

I reached in the bow for the pump and handed it to him. He bent over the stern with his back turned to me working with the pump and after a few minutes said, "Do you have a long handled screw driver on you by any chance?"

“Are you joking?”

He turned towards me, “The pump doesn’t work.”

“I don’t fucking believe it. The motor doesn’t work. The pump doesn’t work. And the goddamn boat is sinking.”

We sat looking at each other. He said, “Well, it’s just an unfortunate set of circumstances.”

I took my toque off and started hitting him with it, “Bullshit! It’s the story of your life for Christ’s sake!”

I yelled and hit and hit and yelled until I was tired. We both collapsed in the bottom of the boat and laughed until the tears ran down our faces. Maxwell tried to re-start the motor as I wondered how cold the water was going to be. But with a combination of temporary motor starts and rowing we made it to Port McNeil where the Coast Guard waited for us on the dock.

“Good afternoon,” he said, “Got time for a safety check?”

Maxwell looked at his watch, “No, we haven’t. We’ve got ten minutes to catch the last ferry back to Malcolm Island.”

They wouldn’t take no for an answer so I ran to the liquor store and loaded up while Maxwell got cited for having an unseaworthy vessel. We just made the ferry back with seconds to spare, not having time to buy groceries, but not caring because we had to celebrate the victory over my premonition.

Later that night Maxwell fell down the stairs and broke one of the steps. He got up, threw his arms around me, and told me he loved me. He was still magnificent.

*And the wind shall say here were
decent godless people, their only
monument the asphalt road and
a thousand lost golf balls...*

Doug,

I took the cover of my typewriter and seven keys were jammed against the roller. What kind of person leaves his typewriter with seven keys jammed against the roller, I thought fleetingly.

I cannot respond to your letter for two reasons. One is that I have long ago burned out my intellect like a hot searing rocket across the night sky. The other is that it was a magnificent letter and magnificence needs no response, except envy and hatred.

You can't imagine what it's like living out here in this little shack. I do nothing. I see no one. I don't write. I don't think. I'm dying. That's all.

TWO NIGHTS AGO CAREY CAME OVER. The first time in four years. The last time I'd seen him he'd come over to Tugwell to buy old Wally's boat. A fourteen-foot boat with a six-horse motor. Carey came over on a Friday morning to look at it with his crazy wild animal eyes and fast lithe movements, looking like he'd been on a bender for a week and was still running on sheer adrenaline at a hundred mph. He decided to buy the boat and paid Wally with three fifties. Richard and I helped him lift it into the back of his truck and he roared away with the boat hanging half out, secured by only one rope, license plate swinging, tail light smashed, muffler leaking and probably without a driver's license, leaving everyone breathing a sigh of relief that he didn't invite himself into one of the cabins using a jug of cheap wine as his admission ticket.

And thinking back to Carey and the time he came down to Tugwell during the party of the full moon and broke into Heather Together's cabin and tried to rape her but she pulled a gun and told him in her lesbian hate rage that if he ever came near her again she would blow his balls to kingdom come.

And the night that Frank looked out of his cabin window at dusk and saw Carey walking into the ocean after an all day drinking suicide trip and Frank ran out when he was already up to his chest and put him in a bear hug and dragged him back to the beach, and Carey not resisting because everything was out of his hands by this time.

And the time he was drunk and insane one winter's night and he started firing his .303 at Aguyin's trailer, "Just a foot from where I knew his head was" he later told me with a half smile on his face. And that was when I began to like him a little because I knew he meant no harm to anyone except himself. But poor Aguyin had to crawl on his stomach into the other room and retrieve his .22 rifle from its hiding

place under a mattress and then crawl into the kitchen and find the box of shells and slide out the door to his secret escape route where he lay cold and shivering in the darkness waiting for Carey to come up and try to rape June so that he could pick him off coming up the path. Not realizing that Carey was just making a statement.

I never minded Carey, just avoided him, because I grew up with dozens of Careys and I understand them. He's just like all the pretty boys would have been like if they'd been born into different families and were tough enough to survive.

Anyway, two nights ago Carey came over for the first time in four years. He had a half-full fruit juice bottle full of booze, wild eyes, and he laughed loudly and kicked my chair in response to anything funny that I said. But at the same time I sensed that he felt there was a line not to be crossed and I realized in a flash that it was because I was crazier than he was. You see, he's not the only one who's been involved in crazy shooting incidents and wild acts of madness. The difference is that I've learned to turn it inward and only destroy myself while he rolls along in what could be called in comparison an immature manner. So my fear of Carey ended that night, but my fear of myself increased. You win some, you lose some.

NOW MY MENTAL STABILITY goes up and down in random intervals. Down is down and up makes it all the way to medium. Last week I was so down that I wanted to stack the Sooke Forum Council meeting (easily done) and pass a motion to change the name of Sooke to Despair, BC. The sign would have to be changed on the outskirts of town to "You Are Now Leaving Despair." The fire chief would have to change the name on his half-ton to "Despair Fire Department." The kid's hockey teams would need a sweater change—Sooke Hornets to Despair Hornets. And the local paper, *The Sooke Mirror*, would have to be changed to *The Mirror of Despair*. But the next day when I woke up I realized what a trauma this would be for the community so I decided to change the name to Pretend, BC. They wouldn't mind that, I thought, and then I felt up again.

I read in the paper a few weeks ago that the Pope crossed St Peter's Square on Easter dragging a cross in a symbolic ritual that is done yearly. They said the cross weighed 1 kilogram, 2.2 pounds. I couldn't

believe it. Big fucking deal. My cross weighs more than that. It made me feel down.

But then last week I read that an old Englishman had been at the Vatican and had become tired so he sat down in an empty wheel chair to rest. Before he knew it a Papal lackey wheeled him out to be blessed by the Pope. Not wanting to leap out of a moving wheelchair or cause a scene, he sat silently, and was blessed by the Pope. After the Pope had gone by he got up and walked away. A group of nuns was standing nearby and went out of their minds yelling “Miracle! Miracle!” Religion still has meaning. I felt up again.

A FEW DAYS AGO OUTREACH, a government funded employment centre office, talked to me and found out that many years ago I had been a researcher for the Department of Social Services. “We have a research job available at the moment, would you be interested?”

“Sure. What is it?”

“It’s market research.”

“What’s market research?”

“Well, it’s a door-to-door survey regarding the personal preference of the occupant for various kinds of beer.”

“I’m not interested.”

“Don’t you want to know how much it pays?”

“I know how much it pays,” I said, “What I want to know is why there aren’t any men working here?” And I swept my arm across the office gesturing to the five short-haired women sitting at their self-important desks and she glared at me with a look of naked loathing, as naked as I would ever be allowed to see her now, but I was only responding to her previous comment that all government funded job creation projects were for the eighteen to twenty-four age group or for women. In fact CBC radio tells me that now 70 percent of all jobs are filled by women. That’s great. If they keep it up at this rate maybe soon they can liberate themselves all the way to despair. I felt down.

On the way home the cars were backed up on Esquimalt Road. I thought there was an accident but when I got there they were weaving around a woman walking down the centre of the traffic lane, her back to the traffic, loose fitting hippy style clothes, her hair tied back in a pony tail, the cars slowly driving around her, heads craning to look at

her, “fuck she must be crazy.” But she never looked up, just kept walking down the middle of the road, face expressionless, back to the traffic, not caring whether she lived or died and showing it up front, I don’t care I don’t care I don’t care. The vibes rose like the smell of fresh tar from the asphalt, and I felt up again. She restored my faith in women.

Jan came back from Malaysia last week and told me the story of sitting in a bar in Singapore and a short sweating Malaysian climbed up on a bar stool next to him and struck up a conversation. After a few drinks he pulled a worn and creased photo out of his inside pocket. It showed the Malaysian and Mohammed Ali standing together smiling. “See . . . there I am with Ali,” he exclaimed. It had been taken at the Thrilla in Manilla. Jan studied the picture closely, handed it back and said, “Yep. That sure looks like Ali all right.” And I was up up up again. My faith in the human race restored. We’re the same the world over.

*“I don’t know, I don’t care,
and it doesn’t matter,” will
be the final human prayer.*

—Jack Kerouac

Pam,

I had a magnificent weekend. I went into Victoria on Saturday and wiped Keefer out in chess. Then we went to the Saturday matinee of *Harry and Son* free of charge because he is the art critic for CHEK TV now with his own show on channel 6 every Saturday afternoon at two-thirty.

His show opens with some funky music playing over a night street scene with Keefer walking down the street. It’s bizarre. It’s just like a movie only it’s someone that you know. Then the camera pans under him as he goes up a fire escape stairway, music pulsating, I ask him, “How many times did you have to run up and down the stairs before you got it right?” And he answers “About forty,” with a tired behind the scenes voice. He hits the top of the fire escape and comes through

a rooftop door and there is a rooftop set, table, a few chairs, brickwork, the lights of the city beyond the ledge. Keefer sounds strained but serious. He interviews a dinner theatre guy, a potter, reviews two movies, interviews T-Bone Walker who is playing at Harpo's, and complains to me about how they always select the wrong shots or the wrong parts for the interview. "They don't understand art," he tells me.

After the movie, don't see it, we play some more chess, smoke some Colombian, drink some Heinekens, have a great steak, some salad, the bottle of Jack Daniels comes out after supper. After a while, Keefer's drunk and I'm feeling good. He leans over the table and slurs, "God-damn it, I envy you Barry." I'm not even embarrassed. I just burst out laughing. I say, "Yeh? Want to trade places?" And he says with drunken seriousness, "Yeh, I do." "Well, it's a deal," I said, "Tomorrow morning you drive out to that little shack. You have a \$140 in the bank. No wife. No house. No job. No tv. Nothing. And you sit in that little shack. With no hope. With no future. All day. All night. And the next day. Always alone. You couldn't take it man. I can hardly stand it myself." And at the same time I'm saying this to him I'm imagining lying in bed on Sunday morning fooling around with Denise, smoking a Colombian, sipping Jack Daniels with a raw egg in it for breakfast.

But I know that what he is really talking about is my getting published, and even though it doesn't change my life at all he has been writing for ten years with high expectations of himself, and as the evening wore on he told me about the scholarships, the English degree. "You don't realize how lucky you are man, to send something away the first time and get it published." But he doesn't understand that I was never happy with that story the way it was written and it's not that it was published as much as it makes what I am doing seem legitimate. I replied, "Maybe people send away stuff too soon," because this is the way I feel about myself. He has to gather his thoughts after that one and comes back with "So, what are you going to do now? Are you just going to work on this thing that you're doing?" (An opus about five years at Tugwell Creek). I answer with, "Yeh, I guess so." But I don't know what I'm doing. I have no concept. No background. I have a thousand questions. Keefer leaned over the table with drunken severity, "Listen man, you have a gift, and if you fuck

this up, I'll never speak to you again." But he's only talking from the perspective of himself. It's got nothing to do with me.

Then he started talking about the futility of life, but what he's really talking about is not living up to his preconceived standards of what he thinks he is. He starts telling me about suicide, but it's Hemingway novel suicide. Shit, I've thought about it many times, without the romance, just matter of fact, do you want to spend your life in a skid row room walking the streets all day, looking in garbage cans, having people look right through you, (they already do with me) having your life disappear. You lose everything you see, because a man with no future has no past.

And now, the mindless build up is over. A reply to your letter. I cannot afford to travel right now. However, you can visit me anytime you feel like it. I enjoy your company as much as someone like me can enjoy anything. You remind me of someone on the left bank of Paris during the thirties. You have that frantic edge of Kerouac's writing, only in real life. I've always thought of you as a character lifted from a great period of art sometime. I can imagine you holding your own anywhere. Any year. Any period. If I was a good enough writer, I would try to capture some of your essence, but I'm not. Page caught some of it through his photos. Enough. Why am I saying these things?

1. I'm drunk.
2. Sometimes I wonder if the people I know realize how far beyond the common herd they really are.

Bill,

I re-read an unknown Kerouac book that I picked up for ten cents and he's writing about working on the railroad and living in a skid row hotel room and telling me as I sit alone in my cabin about how "It's thrilling to feel the coldness of the morning wrap around my thick quilt blankets as I lay there, watch facing and ticking me, legs spread in comfy skid row soft sheets with soft tears or sew line in 'em huddled in my own skin and rich and not spending a cent." And it reminded me of the time that you and I went up to Saskatoon for the weekend. Eight hours of pushing that Goddamn Hillman with the

open glove compartment leg rest and passing back and forth the Bill and Barry rye whiskey mickey. You played Saturday night at a roadside out of town dance tavern and I dropped in but left for downtown and we were to meet later but missed each other, so it was 2:00 a.m. and with only \$2 in the secret compartment of my wallet, the two bills I used for playing bullshit poker in beer parlours with, one with five aces, and the other with five tens.

I'd carried those winners for years. So I opened the secret compartment in front of the desk clerk and bought my room for \$2 in the Yale hotel and my window was broken and I had a torn skid row sheet just like Jack's and a gray army blanket that was scratchy and someone tried to open my door during the night giving me a fear adrenaline rush as I huddled there in the night. And how twenty years later out on the west coast, after reading Jack's words, I feel once again that skid row comfort that a person draws on in the early hours of the next morning after all the scary evil has disappeared.

BUT THE POINT OF THIS LETTER is that I got a letter from singer/songwriter Doug Lang and he talked of Coltrane, Charlie Parker, and Rimbaud, and said things like "If you live it, you better have a fucking horn ... why else spend a season in hell? ... It's time to fuck your mind FOR GOOD ... give blood ... your reality precedes the world, therefore, you determine its course ... it would appear that you have a difficult jazz to sound. You will choose either to master its playing, or accept satisfaction in being its victim...."

Great stuff I thought, but what is he talking about? So he threw in a poem:

sit be still
remember
standing in white prairie grass
as high as your chin
the wind making that field seem
a blanket
with animals running under it
shadows of passing clouds
swift like a shiver

sit be still
 imagine standing
 in white prairie grass
 as high as your chin
 the wind
 the wild animals under a blanket
 shadows of passing clouds
 swift making you shiver

what's real
 the memory or the dream?
 sit be still
 I'll bring you a glass of bourbon
 the answer is neither

drink up

SO I WROTE SOME SHORT STORIES, and the first one I wrote was published, and the first sentence of the first published piece starts off with: "Life has sure turned into a piece of shit," Bill said." Now even though I don't remember you saying that, life was a piece of shit. Details were dropped in favour of the existential life ramble rush, Maxwell had to be dropped, but I immortalized that motherfucking house on Knight Street and everything it stood for. And so on. And so forth.

Anyway, just wanted to tell you that we're history now.

Pam,

The reason that you got a letter that sounded like a bummer was that it came from a guy in a cabin with no outside stimulation running through his life, strife without the buffer of family, kids, job, and an acceptance of normal values....

And the reason that I phoned you was because I'd just made a note about the night that you told me about your Dad, when you were drunk, pacing the floor, stopping to lean on the doorway, your face



“I got a letter from singer/songwriter Doug Lang ... Great stuff I thought, but what is he talking about?” [Aguyin and Doug Lang in Vancouver, 1984 © pjwoodland]

going soft and sad, and then turning to face a distant memory, arms waving, face changing and tightening, lines creasing back from your eyes giving you a ravaged weathered look lasting for only a second but magnificent in its angst, and the images unfolding as you talked, the young girl walking from the rural bus stop in the darkness towards the gray mustachioed stifled artist and poet, burned out liver of life holing up in a rural cabin trying to avoid the pain and so happy to see you and uncomfortable in his stiff dress-up clothes that he put on so he would look nice for you, totally out of context with the surroundings, and you went on and on telling me about your meeting, your distance, your love unspoken, his final weeks, and the flow of your words and the flickering almost unseen expressions of your face and in your eyes made my heart leap from the sheer power of it.

So I went out into the darkness and rain with my handful of piggy bank quarters and phoned you for those reasons.

*I am drinking
I am drinking beer with yellow flowers
in underground sunlight
and you can see that I am a sensitive man.*

—Al Purdy

Pam,

Just now sitting here typing this I hear a dog barking in the distance. Now he stops. There's something about a dog barking in the country late at night. And now I feel that there is something in the room and I turn my head. But there is nothing there. The dog barks again. It is outside. This thing. I am aware that it is outside now. And I am aware of what it is, although I have no words to describe it. And sometimes late at night I even think that I can hear it breathing. Just for an instant, you understand. I turn my head. What was that? But there is nothing there. But I can feel it. It waits. It waits for all of us. But why is it parked on my fucking doorstep?

So, remembering the car pulled over to the curb, the door half open, on a Sidney side street half lit with neon spill over, you reaching for your pack, we look at each other, an existential pause, half lives suspended for an instant. "Keep in touch," you said. So, here's a touch. But I am not going to write to you. I have nothing to say. But I have a feeling of why the thing out there can't just come in and rip us to shreds. It is because we are never really alone. We recognize ourselves in others. So we re-create ourselves, and the others feel it, can feel themselves in it, and are re-created, too.

And the recognition comes from all angles, all parts of the whole, and it is recognizing the parts that sets us apart. And since I'm not going to write you, I'll show you what I wrote about you to someone else, even though I was writing about myself. You get to be a voyeur in your own letter....

"WALK ME DOWN TO THE LIQUOR STORE," she said. And we went down three blocks of big city back alleys, an ideal location, you can slink down to the liquor store without being noticed. We walked down the aisle of the liquor store to the scotch section and the Johnny

Walker was on the top shelf. It was half sold out with the remaining bottles at the back of the shelf. She reached up to the shelf on her tip-toes and couldn't quite reach a bottle. She looked over at me for help with a half smile on her face. I said, "Come on Pam. Get up there. Come on. Show me how much you want it. Crawl in there with them!" She made a lunge for a bottle but couldn't quite reach it. "Fuck you, Macleod!" She said, and I reached in and grabbed a bottle and made everything all right again.

On the way back to her place we cut through the schoolyard and climbed up on a wooden fort platform playground slide structure that sat in the shadows of the schoolyard. We sat on the platform and uncapped the bottle of scotch and passed the brown paper bag back and forth as we looked up at the sky and she pointed out the various constellations to me. "See that star there," "I don't see it." "There! The bright one." "Oh yeh," Even though I didn't see it. "That's the big dipper. See its handle?" "Oh yeh," I said and asked her what she thought it would be like standing alone on the moon in a space suit with four hours of oxygen left, looking down at the earth, a blue and white sphere out there in the blackness of outer space, the moon a desolate prairie of dust and eerie silence, the only sound your own breathing and the thumping of your heartbeat coming from inside your space suit, knowing that you had four hours to live, four hours to come to terms with life and death in an environment of total alienation, to face the reality of your own existence by being totally alone, the sound of your own breathing in your ears, the hammering of your heart, the world in front of your eyes, yet you are not and can never be a part of it again. "What would you do in that situation" I asked her. "Lie down in the dust and make an angel," she answered.

I was writing about myself but you were the catalyst. And now here is someone writing about himself and I am the catalyst, a letter from Doug received last week:

'cause I know that those who *say* it'll get better, that the pain'll go away ... I know they're not my friends ... cause nobody who loves anything would say such things, 'cause those who love something realize that pain, when felt through, opens into character, into humour, into odd shrugs of oh what the hell we're doing just what we need to

be doing here boy. Those who hang around are not the “it’ll get better” people; those who hang around and keep cracking jokes and pouring the beer are those who don’t think suffering is such big news, ’cause they’ve been living in the same house, on the corner of Age Road and Despair Drive, the one with no southern exposure, dripping faucets, a crack under the door that lets winter in without it having to knock, and a toilet that looks almost big enough to fit your face down. I include you Macleod, in this category ... although I’m not certain at what stage in the master plan you’re parked (over parked). I think I’ve raised the issue with you in a previous letter, the issue of when you’re going to get farther into your suffering....

Macleod speaking here again: I think the point of mine was taken at “I include you Macleod, in this category...” but I will let him continue even though it is at my own expense.

... to the point where you wake up with nosebleeds and make Rorschachs on kleenex and send them to your friends as mementos. But ... I crack a joke and pour the beer ... knowing your time is ripe and soon the fruit will fall, kathump, kathump, into the dark and spongy soil ... and we’ll watch the vultures (book buyers?) descend. You can’t miss ... but you’re lazy, righteous, scared, cynical, poor, unloved, masochistic, paranoid, secretly arrogant, judgmental, sick inside, spiteful, and ... (well, make your own list ... I have. To the point where I’m so full of self-destructive adjectives I seldom get an appetite! When I wake up with a verb on my tongue, I put Vaseline on my hand and jerk my tongue until my saliva spurts ... not for pleasure, but because I wouldn’t know what to do if my life once more became pregnant with possibilities.)

Macleod speaking again! I think that I was correct the first time and now realize that I let him continue because I love the sound of his voice. And also, this guy is a serious human being. He knows me so well, and I don’t know him at all. You see, it’s all the different angles, Pam, with each of us recognizing the correlation.

I’m afraid of people coming over
I’m afraid people won’t come over

I'm afraid to go out
 I'm afraid to stay in
 I'm afraid of being mutilated/constipated/alienated/
 devastated/castrated and inundated
 I'm afraid to sleep at night
 I'm afraid to conform
 I'm afraid to be different
 I'm afraid of rats/cancer/boils/syphilis/and sores
 that will not heal
 I'm afraid of my parents
 I'm afraid of being an orphan
 I'm afraid of white black yellow red and brown
 I'm afraid of rednecks, fascists, socreds, micks,
 wops
 chinks
 spicks
 spades
 slopes
 slants
 gooks
 kikes
 boogies
 niggers
 beinies
 bohunks
 ragheads
 hebes
 and liberals
 I'm afraid of my landlord, my neighbours, my friends,
 and the school crossing guard
 I'm afraid to live
 I'm afraid to die
 I'm afraid to drink
 I'm afraid to stop
 I'm afraid of inflation/recession/depression/aggression/
 repression/and confession
 I'm afraid to love

I'm afraid to hate
 I'm afraid of myself
 I'm afraid to sign my name.

*My point to young writers is to socialize.
 Don't just go up to a pine cabin all
 alone and brood. You reach that stage
 soon enough anyway.*

—Truman Capote

Doug,

“Don’t go away,” you said in your letter, you were drunk and just getting warmed up. Well, I’m not drunk, BUT I DON’T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO AND IT’S ONLY nine FUCKING THIRTY ON SATURDAY NIGHT, LANG!!! DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS? You should sit in a shack for seven years and see if it’s worth it. I could do time standing on my head. Richard’s buddy Willy was out here last month after doing three months in jail. Richard said that on one Saturday night Willy said to him, “Christ, there were more things to do in jail than there are out here.”

WHICH REMINDS ME OF REINCARNATION. Did you know that the reincarnation of souls theory is about 4,000 years old? It was invented at a time when the Maharaja, the peasant, everyone, lived all their lives in one place, within the framework of one family, in a fixed caste. You see they didn’t have any concept of change. There was never any movement in lifestyle or status. Everything was static: your job, your marriage, your friends, your enemies, your aging, your death. DEATH! Their only opportunity came with death. And the only way that they could conceive of altering their destiny was through death. Therefore the concept of reincarnation. We just move the fantasy a little closer because of the western gratification hang-up. Four thousand years man and we’re the same shriveled desiccated little things. We even relive Aesop’s Fables over and over again for Christ’s sake.

Al Purdy, I think I mentioned him. We all know they captured Che

Guevara and shot him and chopped off his hands for identification purposes, and Al was in Cuba, and met Che, and shook his hand once, and later a line in one of his poems reads:

I remember the news reports from Bolivia
 how he was wounded captured executed cremated
 but first they cut off his fingers
 for fingerprint identification later
 in case questions should be asked
 and I remember his quick hard handshake
 in Havana among the tiny Vietnamese ladies
 and seem to hold ghostlike in my own hand
 five bloody fingers
 of Che Guevara.

Powerful stuff. You write powerful stuff Lang. Like Aguyin said to me, “Jesus, he really gets into it, doesn’t he?” You really do.
 And I sit in a shack full of notes. Notes that go nowhere.

*words never die
 they just wait
 without hope...*
 —Macleod

Doug,

A wino I once knew told me his greatest fear was becoming old and having to be fed while helpless in a nursing home.

He died at the age of thirty-six from drowning. He was found face down in a pool of water in a city park.

The water was four inches deep.

He left \$36,000 in a will to his sister.

I can’t figure it out. Can you?

THE RIDE OF THE WEEK: Last Friday, standing in the gloomy drizzle by the Tugwell Creek Bridge, an old Pontiac clatters to a stop, license

plate stuck in the front window behind spider web cracked glass. I climbed into the back seat litter. A big Indian wearing a faded green work shirt for a jacket and a large Indian woman with shiny black hair spilling over the seat sat in the front. There was no window on her side, the rain came in, falling on her shoulder, on my knee and leg, and not a word was spoken all the way to town, the silence broken only by the country music crackling on the radio. It was almost Zen-like; I felt a calm and inner peace, a feeling of not needing to be anywhere other than just there at that moment, with no past, no future, no thoughts. We hit the red light at Sooke and I said, "I'll get out here, thanks a lot." And the Indian turned, putting his arm over the seat, leaned over and looked at me for the first time, his eyes wild yet tinged with a thousand sorrows. "You bet!" he said.

And this afternoon, picking up the mail, having a beer in the deli, hiding behind my paper, and Tammy takes my order. She's as tall as I am, and her hair is blown back in feathers like Farrah Fawcett. Her breasts are taut and pushing against her uniform, her zipper at the neck half undone from the ripe underburst. She brings my beer with "There you go." And I can smell her, like a spring breeze, like a lilac. She must be about eighteen or so and every time I'm there she hovers around where I'm sitting, windexing the counter or the window or the front door, and I watch her bum as she walks by and I return to my paper, then I'm interrupted with squish! squish! I look up and she's holding the windex bottle in her hand and she's posed like Marilyn Monroe in the 1955 calendar shot and she's smiling a wet smile at me and I think fleetingly, My God! Can she be attracted to me? This tramp in his raggedy clothes, graying hair, beard curling in every direction, older than her father, but aching/groaning/aching for her, her tight tight buttocks, and those long long legs, and her mouth pouting and dripping with dew, oh Jesus, and if someone talks to her she giggles and gangles and teenage awkwardly and I wonder what we would talk about afterwards. And I remember Charles Bukowski parked in his car across the street from the school yard, watching them at the bus stop, their little dresses blowing in the breeze, and their pink pink lips like cherries. Just once, ohhh just once, he wanted to pick one of them up and kiss them right on those cherry lips and he promised "Oh, I promise I'll put them back down again."

The Prairie Warrior Woman

LAST WEEK A WOMAN FROM THE PRAIRIE BUS two summers ago came over for her second visit and grand tour of the neighbourhood. We ate mushrooms and they kicked in as we walked down the spongy pathway at Point No Point, surrounded by trees, thick salal, with the gray drizzles dripping down from the overhanging branches. Then when we reached the ocean there was a neat red bridge with hand rails and it gave off safe vibes because of its friendly colour so we weren't afraid to walk on it. And thirty feet below the swirling surge of turquoise blue water was harumphing against the rock cliff. On the other side of the bridge was a tiny island with wind-sculpted salal and trees, the pathway circling around to a friendly little bench, red again, which we both glanced at but neither one said anything. We looked out to sea in the gray mist and blue and there was an old ship. "Look the ship of lost souls!" I said and pointed. Then walking back across the bridge we stopped in the middle and I asked her if she'd seen *The Man Who Would Be King* and she said "No," and I thought of Sean Connery standing on the swinging suspension bridge as the mob of Hindu heathens chopped at the ropes and Sean stood in the middle, straight and proud and began singing "Scotland Forever" and the ropes snapped and he plunged miles down into a canyon to his death, almost bringing a tear to my eye it was so moving. And I realized in the instant of thinking it that I was incapable of bringing that scene to life and I leaned over the railing and disappeared into shroomie laughter and we both ended up laughing from mindless mushroom happiness. We looked down at the slopping swirling slosh and I mentioned that the colour of the water was just like a lagoon in Tahiti. Laughing, she called me on it and even as I admitted that I'd never been there, I was glad that I'd said it because it made her laugh and when she laughed her face lit up like a little kid, it was so free. She told me about her friend who when seeing something beautiful would say "It's just like Switzerland" and she'd never been to Switzerland. We left for a beach house which was only a shelter like a bus stop on the beach at the end of a trail, but around the turn we got a glimpse of the beach and saw that there

was no shelter there and turned back because of a driving need to sit down and rest for a moment, that's how exhausting the adventure had become so far. As we burst out onto the main trail again, two people turned like frightened deer and I blurted out in terror a normal sounding Sunday afternoon out for a walk hello and they hello'd back, forcing her to hello mumble too and we both turned and couldn't hold the giggles back, just wanting to get away. So we darted down a side trail.

After a short distance we came to a small opening where there was another small friendly red bench. We stood and looked at the panorama, the fall shoreline colours of reds, yellows, and oranges on the leaves with a backdrop of pastel shades of green winding down the coast and disappearing into the blurry gray mist. And below us the ocean rolling against the beach, storm tossed logs lying there like pick up sticks glistening in the rain. Out to sea in the misty distance the ghost ship of lost souls headed out towards the open ocean—and I wasn't on it!

With a burst of joy I began taking off my clothes, but as I got my jacket half off I realized that it was only my imagination and I'd really started to take my jacket off because it was too warm. So I stood there with my jacket half on and half off, it looking like the strait jacket it should have been. She wanted me to lay it on the little red bench so that we could sit down. In fact this had been the game plan since leaving the bridge, but old Macleod was too rough and grizzled to be Sir Walter-fucking-Raleigh and I said so, regretting it immediately, but it was gone on the wind anyway as we headed back to the car. Up the pathway and uphill at the top were a dozen little wooden steps leading to the funky gate that looked just like it was in Ireland but I was afraid to tell her. We sat in the car and were mushroom silly with me feeling like I was behind the cockpit of a 747 and we watched the people coming and going and even spotted a yuppie couple driving a wine coloured Volvo. Figuring that if they could drive, so could I, we left for Jordan River without mishap except for an instance when we were talking and I turned towards her and almost forgot to look back at the road where it was an impending head-on collision scene because I'd wandered over the centre line and had to veer back into our lane.

When we got to the top of the Jordan River hill, I stopped the car and we tried to coast down to the bottom in neutral without using the brakes. We gathered speed as the curves slipped and twisted by on the way down as we passed the concrete barrier, really starting to careen and fly. I chickened out and put the brakes on because of the extra mushroom thrill and she shrieked, “You really are crazy.” But I was only guilty of trying to make everyday life seem like an adventure.

At Jordan River we did the main drag of that sleepy island town with a store open every Wednesday with hundred-year-old chocolate bars hiding behind dirty scratched 1930 glass counters and a cafe, the Breakers. Always for sale, open Saturday and Sunday, and no one on the street because there was no street. Just mist, ocean, and blue drizzlies. We turned around and parked at the ocean, sitting in the car and looking out to sea until the windows fogged up and then opening the side windows and getting rained on. A Volkswagen full of surfers was parked next to us, boards on top, as clean cut and wholesome looking as Bible salesmen but probably were only jocks or some other form of little boy. She peered out the window side ways at them and said, “What are they doing?” And I answered “Waiting for their wave.” She sat silently for a few minutes and said “Well, they might as well leave, it’s not coming!” and I laughed at the Prairie Warrior Woman showing her disdain for those West Coast marshmallows, and she thought they were seals anyway when she first saw them out on their boards. She was probably right the first time, too.

We left, almost getting stuck. I had a sudden vomit thought of having to ask the hated surfers for a push to get out, easing the humiliation by maybe borrowing one of their boards and putting it under my back tire for traction. We drove back up the Jordan River hill in second gear, embarking on a new adventure, to pee at French’s Beach.

Arriving there we saw the yuppies parking too, also having seen them at Jordan River and earlier at Point No Point. The male yuppie got out of his car and had western written on the back of his jacket. What was that? A direction? We wondered why anybody would have a direction on his back and decided he was an engineer. I wondered to myself, what would my jacket read—down?

We went to our respective pee houses. Hers had a little symbol stick figure on it wearing a dress and I smiled to myself, but my smile disappeared inside my stinking wood and fibreglass stall as the light turned my penis into a horrible rotting purple thing, temporarily terrifying me until I saw that my hands were also the same colour. It was just the lighting. We went down to the beach and stood once again looking at the ocean. There was no one on the beach except a woman sitting on a log under an umbrella gazing out to sea and giving us an Emily Carr profile, an eccentric tinge on the west coast canvas, but then behind us from the parking lot came the yuppies, and some rural dressed-up-on-Sunday visiting the relatives type and a young blond girl trailing a mutant rain soaked mop of a dog-like form at the end of a long leash. We watched in amazement at this thing scrabbling across the rocks, stopping to pee against a log and before being called with "Come on Scamp!" It ran toward the water, and the little girl loved it. That little ball of wet glop was probably a calming influence on her life, and I hated my cynicism but I couldn't help it.

More people came and milled around us. I said "Let's go," and turned down the beach. But the innocent blond girl and mutant Scamp were going that way too and I wheeled and headed the other way before coming to my senses and realizing that we could just leave, which we did with her laughing at me saying "I've never seen you move that fast, ha ha ha." And what could I say? Later we rented movies and a tv from the garage on the highway, stopped for burgers at Milnes Landing where I pig ordered too much on her money, and we stopped at Kemp Lake on the way back and I showed her that mystical mist shroud with the mirror tree reflections. As we stood on the shore a rooster crowed in the distance, a Prairie echo in this damp green other world and it caused me to turn around and look at her, catching her looking at me. And back to the cabin for movies: *Alien*, and the greatest movie of all time, *Dawn of the Dead*. Drinking brandy and smoking hashish and digging the films, but me getting drunk and finishing the brandy I went for the scotch and ended the evening lying in the middle of the West Coast Road in the mandatory crucifixion position until she came out to save my worthless soul just like I wanted her to.

Al,

Last month a prairie warrior woman visited me. When she left I was eating a bowl of cereal. I said, “Leaving?” She said, “Yep.” I said, “See ya” without looking up and she laughed saying, “You’ll miss me when I’m gone.” And I yelled after her “Don’t threaten me!” There’s no defense.

AND A CHARLES BUKOWSKI poem for Al:

each man must realize
 that it can all disappear very
 quickly;
 the cat, the woman, the job,
 the front tire,
 the bed, the walls, the
 room: all our necessities
 including love,
 rest on foundations of sand—
 and any given cause,
 no matter how unrelated:
 the death of a boy in Hong Kong
 or a blizzard in Omaha ...
 can serve as your undoing.
 all your chinaware crashing to
 the kitchen floor, your girl will enter
 and you’ll be standing, drunk,
 in the center of it and she’ll ask:
 my god, what’s the matter?
 and you’ll answer: I don’t know,
 I don’t know ...

Sweet Andrea,

Richard arrived back from a week in Winnipeg on Friday, ticket pre-paid by mom, for the family reunion of the century, and arriving at



“Richard arrived back from a week in Winnipeg on Friday, ... and arriving at the surprise party for his father he found that dad didn’t recognize him, and when he told me this, hair shaved to a scrub, Chinese pigtail hanging over his shirt collar, I barely recognized him myself.” [With Richard, 1985]

the surprise party for his father he found that dad didn’t recognize him, and when he told me this, hair shaved to a scrub, Chinese pigtail hanging over his shirt collar, I barely recognized him myself. And all of his father’s friends were drunken old firemen just like the old man and all of his old friends had jobs and houses and whatever they needed and none of them had a thought in their head and Richard said, “You know what else? They’ve only got this much room for insanity back there.” And he held his fingers an inch apart. “And I don’t care what you say but we’ve got this much room out here.” And he opened his arms to show the gap. I had to smile because I knew he was right; as soon as you deviate back there it’s noticed right away, but out here you can streeeeetchhhhh like an elastic and not be noticed.

DOUG PHONED SUNDAY AFTERNOON from the Victoria bus depot and I arranged to meet him in the courtyard at Market Square, benches, trees, classical music, kids with ice-cream cones, funky shops going into receivership. Parking out front, I ambled through a passageway and came out on a balcony and saw him down in the courtyard feed-

ing part of his hot dog to the pigeons, shoulder bag at his feet, and I just leaned over the railing and watched him for a while until he looked up and caught my eye, neither one of us changed expression or moved and then he went back to feeding the pigeons, both of us feeling like strangers who recognized someone from a depression freight car ride or a hobo camp underneath the Johnston Street Bridge. And later that night litres of our favourite cheap dry white wine flowed down Tugwell Creek to the ocean and there was plenty of talk about writing but nothing was traded on paper this time, for the first time.

The next day Richard was over to help me raise the chimney for some extra draw for the wood stove and the bricks cost \$18 each so we used an abandoned brick that was broken in half and mortared it together, wiring it tight to prevent instant crumble and the three of us up on the roof, sunny fall day, and then climbing down the ladder Doug stepped on boing boing climbing up, yeeaooww jump off recovered in a second, and a bare electric wire ran above the ladder and it was “watch the wire” “Jesus watch the wire” and later that day “Watch the wire” became part of the conversation during the existential turns. And Doug talked about a construction job he worked on where the foreman’s last name was Knifer, and we traded shit job stories, laughing, finally working for ourselves. Richard and I watched Doug down below mixing more mortar for us and Richard said, “Remember on those labouring jobs there was always a guy named Pedro who couldn’t speak English that well and he always grabbed a broom and was sweeping or cleaning up or disappearing when a tough job came up.” We looked down at Doug and laughed because he was puttering around with a wheelbarrow full of mortar singing Merle Haggard songs like a black blues singer on a chain gang, all the effort in the song, the job just a cardboard backdrop. And we added two liners that I’d traded Wayne a half gallon of paint for last winter and the height went up about four feet, and we cleaned the roof off, climbed back down “Watch the wire” “Watch the wire.” Viewed from the north the chimney leaned to the left, a dip where the mortar had settled into a broken chunk, and viewed from the east the three feet of liner sticking above the bricks tilted towards the ocean. “Jesus, that’s no good.” “We can’t fix it now.” And Richard saved the day with “form equals function” and “it maintains the integrity of the building” and mortar dust,

wheelbarrow, ladder, truck, the work crew called it a day and clattered into town for an end of the job beer at Buffy's.

*What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night.
It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime.
It is the little shadow which runs across
the grass and loses itself in the sunset.*

—last words of Crowfoot,
Blackfoot warrior (1890)

Geraldo,

Out of money, car insurance expiring, I left for Vancouver two weeks ago seeking a new life. I walked up the sidewalk to Aguyin's. It was heaved and cracked with dirty clumps of grass trying to claw their way into life. When I knocked on the door there was no answer. I was just going to knock again when it opened part way. Aguyin stood in the shadow, his eyes bleary, face bloated and lined almost beyond recognition. He looked at me and nodded. I stepped inside and dropped my bag at the door, followed him down the hallway to the kitchen. The kitchen table was covered with life litter, unpaid bills, a few letters, part of a newspaper, two ashtrays, one heaped and dirty with cigarette butts, the other with crumpled tinfoil and some burnt out wooden matches. There were three chairs at the table. Tom was sitting in one of them. The overhead light gave the thinning hair on the top of his head a shimmering effect. It made him into a scene. Real but not so real. He looked up at me as I walked into the room, his eyes were watery and bulging. His face twisted into a spasm smile that flashed and was gone so fast that I wasn't sure that I'd seen it. Aguyin walked around me and sat down. I leaned back against the door frame.

Tom said, "Long time, no see." His voice sounded friendly but wired. I nodded. It was like being transported into a B-movie scene. I never thought that I'd see that psycho dope fiend scum pusher again, and it was a surreal scene having him appear in front of me, but also a comfort that I could, when confronted with scenes like that, feel detached and yet have my total awareness deal with it as if there were

no past, no childhood, no experience in life of any kind except that very moment. It was as if my whole life and everything that I'd learned was compressed into that room, into that house, with those two people. I stood in the doorway, everything framed in my mind, everyone seemed frozen in place, until Aguyin said, "Sit down man." I sat down. Tom said, "How are you doing, Barry?" His words rushing together, his huge gnarled ex-fisherman hands trembling, resting on the table, his eyes buggy and wild. Jesus, forty-one-years-old and cranked up like he was plugged into a light socket. I looked at him and said, "I'm doing great, Tom." Aguyin got up and brought a glass from the cupboard and filled it with rye whiskey. I took a long drink. Tom turned a piece of newspaper over and underneath it was a spoon with a bent handle. Suddenly, everyone's hands began moving at once. I picked up my drink and sipped on it. Aguyin dumped some tobacco onto the table and began forming a line. Tom took a syrette out of his pocket and pushed a pin down through the needle. All the time talking about his morphine mother. Mr Hip talk. The words coming out slowly but all pushed together. I heard my voice in the distance saying that I didn't do that kind of thing anymore. Aguyin kept his head down, busy sprinkling some tobacco onto the rolling paper, which made me flash on pot and hippies and mindless innocence. All the time Tom's voice was rolling on and on lulling me like the clickety clack underneath the railroad car when I was half-asleep and half-awake somewhere between the Alberta border and Vancouver over twenty years ago, and I heard him say, "Don't be rude" and it was so incongruous. It reminded me that I was fat and burned out and used up and I reached out like he was passing me a joint and popped myself like I hadn't missed a day and climbed back onto that horse again for a ride around the corral. Tom kept talking but Aguyin never raised his head. He wouldn't look at me. It hit the back of my legs first. Then the back of my neck. I turned sideways in my chair and leaned against the wall, thank you sweet Jesus, I'm safe and warm again, hold me, save me, love me. And Tom droned on with his bugged out eyes and trembling hands, everything under control because he had his paper maché strait jacket on. A man so violent that when you're talking with him you have to tip toe through the conversation. But within seconds it all became normal again. All of it. Yet I

was aware of an overwhelming sense of fear in the room. I turned my head, half expecting to see something, but there was nothing there. And that was my first night in Vancouver looking for work before my car insurance expired. Sneaking up on the world by doubling back on it.

The next morning I felt sick to my stomach. Aguyin was sitting at the kitchen table listening to the radio. He was smoking a cigarette and drinking a cup of coffee. Our eyes met as I walked into the kitchen. I shrugged and he looked down and shook his head. He opened a baggie and began rolling a joint. I sat down and we passed the joint back and forth, not saying anything. Someone being interviewed on the radio said that we now have a three to one chance of getting cancer. Aguyin took a toke and said in a strained voice, holding the smoke down, "I'd like to have those same odds in a lottery." I left later that day promising to get back after I'd changed my life.

I drove into Vancouver and left my car on a side street of West Broadway. I walked down the alley and into the back entrance of the old dirty brick apartment building. I knew where she hid her key and let myself into her apartment. Once again I dropped my bag at the door, on the run, but polite at the same time. I sat at her drawing table and looked down the alley, past the back alley telephone poles, and over the roof tops, and watched the sun going down. It looked like a slot of light shining out from underneath a door. This was the city that I was coming back to so that I could save myself. Slits of light, and junk, and noise, and air full of exhaust fumes, and days filled with people, because I'm dying without it, watching my life drain away. Yet when I try to worship everyday life, that prim proper lady turns into a rip-off whore. I'd come over there full of confidence and zest, hoping for a kick at the can, mumbling to myself, come on Macleod, you can do it, and there I was two days later sitting in a chair looking down an alley at a sunset that looked like a slit of light underneath a bathroom door when two days before it had been muted shades of pink dust stretched over a wild rolling ocean with white caps sparkling in the fading light. From ocean white-caps to city alleys. So what? From lost youth to wasted life. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step chairman Mao said, but you never think that you'll have to walk every goddamn one of them. Save me Che. Save me Jesus. Oh

fuck, they couldn't even save themselves. What chance do I have? Because we all know about Che, who said it was the duty of the intellectuals to commit suicide as a class, but as it turned out he committed suicide and the intellectuals got fat feeding on his corpse. Christ on the other hand was an off the wall everyday megalomaniac who became transformed by a quirk of fate. You see, my theory of what actually happened is that the disciples wanted the body of their master so that they could bury him in a secret spot and not have the Romans defile him in any way. They broke into the tomb in the dark of night and stole Christ's body, replacing it with another unknown crucified wretch. The next night the other guy rose!! It was the other guy who was the Son of God!!! Nobody knows his name, or even what his instructions were, or what his story was. The disciples almost shit when they heard about it but they weren't going to tip anybody off because it was such a great publicity stunt for their boy. So here we are now, thousands of years later, carrying the wrong cross. No wonder we lose our way, I thought, mentally crossing myself, and then jumping out of my chair when I heard a key rattling in the lock....

I STEPPED OUT AND WALKED ON CEMENT for two weeks, psychological cap in hand, and they would ask, "Why are you here, Mr Macleod?" And I'd say, "Well, I think I'm starting to die and I was wondering if I could slow it down by riding the merry-go-round for awhile." "And what can you do in exchange for admission?" "Oh, change a tire, wash dishes, juggle three oranges, check to see if my fly is up without anyone seeing the move, things like that." And life looked down with a smirk on its face, shuffled some papers and said, "Social skills have become more complex since you've been gone, Mr Macleod. Have you considered buying a lottery ticket?"

AND SO ON MY LAST NIGHT I AGREED to meet Aguyin so we could visit my friend Doug in New West and hide out for awhile in a place where words and music and honesty pinch hit for real life. But Aguyin took the wrong bus and he phoned me to tell me he was stranded on East Hastings Street. A "Please come and get me man" plea and a blast of traffic through the earpiece, a brother down in a free fire zone. I jumped in my car, it coughed and missed now, in poverty ill health,

and even though it stalled at all the lights, my mental siren was screaming and then two blocks away there was a break in the traffic. I could see him sitting on a bus stop bench, guitar case beside him, clothes clean but faded, the large gray head staring down at the sidewalk. He looked poor. He looked old.

I pulled over to the curb and he got in and all the way to Doug's he talked about the old lost single men on Hastings Street, the ones people walk past without even seeing, but Aguyin saw them. Saw himself in a few years. And he couldn't stop talking about them, about how many there were now. He described their walk, that aimless shuffle of the homeless. He talked about their unkempt appearance; Aguyin likes to be clean but faded. Sometimes they had sores on their faces. And always the eyes, most terrifying of all, the eyes, empty haunted sunken holes, totally devoid of any hope, the light having flickered out quietly years before, late one night in some bleak downtown room. It left Aguyin shaken because he can see it coming. Can feel that hyena breath of the future on his neck.

We drove on to Doug's place in silence. But arriving there to that colonial shamble on Third Street, we read the sign on the front door that said, "the side door boys" and we walked around to the side door smiling once again. The door opened before we knocked and everything was lifted by butterfly wings when pock marked gravel voiced Doug stood there before us, the most talented motherfucker I've ever met in my life, and we all grunted and swaggered and smiled and laughed and brushed against each other going through the door and found positions around the kitchen table while outside they came home from work.

We sat and drank whiskey and beer in the fading afternoon light and talked talked talked and the talk turned to music and words and poetry and life. We got higher than kites on each other and nothing existed but that moment when all the pain was turned into magic. And that is what life is all about. The rest of it is just the booby prize.

Page,

I was driving back from an unsuccessful job interview in Victoria last week and the following conversation took place on the radio ... more

or less. It involved a trivial pursuit game that they play twice a day. It went something like this:

Announcer: How are you today?

Contestant: Great! I just got a job!

Announcer: You got a job? That's great! how long were out of work?

Contestant: Uh ... about a year and a half.

Announcer: Well ... that's great! I'll bet you're glad that's over.

Contestant: It's just a temporary job on a dairy farm.

Announcer: Well that's great! No wonder you're happy.

Contestant: Yeh.

Announcer: OK. There's \$9 in the jack pot. Are you ready to play our game? It looks like this is your lucky day.

Contestant: I'm ready.

Announcer: All right. Here's the question. What did the "Freedom Riders" ride?

Contestant: Horses.

Announcer: No ... it was buses.

Contestant: Buses???

Announcer: Well too bad. Thanks for playing though.

Contestant: OK. Bye.

I don't know why this stuck in my mind. I suppose it's the only social commentary that you can get on AM radio.

Other than that event, my life is devoid of meaning. In fact it is no life at all. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. The only good thing about it is that death is no longer frightening.

Speaking of death, there were two last week. A psychological one and a physical one. Who's to say which is more valid.

Aguyin phoned Wayne last week to say goodbye. Wayne asked where he was going. Out in the garage to shoot himself.

The other was a life-long friend of Wayne's named Wally. He was a fifty-year-old logger with a bushy mustache who had taught Wayne a lot of the tricks of the trade.

Wally would get up every morning at 3:00 a.m. and get on the crummy at 4:00 a.m. It would be a four-hour ride up to Lake Cowichan to work. His hands were so crippled up from chain saw arthritis that he couldn't start his saw in the morning. Someone else would

start it for him and place it in his hands. After an eight-hour day logging, he would get in the crummy for the four-hour ride back to Sooke.

I was in the deli one Saturday about a year ago and I overheard Wally talking to an old man about the economic condition of the country.

Wally was saying that, “You know, there’s more and more people on welfare and UIC all the time. Pretty soon the government isn’t going to be able to keep paying them. There must be some way to cull them out of society. How do you think we can do that Charlie?”

Lately Wally has been working down at the dry land sort at Muir Creek. Every afternoon he would drive by in his flat bed truck with two big alder logs on the back. Pilfering from the job. One day he took the logs just up the hill on Otter Point Road to a friend of his. There was no one home. Wally got up on the back of the truck and hooked a PV into one of the logs and started to yank it off the deck of the truck. But the PV had only hooked into the bark and it came loose causing Wally to lose his balance. He fell backwards off the back of the truck taking the log with him. It landed on his neck, killing him instantly. I guess you could say that God culled him out.

p.s. It was good to hear from you Page and I especially liked your attitude. It reminded me of an old adage of Hunter Thompson’s—
“When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”

*Life goes by so fast.
Stop for a moment
and take a look at it.*

—Polaroid advertisement

Andrea,

I was washing dishes this morning and looked up in time to see the Tugwell Creek heron fly past. He was coming in for a landing, wings bent like the flaps on an airplane, neck straight out, legs tucked back.

A serious landing.

I ran for the door, dish towel wrapped around my neck, and leaned against the porch watching him as he stood near the outhouse, wings tucked in, shoulders scrunched down, neck tucked in, long beak sticking out, beady eyes peering out. He looked like a child molester in a trench coat standing across the street from the schoolyard at recess, waiting for a chance to flash.

He stood there for hours, taking a break from life. Knowing that he won't be disturbed here. Just like I'm doing.

Except my brain destroys any peace of mind as it fills with ricochets of despair, hatred, madness, and self-loathing. Is that supposed to be hyphenated? I don't use it that often. Unlike me, the bird sat there totally relaxed. Mind empty. Nirvana. Bliss. One with the universe.

I watched with envy, knowing that he was superior to me because he just is.

And I despair because I exist, knowing that I am not.

I left for Sooke late in the afternoon and he was still standing there, motionless, watching me drive away. Outside the liquor store, half-ton trucks pulled in and backed out, doors slammed, mufflers growled, a fat accordion player sat on a folding chair with a music stand set up in front of him. He was playing the "Beer Barrel Polka." A young couple were walking down the sidewalk, and when they heard the music they began skipping along, hand in hand, filled with their own youth, using his emptiness as a catalyst. Ah, love! To hear a sad note and skip with joy. I bought a mickey of LCB brandy. It lasts longer when it tastes bad.

When I got back to my shack, I settled down at the table and poured myself a drink. The heron and I looked out at the same sunset.

The sun has gone down now, the heron has flown back to Tugwell Creek for the night. I sip brandy from a wine glass and listen to KGO-San Francisco on the radio as I type this letter. The talk show host is interviewing Dr Emery, a plastic surgeon, and I think back to when I broke my face, fractured my skull, five fractures in my cheekbone, the bone sticking out under my eyebrow, my eyeball hanging out, fifty stitches, etc. And I remember the plastic surgeon who operated on me, cutting a hole in the roof of my mouth, and another in the side of my head, and he stuck his instruments through them as he put my cheekbone back together. They took my picture before they let me out of the hospital because the doc had done such a great job. And I remem-



“When I got back to my shack, I settled down at the table and poured myself a drink. The heron and I looked out at the same sunset” [The view, 1978]

ber the nurses telling me that he took a wedding ring off a rich fat woman whose skin had grown around the ring and he charged her \$5,000 but when he operated on an Indian woman who’d gone through the windshield of a car, cutting her face to shreds, he put her back together again and charged nothing.

HERE I AM HUDDLED OVER MY TYPEWRITER, sipping brandy, listening to Radio Free Shit. Speaking of huddling over a typewriter, and speaking of shit, I have given up the short story game. I’ve never been able to read anybody’s so why would I write them and add to the pile. My demise was a story called “Life Begins at Forty.” A gritty real life tale that was sent to *Grain Magazine* in Saskatchewan. Here is what they thought of it:

Thank you for submitting your story. We very much like the statement on page seven: “They don’t tell you . . . not to die.” But in general we feel the story is there to push a message about life and death, rather than develop character and situation. And the style is at times a bit stilted. I like the ending.

Best wishes, Brenda Riches

Thank you Brenda. I was starting to feel like I was doing homework by correspondence. Now I can just write what I want and sort it into piles instead. It's like dropping out of school.

Now the best piece of writing I've read all year was written by little Adam Laughy. He and Kim Foster from John Muir Elementary school in Sooke were the winners in a "Take a Policeman to Lunch" contest. They got to have lunch with Constable Mitch, and little Adam reported the adventure in the *Sooke Mirror*:

WHEN I WENT TO LUNCH with Constable Mitch MacMillan first we went to eat at Mom's Cafe, we had a hamburger and fries.

Then we went to the police station and looked in his car and talked about it. Then we went into the station. He unloaded his gun and let Kim and I hold it. Then he got out his handcuffs and put them on us, they are very heavy on your poor wrist it hurts. Then we met the other policeman. Then we went back to the school and Mitch gave me and Kim a pin and an award.

When he brought us back to school, on the way here he showed us a special gun which couldn't come out unless you pressed a special button in the car which only police are allowed to know so we didn't get to see it.

When we got to school he gave us a certificate and a pin and then talked to our class about drugs and so on.

Great, eh? I particularly like the part about "he unloaded his gun and let Kim and I hold it." But in general felt the article was there to push a message about macho perversion rather than develop character and situation. And the style was at times a bit stilted. I liked the ending though.

Sweet Andrea,

Last week I had a dream, a short one because I was yanked awake by a fear grab. It took place deep in the woods somewhere, west coast woods, damp giant ferns. I was with someone else, a vague someone just to the edge of the picture, we were bending or kneeling doing

some sort of chore when I suddenly looked up to my left and a black bear appeared on the scene, FAST!! from out of nowhere, and still moving it turned its head and saw me and came right at me before I had a chance to even stand up and millathoughts rocketed through my mind “Oh shit no, it’s going to be all over me and I can’t stop it” and WHOOFF! Wake up, not heart pounding sweat drenched sitting bolt upright wake up, but eyes open, contemplating.

ON WEDNESDAY AFTER A WEEK of discussion on the pros and cons, Wayne and I went up to cut the plants down, first winding cord around the branches bringing them in snug against the stock making them look like a folded up umbrella then sawing them off at the base and stuffing them into garbage bags, one on each end, then tying the bags in the middle with twine, ending up with two plastic bundles to trundle out with. Half way through the job, Wayne was tying up the branches and I was kneeling down holding them up. I looked over to my left at the open gate and it was FLASH PSYCHO SHOWER SCENE REPLAY OF MY DREAM, Shit this is it, same position, everything, but no bear came charging out but instead out of nowhere a goddamn helicopter came WHAP WHAP WHAP over the trees at a half tipped angle and a siren went off WHOOP WHOOP!!! We didn’t know whether to shit or salute. It hovered about thirty feet above us, there wasn’t enough room to land, and a voice boomed over a loudspeaker STAY WHERE YOU ARE!!! YOU ARE UNDER ARREST! Wayne and I both ran for the gate and cut down towards the creek through the trail we’d cut and the chopper moved over with us WHAP WHAP WHAP heart hammering adrenaline pouring through my veins, salal and salmonberry branches whipping and twisting from the down draft wind whump of the helicopter, and we hit the creek splash stumble feet soaked and pushed through a covered area clambering over a fallen log hidden from sight and the air was filled with the WHAP WHAP WHAP, the tree branches bending and twisting heart hammering, and all of a sudden KA-POW!

Again, all of this happening within seconds and the sound of the chopper blade shifted into a WHUP WHUP WHUP whup whup as it pulled up and away from where we were and Wayne’s voice filled the silence with “There! That’ll get the fuckers off our backs.” We ran



“Wayne and I went up to cut the plants down...” [At the marijuana patch, 1985]

back through the creek bed and picked up our fallen bundles and headed northwest through the jungle overgrowth, moving quickly, hands and face cut from salmonberry branches, heading for Tugwell Creek north, no way to be seen or followed, the void. Working our way back down the creek, arriving at nightfall, home free, fugitives no more, unrecognized, nothing to happen now until those winter tokes pass through the lungs with a little extra zip.

I WENT TO TOWN TODAY FOR A HAIRCUT and changed my mind, two-month beard shaggy bum shuffle collar turned up fuck 'em and bought two packs of typing paper instead. Clean-cut wholesome paper under my arm and I shuffled down government street in Victoria and a hooker smiled at me and I eye wrinkled smiled back at her and walking past her thinking gee her smile was warm, it made me feel good. I felt like going back and giving her a dollar and saying



“I went to town today for a haircut and changed my mind, two-month beard shaggy bum shuffle collar turned up fuck ’em and bought two packs of typing paper instead.” [1980]

“Thanks for the smile.” Or saying, “Why don’t you just charge people a dollar a smile and work a five-hour day like teachers do,” but didn’t. Happy for the smile anyway I turned left on Johnston Street and I walked by a hole in the wall place where this t-shirt jumped out at me right through the window without breaking the glass. It really struck my fancy, I thought it was funny, so on an impulse I went into the store which was smaller than my Tugwell bathroom and bought it for you on the off chance you are still accepting gifts and went through the size quandary again asking the salesgirl what size she wore, just like the Tugwell sweatshirt where the girl was larger and taller than you and I bought her size, this one was short and smaller than you and I bought her size. I don’t understand the rationale behind this because my life is slow and laid back until the moment of purchase and then everything speeds up, my pulse races, vision blurs, I panic, and these wrong size things end result hurtle through the mail to you.

*they were growing a little tipsy about their dreams,
which mingled with those of the other dreamers in
the pub, to form that transparent bauble that hangs
wherever people are trying to somehow get through
another midnight; it's a cheap ornament and
vanishes with a little "pop" at three o'clock, but
while it lasts, it lasts, and that's all you can say...*

—William Kotzwinkle

Doug,

Tom Waits said, "got no spare, got no jack, you don't give a shit cause you ain't never comin' back" and that summed up the note I left for her twelve years ago and I headed for the coast, clothes piled up in the back seat of the '63 chevy, driving through the mountains with one hand on the steering wheel, the other keeping the gear shift from popping out of high. But I never forgot her and found out years later that she had come out to the coast at one point and walked down the streets that she thought I would live on and knocked on doors on the off chance someone would know me. Then me phoning eight years later, "This is Barry... remember me?..." And a second of silence, then "I've still got your note you fucker!" But we wrote back and forth and she flew out and drew on my door and we wrote back and forth some more and she phoned late one night and said, "What would you think if one day you opened your door and my sewing machine and my dancing shoes were sitting outside your cabin door?" And I hesitated, only for a second, but it was too long and she went to Mexico instead with a musician she met in a bar and sent me a postcard that said, "It's really interesting travelling with someone you don't know." But it didn't matter. Then she went to France for a year to write poetry and drink wine and we wrote and wrote and she looked like a Gypsy and loved like a Gypsy but no man made it past a year and a half with her and I tried to put her out of my mind like I always do until I got this letter that started "There's no easy way to tell you this. I've got cancer..." And then a few weeks ago, picking up the mail on the way to the laundromat and there was a special delivery letter there, been sitting there for eight days and tearing it open I read "leaving for Van-

couver on the train on July 17th, please phone collect and I can give you a number that I can be reached at in Vancouver. Would really like to see you.” I looked up from my letter and blurted out “What’s the date today?” And the answer comes down from over by the dryers “the 17th.” I drove to the phone booth and phoned collect but there was no answer. I hung around for a couple of hours, phoning, phoning, but there was no answer. What will she think this time?

AND THE NEXT MONDAY I WAS SITTING at the table and there was a tap at the kitchen window. I turned around. There she was. Hunted me down this time and we left for up-island. Five days of motel rooms, and lying in bed at night, talking in her sleep, I heard her say “I don’t want to die.” And another night after boozing at Boston Pizza in Campbell River she lay in my arms and remembering me leaving said, “I’ll never forgive you for that . . . never . . .” And another night “What would have happened to us if we’d stayed together?” And I said, “You’d have left me after two years,” giving myself the world’s record and she smiled a Gypsy fortune-teller secret smile. And then back to Tugwell for a few days, then she had to leave for reality, for future tests, for a verdict in early September, one way or the other, and I arrived back home from driving her to the ferry and I just stood outside for a long while, elbows leaning across the back of Jan’s truck, head down, thinking about her, the ocean rolling in the background, thinking of nothing but the essence of her.

Then looking up and through the back window of the truck, seeing her morning coffee cup still perched on the dashboard, and back inside the cabin a half cup of coffee sitting on the table and I had to keep busy, trying not to think so I got the mower out of the shed and began a two-hour lawn mow, up and down. Inside my head I could hear the sound of her voice, the way she sometimes stretched out a vowel, the movement of a hand, the fingers, a raise of the eyebrows, a rise and fall in the inflection of her voice, her own accent, subtle music, so sweet, and back inside I reached down to pet my new cat and I heard the sound she made playing with it, rolling her r’s prrrtt prrrtt. And I dug out her old passport photo and looked at it, the eyes sad, solemn, so distant, so unattainable, like an exotic Gypsy, and remembering watching her walk through the surf at Qualicum Beach,



“I reached down to pet my new cat and I heard the sound she made playing with it, rolling her r’s prrrtt prrrtt.” [With boing boing, the manx cat, 1985]

skirt bundled around her thighs, looking out to sea, the wind in her hair, and I remember her saying “What if?”

And I’ll never forgive myself for that . . . never.

*haven’t heard from you.
You must of fucked up.*

Gerry,

I am now the sports writer for the *Sooke Mirror*. This was today’s column:

THE OTHER DAY GOD WAS OUT on the mound again. He smoked a fast ball by Roger Maris for strike three. The last out. Another no hitter for the big guy. The last time anyone touched him was when Gandhi beat out a bunt for a single.

The bull-pen can kill you in that league.

Christ hasn't got that blazing fastball anymore, so he gets you out with a lot of junk—curve balls, knucklers, off speed pitches.

Buddha slows the game down. He fidgets a lot before his windup, touching the brim of his cap, tugging at his collar, hiding the ball behind his back. His best pitch drops just in front of the plate like an orange rolling off a table. People have wrenched their backs trying to knock that one out of the park.

Mohammad, on the other hand, is a no nonsense pitcher. He'll dust you back from the plate, throw at your wrists, keep you back where he wants you, then gets you out by throwing pitches at the outside corner of the plate.

But God, he just overpowers you. Throws to your strength. Challenges you. "LET'S SEE YOU HIT THIS ONE OUT OF THE PARK, ROG!!"

He blew the last fastball right down the middle of the plate. Roger didn't even get the bat off his shoulder.

(p.s. Just joking. I am not the sports writer for the *Mirror*. I am nothing more, nothing less.)

*For every talent that poverty has
stimulated, it has blighted a hundred.*

—John W. Gardner, President,
Carnegie Foundation

Andrea,

I first noticed him last fall. He walked the streets of Victoria, wild hair and beard starting to turn white, clothes faded and worn, boots the colour of dust. He carried a worn leather zippered folder under his arm. He walked with a hitch and it seemed as if his hip bothered him. I would pass him many times in a day in my aimless city wanderings. Our eyes never met. I wondered what was in his folder. Poems? Meanderings of genius? A life? I still see him on the street. There is no folder anymore. The clothes are even more faded and worn. He has nowhere

to go, nowhere to live, no future. He will not be saved for there is no one to save him. He can't soak in the tub to relax. He can't have his friends over. He can't sit in his favourite chair. He can't lie down and watch a little colour tv after supper. Sometimes I see him in the library during the day, head on his chest catching some sleep that wasn't allowed him the night before.

The library is full during the day now. It's harder to get a seat. It's mostly single men in their thirties and forties. Hipster mustaches, jeans, hush puppies. They still have money in the bank or vic coming in. They read in the literature section. Occasionally they glance up, our eyes meet for a fraction of a second. They seem bewildered and frightened. They can't believe this is happening to them. But my white-haired friend and I always avoid eye contact. He can't stand to see pity and I can't stand to see my future. It's a surreal feeling when your life has been thrown away. If he'd married a nurse it wouldn't have happened. She'd still be working. He'd have a home. He could job hunt and become discouraged, start to drink too much. His friends would become concerned about him, and that would be it. Or he could have inherited some money from his parents and be living on a small monthly allowance, barely enough to get by on, or his brother-in-law could get him a job at the garage, or he could move in with his two sisters like my uncle did. Or if he had the youth and looks and most of his ego he could move in with a woman with a job, or a woman with a place to live. It's like they say, there are lots of opportunities out there if you just apply yourself. But when they pull the plug on you, it's so quick that you're gone in a flash.

I had a taste of it last year, nowhere to live, no money, many was the night that I longed to hear Art Pepper blow a little blues for me, or be able to sit in my favourite chair and reach back and pull a book from the bookcase. Not asking for a lot, not asking for love even, just to have some feeling of myself around me. But there was nothing there. Friends don't drop over because there is nowhere to drop over to. They relate to you differently anyway. You are outside of the social structure. There are no more hearty fellow well met drinking evenings. You're hungry. They can smell it on you. It changes what you are. You feel it. They feel it. You both hate it, but deep down inside they want it to go away, to become what it was before.

*The things that I would do, I do not, and
the things that I do, I would not do.*

—Saint Paul

Bill,

Once a week I drop in for a couple of mugs of beer at Buffy's place, sit in a corner, hide behind a newspaper and eat dixie cups full of free peanuts until I feel like vomiting. It allows me to have a light supper. The bar maid is a tall blond with a voice that sounds as if she shouted herself hoarse at the local softball game the night before. As she drew my beer, I noticed that her nipples were trying to push through her blouse. They seemed insistent and alert. I withdrew to the corner wishing that I hadn't looked. Three questionable people watched me intently from the other darkened corner.

A dog sat in the open doorway. He took two steps inside and the barmaid pointed a long finger at him and said, "OUT!" in a husky growl. The dog took two steps back and sat down. She responded with a throaty "Good boy!!" The dog happily wagged its tail. I tried to imagine her saying "Good boy" to me in that same tone of voice.

A man and a woman sat on bar stools, heads together, deep in conversation. After a while, the woman got up and left by herself, her fingers fluttering as she trilled a cheery bye-bye. I wondered why they talk like that. You know, the baby talk bye-bye. I've noticed the more skillful ones use the ping-pong style of bye-bye. After she left the man sat alone and said to no one in particular, "I don't think her elevator goes all the way to the top floor."

Sundog came in and bought me a beer. He leaned back in his chair and eyed the barmaid. "Nice tits eh?" he said in what I thought was an overly loud voice. I was reading my newspaper and didn't reply. He nudged my chair and said again, "Nice tits eh??" I felt compelled to grunt a monosyllable in agreement.

Two unemployed loggers came in, half drunk in the middle of the afternoon. They'd been out trying to cut firewood for spare cash and had decided to take the day off. From logging to kindling in one short year. One of the wonders of the free market system.

The barmaid began telling the loggers about being a contestant in the wet t-shirt contest at Jordan River the night before. "When I saw what we were supposed to wear I said no way I can't wear that in front of my regulars so I just wore what I had on you know." And a short throaty machine gun burst of laughter cut across the room HUH HUH HUH. One of the loggers leaned over the bar and said something in a low voice and she said in mock horror. "No! I was a good girl all night, but that didn't stop me from having fun!!!" And we got another burst of laughter that I soon learned always stopped at three HUH HUH HUHs.

Sundog couldn't keep his eyes off her. Obviously fired up he said, "You and I should go into Victoria some night to the Old Forge."

"I can't afford it."

"We'll take some home brew with us," he said hopefully.

I tried to imagine myself outside of a disco in Victoria sitting in a half-ton truck sipping home brew that tasted like fingernail polish remover, then fortified with that homemade Dale Carnegie course, swaggering inside and trying to pick up a woman half my age. I couldn't think of a worse nightmare.

I turned my attention back to the barmaid who was in the middle of a story about the drunk who broke into her house the other night and was evicted with an indignant, "You can't just come in here and jostle my bed at three in the morning." One of the regulars, I suppose.

She asked one of the loggers to go down to the corner store and pick up some nylons for her. He said only if he could put them on her when he got back. HUH HUH HUH she replied.

I got up and left. Sometimes it scares me when I fall in and out of love that fast.

Gerry,

Last week the first storm of winter hit and lasted all night. Back came the old familiar winter Tugwell sounds of a creaking old cabin, brush drum rain on a tarpaper roof... and sometimes for just a second you could almost hear the moan of a prairie wind, and the next day help-

ing Richard put the roof on his cabin, the weather cleared, the ocean turned shades of blue and turquoise. There was a steady roar from the swells coming in and the westerlies brought in air from way out to sea that was so clean and fresh that I thought of it as being brand new.

A heron stood in the creek, perfectly still, and as I watched the heron took one very methodical step, its long stick leg lifting slowly up out of the water and then ... slowly ... slowly ... it slipped gently back in. For a finale it stood motionless again as leaves floated past on the water like flower petals.

A squall appeared beyond Sheringham, black and angry, the ocean turned gray, and Richard and I turned our collars up as we hurried the tap tap tapping of our hammers. The squall passed through in ten minutes and ribbons of sunlight broke through the clouds and the rain changed to a soft mist, the kind that turns any day into an Irish morning. The colour of the ocean changed yet again. I had an overwhelming sense of freedom. Like the squall, it also passed.

*There's no money in poetry.
But there is no poetry in money either.*
— Robert Graves

Dear Sweet Lady of Despair:

When I got back from Port McNeil, Aguyin, and Bill Watson were waiting for me. We spent the early afternoon sitting around the table drinking out of half finished prairie whiskey bottles and chasing it down with beer listening to jazz and dope addict Fred Neil on the stereo.

Later that night Aguyin was lying on the chesterfield snoring and Bill hollered “Hey! Gordie!!!” and he tossed awake as Bill and I drank some more and listened to Art Pepper and talked about music and life and all that shit. Aguyin started snoring again, only louder than before, and we began to talk about Aguyin’s snoring. We discussed the various ways to stop a snorer from disturbing the other occupants of a dwelling and I figured the only good way was to fire a shot — prefer-

ably into the snorer. Later Bill crashed onto the floor and I retreated to my room and suspended plywood plank. Aguyin was snoring up a storm. Bill and I hollered through the wall about the people we had known, the dead ones, the ones that have disappeared, the ones that are still around but didn't make it.

Finally after a particularly loud series of growling snarling snores, Bill said, "I think you're going to have to fire a shot, Barry."

So I got out of bed and got my revolver out from under the pile of clothes. It was already loaded with magnums so I walked out and fired a shot into the woodpile. Flames spit from the gun as it bucked in my hand. The noise was so loud in that little cabin that it almost left me in shock. Aguyin bolted straight out of bed into a sitting position with his eyes wide open. This was right in the middle of a snore.

He said, "Jesus Christ! What was that?"

I said, "I almost shot you man."

He lay back down. "Well why didn't you?"

And he went back to sleep. But he didn't start snoring for almost an hour.

And the next day we had a great supper with Wayne diving from his canoe and catching twelve crabs, sometimes coming up with one in each hand. And we had hot dogs and hamburgers and tequila and beer and drugs. Then a blazing fire on Tugwell Creek with Aguyin playing guitar and bamboo flute with Bill playing mad insane bongos sending a rhythm pulsating across the creek and into the night. And later Aguyin playing jazz riffs on his guitar and the firelight flickering off Bill's beautiful beautiful face that's lined with a thousand tiny deaths and he recited a poem that went on and on and built with the rhythm of the guitar and reminded me of Ginsberg's *Howl* in a remote Tugwellian bonfire way.

THEY WERE HERE FOR A WEEK and when they left I really felt alone. I went into Sooke where it was so hot at the laundromat that they'd moved the chairs outside. Orange plastic chairs with a morose looking teen-age girl in cut-offs sucking on a Coke and sticking to the wet plastic. Inside was Rick from Anderson Road, just off work because of fire season.

“Goddamn it Rick!! You used up all the machines!!!”

(Loggers like it when you roar and bluster like that.)

“Hey Barry. No, there’s one left here.”

I dumped three weeks of underwear and socks into it, pushing and cramming to stuff them all in for seventy-five cents and we went off to Buffy’s for a beer while the clothes were washing. The place was packed with loggers and rednecks. Rick bought me a beer, turning down the \$2 bill I offered, and patting me on the back when he got up to get the free peanuts. We sat and talked and he told me about how the Italian prisoners of war in WW II were all given cars and houses by the Canadian government.

“I didn’t know that,” I said. (The beer was free.)

A guy with a bushy mustache and wire rimmed glasses got off his bar stool and sat down at the beat up piano in the corner and started playing some real toe tapping boogie woogie music, loggers laughing and talking, Rick telling me about the politics of the proletariat.

THEN BACK TO THE LAUNDROMAT and there was Lorraine, the whiskey voiced mama from the trailer on the bluff above Tugwell, still driving into town four nights a week and slinging booze at Harpo’s where the music is so loud that she has to wear earplugs.

She was standing beside her car with her high-heeled shoes on and her long long legs but I wanted to talk to her just to hear her voice. Her car was faded and dented and rusted. It looked like an opener.

“Hey Lorraine! It looks like your car is feeling the pain.”

“Yeh, but the tires are good.”

“Yes they are.”

She smiled and I thought of the Eckankar freak who lived at the creek for a year and spent his life savings of \$3,000 on her and never got to sleep with her.

“So how are you doing?” I asked.

“Well I ain’t got a nickel yet. It looks like I never will, but I’m having a good time. I can pay all the bills and I spend all the rest, but it don’t look like I’m ever going to have anything.”

“Kid, you’re already a success,” I said.

She laughed her whiskey laugh and made me happy.

Man is biologically sick.

—Wilhelm Reich

Doug,

A new ribbon. A new lease on life. The only problem is that I've been burning out too many brain cells. I can't seem to get a handle on conceptual thought anymore. This certainly doesn't leave me at a handicap in real life, but it's upsetting for my own personal entertainment. I'd been vaguely aware of it for some time now, but it was brought to my attention yesterday. I've always remembered the old adage — if others notice it too, it must be true.

I came home from the bar and had spaghetti, bread, and an avocado for supper. I couldn't finish it because I felt a little sick from all the free bar peanuts. I usually dump things like that in the fire, but there was no fire, so I flushed it down the toilet. The water rose to the top. I took a stick from the woodpile and pushed it around in the mush and flushed it again.

Suddenly I was overcome with an emergency need to shit. It was working its way out of my asshole before I could even get my pants down. I looked down at the bowl. The water was coming up. I sat down and tried to dump before the water got to the top. I dropped a GIANT turd just as the water started lapping at my ass. I jumped up and looked down. All the slime and swill and toilet water was overflowing onto the floor but my turd SANK like an ANVIL! I caught a glimpse of it just as it was diving straight down into the murk. That's a weird feeling man, when your shit wants to get away from you so badly that it swims out of sight as soon as it hits the water. I grabbed an old tin can and started bailing the water into a pail. It was running onto the floor. I couldn't even see the turd anymore. I filled two pails with toilet crap before I got ahead of the back up. I jumped in the car and roared over to Sundog's hoping he had a toilet plunger.

I rushed into his cabin and surprised him with a breathless, "Hey man! Have you got a toilet plunger?"

"What, are you crazy? I have an outhouse for Christ's sake!"

"I know that. I just thought you might have one kicking around somewhere."

“What’s the matter. Did your toilet back up?”

“Yeh, I just dropped a giant turd when the water started lapping my ass.”

“You SHIT in the TOILET when it was BACKING UP???”

“I couldn’t help myself. It happened so fast that I couldn’t make it outside.”

“Why didn’t you shit in a paper bag?”

“I never thought of that.”

“That’s the trouble with you Macleod. You don’t think.”

See what I mean.

Conformity

WIFFEN SPIT IS A POINT OF LAND that runs like a finger and protects the harbour of Sooke from the anger of the Pacific Ocean.

Hunting season opened yesterday and six hunters were lingering on the spit as the sun began to go down. They’d come up scoreless against the ducks that day.

They stood in a group, talking, smoking cigarettes, passing mickeys of whiskey around.

A lone seagull flew by.

As one man, six shotguns rose and blew it away.

A few feathers floated down in the cool evening air.

It was explained later by a participant as, “Well, a guy works all day man. He has a wife and kids at home and a mortgage to pay. You know, sometimes he just feels like killing something.”

Page,

Aguyin showed up last week, a Friday afternoon horn honk, big blue ’72 Ford wagon, (\$500 from his next-door neighbour) and I went outside to see a large graying man with a “John Deere Performance” cap. Old homeless Aguyin finally out in the real world, hard to be hip after all these years—he said he’d always wanted a John Deere hat years ago when everyone had one, but now that he’d got one, nobody wore

them anymore. He said he stood in the line-up at the ferry terminal and no one had anything to read, so they stood around and read his hat.

We stood outside in the sunshine and the shadows and he talked about being crucified on a bicycle tire with elastic nails so that he would sway in the wind, and he wanted a length of wind chimes hanging out of his asshole so they would tinkle as he moved.

But later when the sun set red, pink sky, blue silhouettes, the cat on a log, back arched, and old raggedy man Aguyin hunched over playing his grandfather's wooden Irish flute to the sunset ... and back inside by the fire he sang his latest greatest song "Jessica Spring" about a ten-year-old girl he knows in Richmond, and it sounds like a hundred-year-old Irish ballad, so beautiful, so sweet, so sad, about a love for Sweet Jessica Spring, so moving you almost weep when you hear it, whatta Aguyin! And I asked him how the little kid reacted when he sang the song for her. He said she was over at his place, sitting at the kitchen table colouring in a colouring book, and Aguyin sat in the corner with his guitar and began playing the song, first time sung to anyone, and he began singing it softly, no intro, and all of a sudden she stopped colouring, and just sat there with her head down staring at the colouring book and a little smile appeared on her face and just sort of stayed there for the rest of the day, and then later he sang the song for the mother and she just broke down and wept it was so beautiful.

IT'S EIGHT-THIRTY, FRIDAY NIGHT, stove groaning, foghorn, toilet dribble, and I'll be leaving for Saskatchewan in a week or two to see an old friend, dying to see me you might say, and I think of going back there, how things are always moving, people moving things from room to room, or moving from house to house, province to province, relationship to relationship, all over the world. And someday the balance of the earth will shift one time too many and someone walking on the beach will pick up a piece of driftwood and send us hurtling off into oblivion.

ON AGUYIN'S LAST NIGHT HERE we went to visit Jan and Mary—whiskey/beer/pot. Mary came home and Aguyin offered her a drink,

and her day had been so hectic, and she said “Sure!” in a squeaky Mary Poppins voice. That’s the way she talks all the time “Let’s get down to some serious drinking,” she squeaked, and I get such a kick out of it, and drinks went round and Jan began to squint and rumble while Mary was pert and prattly and then BRANG! right into the middle of the evening a phone call from Malaysia, and Jan talked to Malaysia in a gravel voice, head bobbing back and forth, silly grin on his face “What’s up Steve?” And what’s up is that the Chinese are moving in on them, “Ohhh?” Jan says on our end, talks for a moment longer, hangs up and says “Well, the Chinese are moving in on us.” And that’s it, Aguyin filling the silence with “I always thought you were with the CIA, Jan.” And so did I but he just laughed and poured drinks while Mary painted Aguyin’s forehead in Indian-from-India markings, long black line, red dot, and Aguyin kept rubbing his forehead and circling his eyes with his fingers while he drank and turned it into a black circle around the eyes New Guinea headhunter design, and back at the cabin out of the blue, Aguyin said to me with all sincerity, “I thank God that I was chosen.” And I looked at this man and he had a red dot smudged on his forehead and large black circles around his eyes.

So on his last evening he tried to “Christ” on me. But instead of rising the next day, he drove to Denman Island, hoping to find a shack to live in.

He left some poetry on a brochure:

It hurts more to try and get away
than to stay and take it take it take it.

Where Bambi Goes, Nothing Grows

LAST SUNDAY WAS THE FIRST DAY in four weeks that the ocean was blue instead of gray. There were pale blue mountains across the strait lurking under a wispy cloud layer of pure blue sky.

I sat at the kitchen table and it made me feel good just to look at it. I was interrupted by a sharp knock at the back door. It was Richard.



“Drinks went round and Jan began to squint and rumble while Mary was pert and prattly and then BRANG! right into the middle of the evening a phone call from Malaysia ...” [Jan and Mary Johnson in their living room, 1997]

Before I could get up, he barged in, his voice tinged with excitement, “Listen! You’ve got to kill something.”

“What?”

“A deer’s been hit out on the road. Come on!”

I grabbed my pistol, already loaded with magnums, and followed him out to the road where we found a young deer lying on its side.

An aging hippy with a gray ponytail knelt beside it. He was a potter from the interior and was staying with Richard, trying to get his head together after a spell in the mental hospital.

His hand rested on the deer’s side, comforting it. I was surprised to see tears running down his face.

A man with a bushy mustache wearing a Kramer Kat hat stood off to one side looking uncomfortable. His truck was pulled over about a hundred feet up the road.

His kid sat looking out the back window. His face and hands were pressed against the glass. The sound of his crying carried all the way back to where we were standing.

I looked down at the deer. It was bleeding from the right hip.

I asked Richard how badly it was injured. He pushed the wound open, covering his hands in blood, like a sacrament.

The deer lay silently, wet brown eyes taking in everything. We discussed the alternatives. The deer tried to get up when our attention was diverted. It fell immediately, legs splaying, obviously hurt bad.

Richard said, "You've got to kill it man."

"I don't want to do it," I answered, but I was already imagining what it would be like.

The click of the cylinder as I cocked the hammer.

The slow squeeze of the trigger.

Killing. That's easy.

What would it feel like?

The redneck from the truck said, "I don't want my kid to see it."

I said, "OK, split man. We'll take care of it."

We watched the redneck walk back to his truck.

Richard said, "It has to be done. If you don't do it, I will."

He held his hand out for the gun and said, "What do I do?"

I looked into his eyes and knew that he didn't want to do it.

I turned away and said, "No . . . I'll do it."

I looked around for traffic.

Nothing.

I pointed the gun at the deer's head. Its moist brown eyes looked up at me. Richard turned his back. The graying hippy kept his hand on the deer's side.

The gun bucked as I shot it in the head. Its head reared up and its eyes bulged out popping in death fear. The body lay in the ditch. Its legs were kicking.

"I don't think it's dead yet," said the graying hippy.

"It's just nerves," I said, an instant expert. "It's dead man."

We dragged the body over to Richard's car, threw it in the trunk and drove over to Sundog's. He skinned it and hung it from the beams in his cabin. According to his autopsy report, it had a broken leg and a broken hip.

LATER THAT NIGHT I LAY IN BED fantasizing about a Cadillac missing a curve out on the road.

A Social Credit businessman lay pinned behind the steering wheel. He was wearing a \$300 pin-striped suit.

He had a broken leg.

I went out and shot him in the head.

As an experiment. To see if it would feel any different.

Very nice, though there are dull stretches.

—Antoine de Rivarol,

commenting on a two line poem

Doug,

Into Victoria this morning to have my three month blood pressure check after phoning for two weeks and no answer at my doctor's office. His receptionist is great, a 1940s private detective secretary look about her, but very loose and not too concerned with the medical starched white we know what we are doing manner. You phone for an appointment and what ever day you suggest, she says "Sure," writes your name down, doesn't ask what's wrong with you, doesn't care, and says "See you then." And you show up and she ushers you into one of the side rooms and through the half closed venetian blinds I looked out on the green trees on the Johnston Street boulevard and every once in a while someone walked by, healthy, uncaring, and I felt that palm sweat Doctor's office other world feeling and it's one of those places where you're really alone, isn't it? I heard my doctor in the hallway talking to the receptionist and he's saying "And how many more of these people do we have to see?" and smiled because he told me once that he'd rather run a hot dog stand than be a doctor. Somehow that inspired confidence in me and he came in and took my blood pressure and it wasn't in the danger zone yet, but borderline, and he said, "Come back in a month. You may have just had too much salt yesterday." And I thought, right, too much salt in the scotch, too much salt in the beer, too much salt from sucking my thumb all night.

RICHARD CAME OVER LAST NIGHT, a tapping at the door, interrupting my typing, and he had to tell me about the two visitors that he'd had that afternoon, and he re-enacted the conversations, imitated them by pinching his eyes and making his voice squeak. He gave a capsule comment on their deepest psychological problems, complained about the interruption, and concluded with the usual "Boy are we ever out of it here." And I had to agree once more; it's always brought home when the world drops in. It's not the physical isolation. Or the social isolation. It's the mental isolation. But when regular everyday people show up, although none have come here in years, but Richard still gets them, they seem dull, trite, boring, their value system seems perverse. Yet we don't even have one anymore, and we bore ourselves to death, a pistol shot away from each other and we can't even make the effort to pull the trigger. I didn't have the heart to tell him that they come out here like people go to the zoo. Every time someone visits Jan from anywhere in the world, the car pulls up in front of my cabin even though I may not have seen him for months, and total strangers are trotted in for a visit, they bring their own drinks, and I do a few hand-stands and some soft shoe and then they pile into their car and drive down to Richard's place where he specializes in triple somersaults, and then away they go again.

And Richard tells his stories and I don't have any and we sit in silence while he eats my sunflower seeds and I drink my beer. Finally I say, "Well I have to get up early tomorrow 'cause I want to catch the early bus to Victoria." And he says, "I'm going to the city tomorrow too. Maybe I'll see you there." The expression on his face is the same one you see in a tavern in Greece when you are telling a friend that you're going to Yugoslavia next and they imagine seeing you there.

Richard left, and I walked outside with him and we stood looking up at the sky where thousands and thousands of stars were sparkling and twinkling with the swish of the milky way running through the middle of them and you can't help but feel like the speck you really are. And I wondered if the stars looked back down on us, would Richard and I be sparkling too?

LEAVING THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE, I went to the walkway between the buildings at Eaton's because there are usually some good street musi-

cians there, no traffic, and good acoustics. And joy of joys, one of my faves was there. This guy is about six-foot-one, wears a white and red baseball cap, a wide black belt with silver studs, faded cowboy boots, hair curling around his ears and shirt collar, a three day growth of beard, bleary eyes, and he's always trying to bum cigarettes and he has a beat up old guitar and a voice like Waylon Jennings with a lung full of smoke. What a voice! He makes gravel sound like wind chimes. "How's it going brother?" He rasped as I walked by. "Like shit," I answered and he gave me a sideways smile and cough laugh talked all at the same time and said, "I wrote that song buddy," and I laugh smiled and he wheeze laughed. I sat in the Victoria mid-day off the ocean breeze with the retired old ladies and listened to him singing. About noon a little guy with wire rimmed glasses and a Bobby Kennedy haircut arrived with a violin. I remember seeing him there last winter playing classical music for the Christmas shoppers as they walked by like zombies hugging their parcels and he was good, so good, and his music soared above their heads and he had to keep warming his hands, standing under the eaves in the Christmas rain. But today he went over to the cowboy in the baseball cap and they obviously had gotten to know each other and he opened his case and took out a fiddle, and they started to play together and it was magic, toes started to tap and the cowboy rasp gravel growled out the pain and hurting songs and the fiddle wove in and out of the lyrics and wept right there on the sidewalk between the Eaton's building and coins flew through the air and the cowboy gave a gravel voiced echo chamber "Thank you" and had a nod for everyone and they made my day so I gave them my afternoon beer money and I laughed when the cowboy said "Thank you" 'cause I'd throw quarters all day just to hear the sound of his voice. What wonderful people live on the outside. It's such a shame that it isn't wonderful out there.

THEN A FRIEND ARRIVED ON HIS LUNCH BREAK and bought me a beer anyway and we watched two tourists—he had a styled haircut, camera around the neck, fortrel polyester everything else, and expensive shoes, while she was heavysset, white blouse frills, blond streaked hair, giant sunglasses, white polyester pants, and he ordered a draught and she ordered a coke, had one sip on her coke and he said "Time



“And I wondered if the stars looked back down on us, would Richard and I be sparkling too?” [With Richard at Tugwell Creek, 1985]

is money baby,” and she got up and hurried into the bathroom. He stood up while he waited for her and drank his beer standing up. In a few minutes she hurried back and without sitting down again they left. Maybe on their way to the double decker bus ride.

Maybe you have a choice—time to drink your coke or time to go to the bathroom, but not both. “Time is money baby.”

They made me feel rich.

AND THE WHITE PHONE BUZZED last week and I picked it up and a strange voice said, “So, you had to let it ring twice didn’t you?”

And I was out of practice and said, “Uh, uh,” and the voice said, “So what are you doing?” I didn’t know what I was doing and couldn’t think fast enough to make up an answer. The voice waited and then I said, “Who is this?” and it was Anne. I’d never heard her voice on the phone before and I went over, you know, and Sherry the social worker was there with her shriveled right arm that doesn’t work, and a gimpy leg, and the most beautiful face that God ever put on the planet, an ex-lost soul fucking her way through a west coast hippy life until a big fisherman fell in love with her and now they have two sweet daughters and a log house up at Sherringham Point, and she showed me her pictures of their trip to Portugal and Spain and England and everywhere and Richard barbecued the tofu wieners and Anne’s kid came over and handed me the plastic wiener wrappers saying “Richard told me you saved these,” and some kelp washed in and Pia and Anne ran down to the beach to pull it in for the basket lady to use. Pia ran barefoot over the rocks while Anne yow! owed! How do you do that? behind her, and Richard and I decided to borrow a camera and take pictures of our trip overseas. A snap of the pathway up to Anne’s—Here’s Richard walking up the Hindu Kush, and the sunset going down behind Sherringham—Here’s a sunset at Papua, New Guinea. And so on, and no one would know, and here’re two peasant women gathering kelp at sundown on the coast of Madagascar, and the sun really did go down at Tugwell Creek, dropped behind the trees at Sherringham Point, sending up a brilliant orange glow that ran through the fog bank across the strait and turned it into pink fog a-go-go.

I Can Hear Cremation Calling

JUST SITTING HERE ON SATURDAY NIGHT ... 1:00 a.m. ... wondering who my pallbearers would be.

Richard ... Page ... Aguyin ... then who? Pam? Why not? I always liked Pam, besides it would be good for her to get out more. OK. That’s four ... who else? ... Betty? ... No. Maybe Linda, though ... at least I’d be assured that she would cry. How about Keefer? ... maybe ... who else? Jesus, I



“Pia ran barefoot over the rocks while Anne yow! owed! How do you do that?”
[At Otter Point, near Anne’s cabin, 1985]

can’t come up with six. I’ll have to go out with a garbage can with two handles . . . that way I could have alternates . . . in case somebody couldn’t make it.

Pam,

The white rain almost finished me off. Never warm. Ever. Could see my breath. Would wake up at 4:00 a.m. because my ears were cold. No water. Pipes frozen. One morning the cat’s dish was covered with a thin layer of ice. I took its little paw and smashed it through for it. It was fucking brutal. And I was also sick at the same time with the flu/cold. Everyone who didn’t vote Social Credit got it. But you know, all I could think about were those poor bastards out there sleeping in parkades and doorways and dumpsters and such.

Then last week, searching for the Ghost of Xmas Present, I slouched down Government Street at 10:00 a.m. . . . blue sky, clean fresh air with a touch of breath in it, a glow on my cheeks, and there was Christmas everywhere. A ragamuffin played classical violin xmas

music in front of Eaton's. Two Victoria yuppies stood watching him. She poked about in her change purse looking for the correct amount to give him. Tips they know, but they haven't got the rate for beggars down yet.

I passed by a woman loaded with parcels, leaning down to open a car door. "It's not on this street," she bleated. A voice boomed from the car, "I KNOW ITS NOT IN THIS STREET! THAT'S WHAT I GOD-DAMN TOLD YOU!!" She leaned back out of the car. Her parcels teetered. "You don't have to yell at me." I turned the corner... 'tis the season to be jolly.

Then to Harbour Square where you can get your picture taken with Santa for \$2.99. A giggling teenage girl hopped onto Santa's lap and squirmed around. Santa closed his eyes, lifted her up slightly and re-adjusted her.

A city worker was pushing leaves around with a wide broom in trounce alley.

There seemed to be a lot of short-haired women around who looked like cute men.

I ventured into "Watson's Primitives." The old man sat at the front. A tin airtight glowed in the back. Some safety pins hung from a card on the wall that read "Free safety pins if you are in need of one." I made a purchase and he put my money in his pocket and gave me change from his other pocket. A human cash register.

A sign in Shopper's Drug Mart said "Please shake your umbrella before entering...."

A man in his fifties stood reading his own stuff from a notebook. He kept lifting his feet up and down while he read. Trying to keep them warm in their tattered runners. There was a small box on the sidewalk for the coins. There was seventeen cents in it.

ho ho ho

Santa Doesn't Come Here Anymore

I VOLUNTEERED TO TAKE CARE OF A DOG over the Christmas holidays. A brown eyed tail wagging streak of a forest dog. It beat having the relatives over.

On Christmas day I drove into Sooke on the off chance that

the corner store would be open. Fortunately Mr and Mrs Small Biz were kind enough to take a little time off from their family holiday to make a few extra bucks to pay for the video games.

I picked up a newspaper for myself and a tin of Dr Ballards for the dog. I stood in the line behind four people who were buying mix. They bear-hugged giant bottles of Pepsi and Coke. Sky scraper sized boxes of potato chips spilled from their grasp.

Mr and Mrs Small Biz rang up consumer number one. The cash register chinged. The money changed hands.

And then Mr and Mrs Small Biz simultaneously blared out a hearty "Merry Christmas!"

I tensed. After another ching and subsequent exchange of greetings, I started to glower. I endured four replays of those Christmas junkies shooting up.

When it was my turn, I lay the newspaper on the counter and slammed my tin of dog food down on top of it. It startled them. They looked nervously at each other.

I glared at them, sending a silent message with my eyes, "Go ahead, I dare you to wish me a Merry Christmas you son of a bitch."

They rang up my order. Ching. And then, most blessed of miracles: no Merry Christmas.

Maybe they thought the dog food was my Christmas dinner.

*Think of death
as a pie in the face
from God...*

Don,

The holiday season started with a 10:00 a.m. joint at Rainbow Annie's, a short walk on the beach, then driving into town, a little high, some oompah music playing on the radio making Sooke seem like an Austrian mountain village — then into an empty lids up laundromat and later she browsed through the Sally Anne while I sat next door in the library, a pattern that has developed since the time she came across a



“I volunteered to take care of a dog over the Christmas holidays. A brown eyed tail wagging streak of a forest dog. It beat having the relatives over.” [With Jim Page (left foot), and dog]

pair of crotchless panties and hollered across the width of the store to me “HEY BARRY! LOOK!!” and as I turned to look she waved them in the air and yelled “CROTCHLESS PANTIES!! I DON’T BELIEVE IT! CROTCHLESS PANTIES IN THE SALVATION ARMY!!” And she waved me over. Everyone in the store watched me walk over to the pair of crotchless panties. They were a bright red colour. Like my face. They had a frilly black border around the crotchless part. The scene ended with Anne handing them to me and as I stood there in front of the audience with the panties in my hand, she delivered her last lines, “They’re only seventy-five cents. You should buy them.” As I said, this led to me waiting for her in the library, hiding behind a book.

PAGE ARRIVED FROM VANCOUVER later in the evening and took \$300 worth of Tugwell photos in the first two days. First time he’d been here in three years and he went wild. Page, Richard and I went for a Christmas day beach walk from Tugwell to Muir Creek. The weather was sunny, blue sky, temperature in the high forties, no Christmas

talk, no relatives, God what a day. And Richard and I watched Page wander around with his camera and tripod, stopping here and there, crouching down for a shot of this and that, and we renamed him “Meander Winkley” thinking this would give his photography career a boost. The name is important. Remember Englebert Humperdink, an obscure second rate lounge singer and when he changed his name it was instant super star. So we thought we could do the same with “Meander . . . Winkley.” It’s pronounced with a slight hesitation before Meander. Not a stutter. Just a silent skip of a beat. Richard phoned the next morning because there were some otter in the creek outside of his cabin that wanted their pictures taken. “Hello, is . . . Meander still there?”

Later Christmas night I played Cosmic Football with Page, two little boys with their re-built football game, laughing and psyching each other out, which gradually gave way to a melancholy, a feeling of having traveled a slow long wandering path, and coming out of it feeling flat, aware of no longer being what I had been, and all of that. Silent reflections in between the laughter. Booze and holly and semi-jolly.

Boxing day I took Page over to Jan’s yard so he could get some photos of half melted baby Jesus in a trash barrel, a twisted wire ladder high rise jumble and inside of it a dripping metal face, a little naked metal guy trapped inside a shovel blade, that’s my personal favourite, and the old trike with three feet driving it, and a new art gallery section with old second hand store pictures nailed to trees.

That night Page put on a triple bill slide show at my cabin—a pot-pourri, a Yukon hike, and the history of Tugwell Creek. Everyone who was everyone was there. Nine Tugwellites. The cream of society huddled together around the wood stove and a standing ovation with whistles and applause for Page when it was over.

The next morning over breakfast Page told me his most memorable childhood memory. When he was about four years old the family cat ate some string. A few days later a little piece of string was seen hanging out of its asshole. This went on for a few more days. Finally Page’s Dad decided something had to be done for the cat because it had become constipated and plugged up because of the string. Mom held it down and Dad pulled the string out of the cat’s asshole. Page said the string was a brown colour. Dad pulled it a little bit and the cat yowled



“Later Christmas night I played Cosmic Football with Page, two little boys with their re-built football game, laughing and psyching each other out...” [Setting up the game, 1981]

and clawed to get away. Then dad pulled a bit more and the cat screamed again. Then another length. Another yowl. Until finally the length of string was yanked out of the cat’s asshole and it yelped away to a corner, licked itself and went on with its life, leaving a seriously scarred four-year-old who relived again and again the cat asshole string pull.

I love stories like that. What’s wrong with me?

ON FRIDAY NIGHT WE LISTENED to Doctor Love from Portland on the radio. He was away on holidays and was replaced by Nurse Mendaheart and Doctor Huggable. Jesus, what a pair they were. The call of the evening was “I like to be wined and dined and although I am blind, I like spectator sports.” Unreal. Doctor Huggable came back with a great follow-up question “What is your favourite colour, Diane?” “Yellow.” Nurse Mendaheart asked, “How important is religion to you?” And Diane said that she’d once had a marriage annulled in a Catholic church. “Oh. You’re a spiritual person,” Nurse Mendaheart said.

THE NEXT DAY I WENT INTO VICTORIA to get my typewriter out of hock. On the way I passed the Sooke garbage truck. It has a decorated Christmas tree wired onto the top of it. Made my heart warm.

Then on the way home I stopped at Sooke for a few odds and ends, wine and wine, and I ran into Anne and her kid on the street looking for a ride home, and she invited me in for a drink of Scotch and a mid-day number. We sat and watched the blue gray ocean roll, listened to some Leo Kottke, the kid showed me her presents, the favourite one being a Fisher-Price radio with microphone attached, and she asked me to talk into it, and bolstered with the mid-day stimulant Tugwell coffee break, I really hammed it up with radio station CUKE/Sooke, and gave a news item: "A low flying airplane seriously injured a giraffe in Jordan River this morning," and an old George Carlin weather man routine: "This is the hippy dippy weather man with the hippy dippy weather man. Forecast for tonight, dark, turning to light by morning, and for tomorrow partly fair, mostly unfair." And the kid laughed at the first part and Mom laughed at the second part. What's it all mean?

Then a few hours into the new year I was shaken awake by the howling wind coming off the strait, the flap of the plastic where the porch window used to be, the Tugwell creaking and groaning of the cabin. The kind of sound where you feel more like you're huddled in a shelter than you are inside of a dwelling. The door quivered every once in awhile as if someone were trying to get in. The rain drove harder against the roof in the wind gusts, heewee WHHOOEEE, the door shaking and rattling, the shump whap whap of the plastic on the empty window, lying in bed, eyes open in the dark, feeling small.

The next morning I had a late breakfast with a sad eyed poet woman who showed up on New Year's eve, drinking, talking, "Marry me and move to Alberta," she said, and in the morning eating last year's eggs, she only wanted aspirin. We drove down to Jordan River to see Aguyin, not having been there yet, curious, but half wary of his madness now. People used to say "Wow what an incredible guy!" when they first met him. Now they draw you aside the next day and whisper "What's wrong with your friend?" He lives in a compound of shacks on a hill above Jordan River. It is referred to by the locals as "living on the hill." He was drinking his breakfast when we arrived.

Scotch and coffee. A retarded black lab he'd adopted lounged on the front step, fish float stuck in its mouth, covered with slobber and drool, tail whapping on the step, big bright dumbo brown eyes looking up, hoping for a float toss run down the road pick it up run back tail wag adventure. I reached down and gave the dog a scratch behind the ear and said, "Forget it pal. I used to do it for a living."

The next morning my friend Maxwell from Port McNeil showed up at 10:30 a.m. with a case of beer. "Want a beer?" "No thanks...." He left the next morning at 6:00 a.m. and took the last remnants of the holiday season with him.

INTO VICTORIA LAST SATURDAY, the muffler gone, wipers skidding across the windshield, the steering pulls to the left and the front brakes are gone—road and track car of the year for Tugwell Creek.

And I visited my token American friend and mooched a hot city bath, played chess and drank, rose early in the morning for the Sunday religion shows. Driving home I thought about them, thinking they were a lot of malarkey and WHAM! It was like God speaking to me and telling me to start a new religion. Malarkians. People who believe in all that malarkey. The guy rose. Sure we believe it! Mary was a virgin. We believe it! Absolutely!! We believe all that malarkey. If it caught on there would even be a spin off group of believers with a political philosophy call Malarksists. A philosophy probably started by a red nosed Irishman with a name like Michael Malarkey who had a twinkle in his eye and sat smoking a pipe in a thatch roofed stone pub on a winding green country road. And over the years they got the philosophy out of context by being too serious about it.

THEN A NEW DAWN TODAY. Laundry day with Rainbow Annie from Otter Point. We had the regular drudge hit town laundry, library, Sally Anne, Post Office routine. Then on to Buffy's for a free mug of beer, noticing that there was a new special shooter advertised—a Slippery Nipple. Big Nick showed up for his noon pail of beer, moaning about a New Year's diet. He's hit 307. Doesn't show it though. About six-foot-five or six-foot-six and looks about 270. I asked him if he wanted to arm wrestle but he was in a hurry. Then back at Anne's early afternoon marijuana smoke curling above the table, airtight crackling, a

seal surfaced, went under, I didn't even bother to mention it, BB King on the stereo, blue and hurtin' playing for the inmates in the Cook County jail in Chicago. No pain out here though, clean downy soft clothes nestled in wicker baskets. I sat looking out to sea, a mindless gaze. Anne sat across from me knitting a new door. There is something calming about sitting in the same room with a woman knitting. Time stands still.

Pam,

OK. Wine glass filled. Fire crackling. Cat scrabbling. Frogs croaking. We covered the movie. The flood. The calendar. What's left? Let's talk about politics since you brought it up with your "Whattaya think of Corey?" question.

So here we have the Philippines. Marcos the product of a rich land owning family. Corey Aquino the product of a rich land owning family. We have the American invasion and colonization. One of their more benevolent attempts I must say. We have the rural poor uprising, the Huks, who of course were horrible communists. The Huks fought the Japanese invaders. Marcos pretended to fight the Japanese invaders. Aquino Sr collaborated with the Japanese. Like most good businessmen, profit came first. They didn't have to adjust for Hitler very much in Germany either. After the war the Huks were exterminated so they couldn't take power. Another common scenario. The reds fought the fascists in China, Yugoslavia, France, Greece, Spain, etc. and then would be wiped out after the war so they couldn't threaten the power structure. Sometimes they won as in China, Yugoslavia, etc. But I start to wander and I have a feeling I will wander all over the pages as the letter goes. So throw it away if it becomes tedious. Anyway the Huks were wiped out after the war with the help of the American saviours. The various factions of the land owning ruling class took turns at the trough every four years but lacked cohesion and a common goal. So Marcos came up through the middle, took the reins of power, consolidated some of the landowners, and gave the people some strong guidance, but grew fat and corrupt and bled the country dry. In fact, the middle class today is even smaller

than it was thirty years ago, and finally when the rich land owners and businessmen started to feel the pinch they switched allegiance to an honest member of the free enterprise ruling class. Even at that, they had to form a coalition to get enough support to defeat Marcos in an election. I know. I know. He cheats. But I would estimate he still had about forty percent support at election time. Then the beginning of the end started. The two generals jumped ship. The army sat on the fence for a while waiting to see which way the wind was blowing. For a while I wondered if the CIA had forced someone to tip their hand too soon just to test the waters. One of the generals was an old Marcos crony who was jumping ship for the winning side. The other was a honourable army man trained by the Americans at West Point. So now Aquino takes over. She has to hold the factions together. I don't think she has the political savvy to do it. They will be maneuvering behind the scenes, the army, the right wing, the landowners, etc. But since she is the image to hold things together it may take about a year before you see the strings of power being grabbed. Of course the Americans will pour money into this new democracy and stabilize their military bases (we're talking about 60,000 of the bastards) and the multi-nationals will still get to exploit their profit and the West Point boy will take over the army and weed out the corrupt lazy faction so they can more effectively wipe out the NPA (New People's Army) which has replaced the Huks and stands for real social and economic change. Basically they are right back where they were before they started with the ruling class fighting real social change but with a better image this time because they are seen as a liberating force.

So the elite takes turns running the country again while fighting the communist menace. The hungry and the poor are still hungry and poor, you dig? Now good old Corey, who is a very nice lady and is very capable I'm sure, comes from a family and herself has holdings in what the American media describe as "sprawling sugar plantations." So Corey was lucky. She had a head start in a way. She has had a whole lifetime in which to do something about the plight of the workers since her privileged position in life was due to their labour. She benefited directly. Brian dies and Mila takes over. Ronnie croaks and Nancy takes over. Geraldine Ferraro becomes president. So what? Their job is still to put the status in status quo. Bennie and Corey. I'm not im-

pressed. Sure it's change. Sure they had to get rid of Marcos. But these are people who don't represent the kind of change that excites me.

Even an old bureaucrat like Fidel Castro did more to excite me last month. He shook up the cabinet and the legislature in Cuba saying, "I want to give the party a strong dose of feminism, of blacks and mestizos and a booster shot of youth." So out went one third of the ruling organ (like our cabinet) and more than half of the 225 member central committee (like our legislature) and those people were replaced by the above. It was reported in the Seattle paper as "the changes brought devastating demotion to many of Castro's intimates" and "it was not only difficult, it was traumatic, Castro confessed as he announced the re-organization." Can you imagine Bill Bennett doing that? or Brian Mulroney? Of course they don't have the power to do that. We live in a democracy here. We get to vote on different people who claim they can run the free enterprise system better than the other guy. The Cubans vote also, but they get to vote on who can run the communist system better than the other guy. We have freedom and they do not.

AND THE HIGHEST STAGE OF CAPITALISM is imperialism, Lenin mumbled over sixty years ago. Is he right? Let's listen to Ronald Reagan on the CBC news: "I can see flocks of businessmen pouring into the Caribbean where they will find honest and happy, hard working people. I can't imagine a more plentiful bounty." Except in Cuba of course, where the bounty mutinied. The Americans retaliated with a twenty-five-year boycott which is still on. There were over 1,200 commando raids by right wing Cubans backed by the CIA whose purpose was to destroy crops and factories and disrupt the economy. Plus about eight assassination attempts on my boy Fidel. Do you think hotels would be throwing out poor people for Expo in this province if Castro were Premier?

And the Americans did the same thing in Nicaragua. First the economic boycott to squeeze them and then the military actions to topple them. "See, it doesn't work!" they chortle with glee, while some poor impoverished country whose dictator has just left with the treasury for Miami has to fight with every ounce of energy to just survive. But I love the rhetoric. In the Philippines they have a crooked elec-

tion. The Americans say they don't want to interfere with the internal affairs of another country. It's for the Philippine people to decide. Of course, either way, America is a winner. In Nicaragua they have an election that all observers say was honest and the Americans have to overthrow the government with "freedom fighters." Here is a trivia question: How many of the twenty-three Contra leaders are from Samozá's National Guard? Answer: twenty-two. The other one is a pure freedom fighter "Commandant 0" (Edan Pasora) who fought for the revolution but was not a communist. The Contras try to murder any teachers or medical help in the impoverished areas. They try to destroy agricultural co-ops. Anything that is helping the people. They can't afford to let change take place.

EL SALVADOR ELECTED THEIR COREY AQUINO. He is a man named Napoleon Duarte. And the Americans pour a million dollars a day into that country to kill communists. I would pour a million dollars a day towards the communists because I want some fucking change around this goddamn world. In fact, El Salvador is a tragedy like Guatemala. So many people are murdered that it takes two or three generations before there are even enough bodies for another uprising. I kid you not.

But there is one thing about the lower classes and that is they have an instinct for class analysis. A hooker on CBC radio had a friend who was kidnapped and killed. She said the cops didn't care, but it would be different if it had been the mayor's daughter. Another commented on Bill C-47 and said, "Why don't they spend that money to find out why we end up on the street? Most of the kids from Regent Park are going to end up out here. They've got nowhere to go." (Regent Park being a housing project in Toronto.)

And sometimes a country becomes so comfortable that the middleclass confuse their own self-interest with social change. Countries like Canada. Operation Solidarity is a prime example. The middle class was worried about their jobs. They formed a coalition with labour unions. They called this coalition "Operation Solidarity." Some people from Poland protested that it was a total distortion and bastardization of the real "Solidarity" movement in Poland. But nobody wanted to hear that. The poor, the hungry, the homeless, and the

welfarians were lumped into something called the “Solidarity Coalition.” They were what the fight was all about.

Now I’m not arguing about the people involved. I’m talking about analyzing a political movement. If I had been involved I would have used it as a lever to dislodge the government which is what most of the organizers were hip enough to try to do. But it was doomed from the start.

First of all, they were paying lip service to the poor and disadvantaged that were suffering under the Sacred yoke. In fact, they were negotiating a union contract for job security and a pay raise. Now I can understand people being concerned about losing their jobs. And I can understand people wanting more money. But let’s not pretend that has anything to do with how the poor are shunted around. The labour movement couldn’t care less about anybody but themselves. Teachers of course wouldn’t dare put their ass on the line unless it’s totally for their self-interest. You can get about a token three days of the job from them. Basically everyone was saying that if they had a job for life and more money the poor would be better served. I don’t think it matters how much your welfare worker or teacher makes in wages. People come out of high school illiterate because the teachers aren’t worth a shit. Don’t think so? Talk to a couple.

Anyway, Art Kube folded under the pressure and Jack Munro came in and bailed him out because the coalition was fighting among themselves in the background. The party line was that Jack sold out the movement, but in fact he saved it. Saved their face because it had got to the point where it was going to be soon obvious that they wouldn’t put their jobs on the line or anything else. Everything was ok as long as they didn’t lose anything. The “Solidarity Coalition” was left holding the bag of course because they were merely used for purposes of rhetoric. The struggle had nothing to do with them really. They’d still be down and out after it was over, but their social workers would be making more money and wouldn’t be laid off. They wised up in time to boo Art Kube off the stage at the final meeting.

It’s not the first time the disadvantaged have been used for the benefit of the middle class. The NDP do it all the time. The way you change things is to believe in it enough to put something on the line.

In Nicaragua you put your life on the line if you believe enough. In Canada you put your job on the line.

Where is Operation Solidarity now? There's more poor and unemployed now than when they were out on strike. Why aren't they on the streets now? For one thing they would lose their jobs. They only go out at contract time. They were only responding to losing their jobs through cutbacks. If they were really concerned about someone other than themselves, why aren't they out now? The middle class will never put their ass on the line for social change. Never. And they were the middleclass. Teachers average \$35,000 a year (\$36,000 in Sooke) and an eighteen-year-old girl filing papers in an office makes a bottom line of \$18,000 with the government. How much do you make Pam? And they justify it. Keefer's mate, Denise, for example. A wonderful, kind, caring, NDP type feminist. She works for the GRD finding places to live for the poor. She makes over \$30,000 a year, gets \$50 every time she goes to a meeting, and there are a lot of meetings. I've been there.

A LARGE PART OF THE HELP-PEOPLE CROWD spend an inordinate amount of time justifying themselves. So let's dissect her job. She finds places to live for poor people. Now these are people who already have a place to live. She finds them a better place to live, i.e. a woman on welfare with two kids. One of the kids is now a teenager and wants their own room. Denise tries to find a place where the kid can have its own room. Or a single mother who works part-time for Gordon Hanson, the Victoria NDP MLS and she makes \$800 a month and gets subsidized housing, a modern two-bedroom apartment with wall to wall and all the rest of it. She complains because the traffic is too noisy on that street so Denise finds her another place to live. Fine. Wonderful. She is helping people out on the lower end of the scale. But at the same time there are now a hundred people living on the streets of Victoria. There are churches in Victoria with rows of cots for the homeless. Why doesn't she bring that up at the meetings. And they all make a damn good living off the poor. Lots of holidays, all the benefits, trips to Greece, San Francisco, houses, cars, Volvos with save the whales bumper stickers on them. They are professionals. When Operation Solidarity was going on they had champagne brunches with their fly-

ing picket squads. Why not? What do they have to lose? Now I like Denise personally and she does a good job. But part of her job is perpetuating the system and if she doesn't want to she will lose it. I would like her politically if she lost her job.

WHEN I WORKED AT WELFARE I was going to change the world. We did studies and had meetings and I interviewed people all over the province and it was great and wonderful and challenging and stimulating and I was on my way up. But the only change in the welfare system was with the people who were administrating it. They kept making more and more money and getting more and more holidays and amassing more and more credits for their cave's and learning more buzz words, Jesus, I hate buzz words, and becoming more sophisticated in justifying themselves. So anyway, they did another yawn housing study and I decided that welfare recipients should be used for the interviews instead of a bunch of middle class university students. It was just a bullshit questionnaire anyway. It meant nothing. But at least they could talk to someone in the same boat as them and not feel alienated. I got a radical freelance poor people's advocate (now a city alderman in Regina) to load me up with all the self-help info and legal rights and resource info so that my interviewers could hand this package to each person they interviewed. Why shouldn't they have access to all this information? It concerns them. And you don't need some slither with a government grant to spoon it out to them. The housing survey wasn't going to change their goddamn housing anyway so I thought at least a few of them could get on UIC after and maybe pull out of the welfare trip, give them some self-worth, give the others some information. And meantime in the background I would be working full-time doing title searches to find out who rented to people on welfare and was going to turn the information over to my leftist friends who were in a position of embarrassing the government with the information. This was the NDP government by the way. But I was branded an agitator who was going to organize the people and disrupt the administration of the department. I remember on the last day one of the hip mustached, sports-car driving social workers pleaded with me to back off because they would just hire someone who didn't care as much to do my job and the

people wouldn't get helped at all. Now this is an important thing to believe because it flatters your ego and is the cornerstone to justifying your job. I was very naive considering how hip I was at the time. I thought my job was to change these people's lives and anything other than that was a waste of time. But my job was really to make a living off them. To monitor them in a kindly manner. I remember an Indian woman who lived in a shack like mine in Moosomin, Saskatchewan with five kids. I asked her if there was anything that she needed and she said "an iron." A fucking iron, for Christ's sake. So am I supposed to go home after getting her a fucking iron and think I'm doing something for her? And on one of the questionnaires there was a trick question to test the value system of the poor people. I can't remember what it was but it had something to do with what was and was not a necessary material item. Want a laugh? Ask that same question to a rich person. I used to show them the questionnaire and say "Here's the trick question," and tell them about the study and why it was being done and what was going to happen because of it. The only difference between us that I could see is that they were poor. What gives me the right to build a career over their body? No one else reacted like me. No one else got fired.

But I don't care. I'd do it again. But so what? The point I'm trying to make is if you want to change things you have to put your ass on the line. The day that "Operation Solidarity" walks off the job in the middle of the week, in the middle of a contract, for a general strike in this province, puts their jobs on the line, not even their lives like people in other countries have to do. Merely that little extra blob of fat in their lives. But they'll never do it and Corey Aquino won't do it either.

I SEE POLITICS FROM A CLASS PERSPECTIVE, always have, always will. But I do enjoy the drama and the struggle for power, left, right, doesn't matter, I watch all the movies out there.

But of course shrouded behind this screen of political integrity is the psychology of the individual. I remember one of the main line leftists in graduate school calling me over to his table in the beer parlour after we had occupied the university for a week. "You know, Macleod," he said, "I can never really pin point where you are coming from half the time." I put my arm around him, my comrade, and said,

“Larry, I’m one of the guys that is in the front lines of the revolution. I’m with you all the way. But afterwards I’ll be one of the guys that you’ll have to purge.” “Oohhh,” he said, finally understanding. I was half joking, but there wasn’t even a twinkle in his eye.

But politics isn’t going to save us anyway. Not people like us, Pam. Not politics. Not literature. Not love. Not anything.

You should hear the frogs now. They sound like a kabillion crickets competing with each other. A life sound. Not a man made sound. Like this typewriter. Like the drip of the faucet. Like the pain in my gut.

*They peered angrily into shop windows and walked,
stamping the pavement, giving off their rays:
I have money, we have money, we have more
money than you have, we are better than you are,
nothing worries us; everything is shit, but we
are not shit and we know everything, look at us.*

—Charles Bukowski, describing tourists

Andrea,

Last week I took my book, blanket, and pillow down to Jordan River; the tide was out, the beach soft sand, the sky a beautiful blue. The sunlight shimmered and sparkled on the water. A loon called out from out on the water, and every time they do it I’m reminded of Northern Saskatchewan; loons on the ocean, I’ve never been able to adjust to it. And as I walked on the beach I came across some deer tracks, the forked print of a doe. Finding my favourite spot, driftwood wind-break, beach rock backrest, I found otter prints strolling through my reading area. Setting up, soaking up some sun, the soft surge of the ocean making circular motions on my temples, and later a blanket of fog, soft white, rose in front of the mountains. Behind the fog were pale white twist-curl puffs of cloud twirling up into the soft blue, the ocean was still shimmering, but moving now, from the south-west as always, and walking over to a fallen tree, silver wind swept, roots bundle gnarled and I leaned on one hand against it as I had a pee, just

as I've leaned one hand against a kabillion urinal walls ... I've been using the word like a hula-hoop Andrea, wearing it out.

I PAUSE AND LOOK AROUND THE CABIN. A few half read books, a jacket hung over a chair, table strewn with half-assed writing attempts, soft sixty-watt light, stove heat creak backdrop. The only thing missing is the usual melancholy. I'm still coasting from the mid-term results of your report card; that's the only time in my life that I've ever concentrated my heart, soul, being and energy into wanting something to happen (or I could say not wanting something to happen) and all hopes and fears of life's yesterdays, today's, and tomorrows were gathered in and stacked up for one roll of the dice, and I was surprised that under all the pain and loneliness and sadness I found there was still something buried deep down inside that could just burst with joy for another person. All I want in life is for her to live—and, well, it kinda surprised me, not my feeling for you, that's a given, but the intensity of it, just for you only, no strings or ties on it, just to be happy for you, to feel it so strongly that it overwhelmed everything else.

Enough ... I have a feeling that I'm turning what is probably a normal human emotion into an event with the magnitude of the moon landing ... if indeed I am making any sense, falling into prattle again, slipping away into blather, you know, I used to walk on the kitchen floor of a clean typing page with mud all over my boots and not give a shit about the dirt tracks ... but lately....

WENT INTO SOOKE LATE TODAY for the Saturday *Vancouver Sun*, a cool day, gray, winter rain steady drumming off the West Coast road and standing by the curve outside of town was an Indian, rain soaked, cardboard suitcase and weathered nylon shoulder bag. So I pulled over and he got in, surprised that someone had stopped, six o'clock and not much traffic, two strikes against him, rain-soaked and non-white, three actually if you count not having a car, and he was going to Port Renfrew to visit his family on the reserve, and away we went passing three more University of California types on their way to the West Coast Trail, fuck 'em, and we talked and talked and waved our

arms and veered around the road and I took him all the way to Jordan River, ex-alcoholic, ex-drug addict, ex-weekend fighter, ex- “I used to like to rob people,” and I liked him, liked him a lot more than the three people that I drove past, and we shook hands before he got out of the car, and driving back home I remembered him saying “I used to like to rob people...” like to rob people... and I nodded and didn’t care, first thinking well, I’ve only got \$7 on me, and then thinking he doesn’t look that tough, and only on the drive back home did I realize that I’m not that tough, I’d forgotten at the time and had missed a free fear flutter.

AND TUESDAY MORNING, the morning that I phoned you, was plant watering day and I went up to the spooky scary forest spot and on the way in spotted some bear-type smudge scuff marks and stopped on the trail looking around, and the wind came up and rustled the leaves and my impulse was to turn back, but I had to get it done and what are the odds of the tracks being two minutes old anyway? So I carried on and jungle search water bucketed and half-done the bushes next to me started crashing and swaying and a “huummph” sound came out of them, oh shit, the son of a bitch is right fucking here now when I’m here and I found myself saying in a loud voice, “BUGGER OFF!” and the bush swaying stopped, and I thought well a deer would just bound away and it seemed like a very big deer so I began to water faster, water water, and the bushes started crashing and swaying again and this time I yelled “FUCK OFF! JUST FUCK RIGHT OFF!!! GODDAMN IT! LEAVE ME ALONE!!” And I kept watering talking out loud, then finishing and wiring the gate shut but by now talking to myself in a mumble mumble monotone and looking over my shoulder moved my candy ass down the narrow jungle overgrowth trail and arriving back at the car felt like a WW II fighter pilot returning from a mission, calm, able to relate the adventure with just the right touch of humour for the boys in the officer’s mess, and I guess that’s the way it was done.

SO TONIGHT THE SKY WAS A BLUE GRAY, the rain stopped just before dark, everything was left lush green and dripping with wet, there was an open area in the west, and the setting sun shone a bright spotlight

white, the eastern sky was a deep purple, the middle sky a powder blue with gray white clouds, the yard around the cabin ran with patterns of light and shadow, across the strait there were Tony Onley mountains with a ridge of violet sky above them and below was a bright turquoise band of colour that disappeared into a dirty pink ocean. When I begin describing surroundings you'll know that I have nothing to say but I don't wanna stop, so how about if I give you a quote from Doug's last letter to me. I get such a kick out of him, he thinks I'm in pain ... "I read all of your letters last night on graveyard at the asylum for mislaid youths. Marvelous odyssey, stories that are varied in twist and turn, but all have in common a bloodstain, a smear of battle worn camaraderie with pain. What can I add ... they are, to me, masterful expressions of a man's aloneness in the midst of his own incorrigible and cantankerous abundance of character. Rimbaud often worried of the burden of having vision ... no worry, pal, the main thing is to have vision ... any burden is secondary to the thrusting education of the experience itself, so I toast your vision, your character ... I even with so much tequila handy, toast your burden. Salut! Endaxi!"

And I get such a kick out of Doug, he thinks we are going to be famous someday and he doesn't understand that we are just famous to each other, and he thinks that the more I hurt and die and bleed the more I grow, and fuck him, why doesn't he hurt and die and bleed in the name of art? That's not fair, it's not right either. I guess this is what we do instead of playing bridge with each other every Wednesday evening. What's the difference? It's just some left over dealing with someone who sort of touches things you thought were secret, known only to yourself, and I used to have great trouble dealing with Doug, waterfront scenes in drunken navy pea coat pushing him against the pier barricade saying "Get off my fucking back man," and he half surprised, half smiling, saying "I'm not on your back." And a gradual grudge realization over a period of years that maybe it's the same wave length and I needed him to push prod draw me out and I thought he was making fun of me at the time, only neither one of us were laughing, but we are funny and that's close enough and since I'm filling the letter, I'll give you the end of his letter also: "Kid pulled a blade on me at work last Sunday, one of those scuba knives, ever seen one? They're shiny and sharp. I tried to tell him he was a Godsend, you dig, that I'd

been looking around for a weapon to use on myself and that I was sorry he'd have to spend a few years in detention camp over a sod like me, but them's the breaks, and all that, and got his anger to puke into a grin, which he quickly tried to hide, not wanting to give in so easily, but he put it away, the blade, deciding to wait for a bigger fish I guess. Two hours later I told him he'd have to hand it over or find somewhere else to sleep. He hands it over. I lock it up. I go back into his room, tell him he's lucky he comes from a broken up and fucked up poor and tattooed family or else I might really get pissed off at him. Later, when all the others are asleep, he gets up to take a piss. I'm reading your letters ... what's that? ... I show him the part about your Uncle Ken, the car driving through the bunkhouse wall, Stella, and that funeral trip about not applying for a fuckin' job now, and the kid thinks you're Jack Kerouac, Macleod, he wants your address! Luckily, you don't have one. You being a bigger fish than me."

And I love it, we entertain each other, our reality being more interesting than regular real life, and that's what it's all about now, isn't it? It's not enlightenment, but it beats nine-to-five all to shit, ramble mumble,

stretch this letter out
 wring
 twist
 to the last drop,
 and so it goes tonight,
 Saturday night live ...
 Barry





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