

# Personal History

## Personal History – From Louise Boren's Boarding House *(for Jim Morris)*

What is it that – sitting in the sun-stained afternoon  
in my upstairs room,  
where thoughts run following yesterday  
over the floorboards –  
stretches them to giant size?  
Pretends to eternity?  
Rises like dough to fill the room  
until I feel at my back the now familiar  
twinge of personal history,  
inflated and floating above me like a child's balloon?

What is it that, then,  
both leaves me a cliché-ridden historian  
and lifts me to my death, to see below  
a man: his past three-dimensional  
and his shape, my own?  
What some gain over a lifetime

and others lose in a single breath, I watch myself  
spending like light pouring from my eyes,  
shining away a human force  
that slowly impoverishes and anneals me.

Suspended there, above the play  
of this light on a stage  
where deaths no more or less real than my own  
waft up the staircase  
in a little wind – almost a chorus,  
some indefinable song heard when much younger,  
like Mozart played on the downstairs piano  
in the late afternoon –  
I survey the personal landscape:

There's Jim, at the piano, improvising,  
posing mad before history – music pouring from  
hands, eyes, mouth, stomach; losing vital  
inner forces in an enormous outpouring  
overwhelming the brutality of history for a moment.  
There's me, writing and rewriting at my wobbly desk,  
putting absurd pieces into birds  
that take off and fly into ceilings of light.

There's a child that stands, playing with a stick  
in the puddles at the edge of our histories,  
reaching across years. Eternal,  
useless universals hang over our heads –  
Why write on? Why play?  
Patch the scattered thoughts together,  
call it memory; live it  
and be done.

## The Boy in the Picture

Where is he, the boy I loved?  
In 1959 the traveling photographer,  
like the Fuller Brush man  
came to the door, dug in his case,  
pulled out a frog that squawked.

The boy in the picture  
squeezes between his older sister and younger brother,  
looking quizzically at the photographer's frog  
his little brother wants so much.  
Perhaps he was five. He wore a tiny striped bow tie.

Before bullies; too young to be shocked,  
or too short, or anything  
other than what he was.

He was polite – too polite to say so  
but he saw through the story. He had self-respect.  
He deserved love.  
He saw through pretense,  
but he believed in stories.  
He could feel the last day of summer.  
He was sure that his mother *knew*. He looked  
for the little spider in the waterspout.

## Jim Morris

the same day i moved into Louise Boren's  
boarding house, Jim got off the bus –  
mainlined from who knows what  
part of the city – and sauntered in  
with 3 shirts and 2 pairs of pants  
on hangers over one arm  
and a box of Shredded Wheat under the other.

Jim. . . tried to teach me kung fu (between smokes  
on the front porch): "try to hit me"  
and when i laconically did,  
one hand flicked my arm away, reflex  
drove the other to my face  
(picking me up with real concern). . .  
whenever my Subaru backfired, he'd jump,  
hands assuming the fighting position.

smoked fancy cigarettes rolled in brown  
paper (but didn't  
inhale: for show) –  
i carried them too, and we'd let them  
burn down with exaggerated attention.

talked about sex: "a pointless  
activity in itself". . . grossed out by a girlfriend  
who wanted it too often.  
walking in the University Rose Garden,  
we discussed it seriously.

ate McDonald's when he couldn't get  
the money to dine expensive (often). . .  
apprenticed to a violin-maker;  
wanted us to build cellos in the basement  
(cottage industry).

whenever he painted, got so wrapped up  
that he had to quit his job,  
so he played classical piano instead,  
for hours, and beautifully.

practiced expressions for hours  
in the mirror. . . cultivated  
the right laugh for every occasion.

used to pull one end of his blonde  
moustache and raise the opposite  
eyebrow for effect. . .  
practiced walking clubfoot to con  
insurance dollars from doctors.

loved Chaplin; surprised me once  
with a fake fall down three flights  
of concrete stairs outside Lander Hall,  
just to make me laugh.

Jim Morris – sold pornographic pictures  
in 8th grade; dropped out in 10<sup>th</sup> –  
i didn't see him again  
until the night we both moved into Louise Boren's  
boarding house and he gave me a package of Shredded Wheat  
for breakfast the next morning.  
six months later, like some sock-sticking thistle  
that drops to seed some vacant lot, he was gone.

## Anne Treanor's Shoebox of Color Crayons

### i. first grade

Anne Treanor sat next to me in first grade  
her shoebox full of crayons –  
streaks of color up the insides, beelines  
to nowhere  
dashes of green  
reds, tans,  
blues, yellows –

Anne befriended me, easy  
as huddling together  
over drawings, picking out colors –  
sweet children  
dashing bits of pink  
in with the apple green  
like laughter –

Anne shared her crayons with me –  
a simple demonstration,  
what generosity looks like –  
so that later, even in high school –  
when we never  
sat together –  
I held a simple belief in her.

### ii. high school

Ten years later Anne sidled up to me  
in the high school hall  
surreptitious as a spy –  
it may have been the one time we talked  
in those 4 years –  
her best friend, Patty Alpaugh,  
in with the most 'in',  
*wants you to ask her out.*  
yeah ha ha –  
popular kids in  
on the joke – crude Mike Benz advising me  
in studyhall: *keep it in your pants,*  
*don't take it out too soon.*  
Seven innings, two outs.

Anne, Anne – when did you step  
on a mean nail?

Can we pull it out?  
And did you know that if I was going to ask anyone out,  
it would have been you  
because I love spirit and wit?

### iii. dream, november 6, 2016

Tonight unappointed Anne comes again  
to arrange for Jennifer to meet  
me at the basketball game –  
but we'd already planned to go together.

First grade long, long behind,  
high school too – and the ones who once passed  
as ourselves.

By the time I get to the grave, winter has set in.  
The grave is unmarked and I don't know whose it is.  
It's late and I had to park far away and trek in,  
icy snow on a thin path threading a field –  
I don't know this grave, unless it's mine.  
This isn't just a long walk in from some parking lot.

By the time I get to the game, it's in its final minutes,  
our team losing, down 5 or 6 points,  
missing all our shots. I check into the game with  
Vince Taylor, artist in etched glass,  
in whose small house of recovery I'm renting.

Jennifer catches up to me  
after we lose and we all head out together  
but Anne intervenes – she's promised  
that Jennifer would go home with another man.  
Hurt shoots from the fingertips.

I tell Jennifer  
*come with me if you want to*  
then set out, plowing across the icy snowed-covered  
meadow, but this time take the wrong path,  
a little too close  
to the woods. When we're alone  
it's easy to feel abandoned – and then  
worse follows too easily.

Halfway across, Jennifer comes up from behind,  
surprising me. The path curves,

we're back on the right way  
just at that dangerous spot where you have to  
leap a little.

## The Wind

the wind is rising again,  
knocking on my bedroom window,  
asking “will you come?”

it sweeps through bedclothes  
as wallboards  
knock their still-swaying branches together.

the soul tugs at anchor –  
released, it joins the great marrow of the wind,  
surprised to find there  
so many traveling companions.

the wind carries words from the ends of sentences  
broken off, sighs breathed out  
all the love sighed out –  
the people parted from these.

when blue dawns shatters the morning  
I’ll find myself rustling corn in Minnesota,  
lose a bit of myself in a Midwest thunderstorm,  
and blow out in a mid-afternoon squall  
over the Atlantic.

## First Night in Seattle Apartment

Cleaning done, sat down –  
candles, Cat Stevens playing.

Once  
twice  
a third time  
the candle in the Lancers wine bottle  
the white 7¢ stick candle  
the candle on the wooden nail keg

flicker.

The red armchair, the ceiling,  
the mandolin hung on the wall  
test their hardness  
    as darkness, like some steward,  
disperses furniture in particles.

The stairs that go up to the kitchen  
swallow deeply.

Butterflies in my stomach merge  
with the heavy-grained wings  
of the whole evening.

## The Calling

After dinner, at the sink,  
washing a fork,  
a noise penetrates –  
as though a paper bag were lifted from my head,

penetrating the stereo  
the tapwater on the pan  
the upstairs footsteps of the landlady.

A noise that  
    here,  
    in these rooms,  
    in this apartment,  
I have been slowly paying attention  
to

all afternoon.

Even the candlelight washes out in it,  
and the funnypaper faces  
    which I have placed over my head  
burn up in it.

## Tricycle (for Carl)

Carl and I leaned on the oil stove all night  
and talked the way oil pours –  
takes a long time to drain the can.

Blue plotches the window's dark robe –  
we open the curtains, stop talking,  
put on our boots.

He took me up in the pine lot  
above our old house and showed me it:

rust – made of rust; all three  
wheels busted off, lay on its side.

We cracked through dry pine branches to find it –  
just after 5:00 a.m.  
and bleary light.

I shivered, heard more birds sing  
than I knew were in Winslow.

So tiny that when I lifted it  
between my legs and straddled,  
the handlebars touched my beltbuckle  
but the scooter bar didn't reach my knees.

## Beth's Café, 1973

Beth's Cafe, on Aurora  
serves 12-egg omelets for \$2.35  
hanging over hash browns  
over the edges of the plate.  
3:00 a.m., kitchen stoked,  
a long line at the door; two straggled  
waitresses worm through the customers.  
sat down at quarter to four; next to me  
a well-traveled "man of the road"  
says i remind him of Audie Murphy  
"same size, same attitude," says  
Beth's serves the best food  
for a dollar this side of Swede's,  
Lancaster, Wisconsin.  
The night closes its ham fist  
on us; trading on old jokes  
and big talk, we sew its fingers  
together, button Levi jackets  
over worn flannel shirts,  
saunter out into the cold  
street, knowing all the bars  
are closed, stuffed and bluffing.

## Poem on the Way to Visit Ross

If I lift you, left you, let you hover  
(lest I lost you) – light your longing,  
leave your songing – say you saw me,  
soon aslumber, sifting, shifting,  
through senses drifting –  
in dreams and drawings drooping  
round me, things I dared and those  
I didn't, here collected, coughing,  
cawing, amid loud guffawing,  
in these visions that filling  
sleeping, dreaming, waking  
spill about me, fix me, free me,  
will desert me, fly to you, touch you,  
tip you, till you with my art strokes,  
pen-boats, wishing motion of wispy  
mind-folks, deftly dancing  
with you: would you, prancing,  
learn my steps? swirl your flower  
onto their stems? nod awhile  
in their world? nothing kept  
and nothing left, would you find  
my mind friends pleasing to go  
a-breezing with, if I lift you,  
left you, let you hover?

## Lines on the Face (Listening to Woody Guthrie)

the ones that crease my smile  
(like scars that remain behind)  
at first came many times  
without staying,  
they came and left like days  
that have all gone.  
without my noticing it,  
living came  
and left its mark on me.

some of course I knew about –  
I made some of them dinner every night  
until one evening they stayed out all night  
and I went to bed worrying,  
but they were gone – never mine.  
others I surface against, swimming up  
against them night after night  
in that still early alone time  
when I come to, desperate, holding my breath,  
trying to push them aside  
like a hatch over the head of a drowning man  
who wants to flood  
out of this watery suspended silence –  
but then in the midst of one dry day  
my ears pop as if bursting through  
a surface of water, and sound and motion  
begin again, and they too go – not really mine.

but some mark me for life,  
like a seedling grazed by a cow or rabbit  
which grows in a peculiar habit  
from then on, the central stalk bent,  
following a new direction, preserving in its shape  
and its entire orientation from then on  
the memory of its history. and some,  
like this one where I smile,  
discovered only today, listening  
to this old favorite folksong (last heard  
7 or 8 years ago)  
make me aware of the scars living leaves.

## Oblivion

If death ever comes to me, surely  
it will be clothed as it did when,  
driving with Adele and Ron,

comfort and gray rest overcame me,  
the evening dropped its pearl shields  
and I found warmth and relaxation and the road  
winding beyond my cares.

I don't care if the windshield  
becomes more foggy  
and I lose count of the turns,  
as Adele's fleeting, piping voice  
and Ron's deep roll fill up  
all the harvested valleys with mist,  
settle slowly into me like pebbles falling through water.

– the loss of time is like a good friend  
who comes back suddenly  
after an absence of years.

## Driving Highway 127, Pullman to Seattle

I want to be a poet, not a historian.  
Scatter the scope of living moments wide,  
not close dense tomes on the world.

Dust settling through the sun  
is caught  
by the ragweed on the side of the road.

The argument between what we think we ought to be  
and what we are  
is not an argument of the ragweed  
or the wheat in the field;  
not of the silos  
or the still buttes –

it is not mine.  
It is the argument of the historians,  
the sociologists, politicians, economists,  
theologists.  
Mine is the argument  
of the sun with the ragweed  
and the wheat in the field.

## Second Beach, La Push

climbing out on the point at Second Beach:  
tidepools with *Pisaster*, sea oats,  
nudibranchs – electric blue and transparent,  
still more starfish, sea anemones, snails,  
limpets, crabs, algae, and seaweed.  
bend staring into a pool until it comes  
to life, learning to *see* again.  
mussel beds; gooseneck barnacles  
below the *Balanus*. i jump the crevices  
and crawl, fingers in crustaceous rock  
(seven feet, now 10 feet to the surf below)  
out to the sea-facing prow of the sheared-off  
rock. wedge into a foothold,  
lean back and look up over my right  
shoulder to see how sheer the face is.  
clouds moving overhead; suddenly  
the rock tips slowly, constantly  
north. feet planted on a gigantic wheel,  
hands on its rim, the big rotation  
of the earth falls continuously  
backwards over my shoulder into the surf.  
waves thunder into holes scooped out of rock,  
fill five bathtubs in a hurry, then  
thousands of white waterfalls  
drain down goose-barnacle necks.  
a fog moves in, covering the outer rocks;  
mists tatter around me; an awkward frog  
in sunglasses and a jean jacket, i clamber  
feet-first down the narrow cracks  
and back around the point to the beach.

## Woodlot

I

What bird is that I hear? It seems he's sung above every morning since I was a child, although I hear him now only on mornings like this – the ferry sliding into Eagle Harbor at 5:30 a.m., the sky just turning from black to blue, the water like a satin blouse that clings to the curves of a breast.

Walking the sunrise streets of Winslow home, the sky lightens and the points of light on Seattle's night-necklace skyline blur and run together. As I move inland, behind me, in Seattle, the friends with whom I spent the night are already in their beds: Dan with Joanna, Chris with his latest, Julie, Jerome with dreams of scarps and ropes.

The sky reddens like the sunset with which we began the evening nine hours ago at the J&M Cardroom & Café. I bought the first round, we lost Gene to the early ferry home before we moved on to Mother's Tavern to find Jerome.

There we decided on a full-dress dinner: a game of dress-up. I drove slowly north, dropping friends at their homes to dress, as if dropping lobster pots along a line. At its end, only Chris and I remained, slipping easily into the suits of old friendship. In ties – even tux and top hat – we drove back along the line, fetching in our pots and inspecting each catch.

At 3:00 a.m. we arrive fashionably late at 13 Coins by way of Jake O'Shaugnessy's, where, a wedding celebration in progress, it is assumed that we must be guests from out of town.

The sky fully light now, I see that decades of friendship *hold*. Turning up our gravel drive, thin lines slowly blue between black trunks in the woodlot across the street. The young pole wood still holds the receding dark. Moving out into our lives, we leave behind stands of young memories near home that daily fall silent in the gathering night, and come to life again in early dawns. Last night we cut none of our woods, where now that bird perches who sings each early morning into daylight.

II

Our lives dropped like rocks in forest-rimmed lakes, expand in rings that come round again after many years – a stoned revelation that Chris and I happily found years ago one night at Cannon Beach, a thought that now itself keeps coming round.

This early morning's crescent moon startling as it ever was; it's not hard to envision pre-historic humanity learning to count by notching its changes, carved on sticks; lines that became amazed time itself to their no-longer-baffled minds, long before Newton or Kant postulated Time as a sort of blank spot on the map of reality to be filled by whatever events the mind perceives. Time returns again to be what it always was, mutually co-created in the act of life in a cosmos never standing still.

But, as it happens, the moon is joined in this morning's sky by an early transcontinental flight lifting out of SeaTac, some few hundred stunned beings in flight to new destinations that will startle their staid old lives. Its left wing-light blue, the right and center bright white, it looks almost alien yet not out of joint with the ancient moon with which it shares the sky.

Below my feet, the mycorrhizal links of our Vashon woodlot tie the trees together in ancient murmured conversations, transferring nutrients, signaling to the community which ones need to be protected, a language only now becoming approximated by human texts and social media that tie us in a web that we have the hutzpa to imagine is something unique and unprecedented, a human exfoliation that is only again the ancient All-in-One. Oh how did we lose sight of that?

And those friends whose end-of-life songs still sing the early morning into fresh being, as young and new as they ever were, are in flight too, our entire web lifting like a filmy cobweb fine as filtered sun that lights each thread, a community whose roots murmur like an orchestra, the embodiment of time.

# Hunting

*(for Chris Foster)*

## First Hunt

It all began when you showed me the geese –  
a gabbling congregation shopping over the grain  
among the cut stubble in a far field.  
Too smart to sneak up on, you said –  
their shop talk could be heard all the way to the house,  
thousands, I thought, shuffling and jostling  
as if at a convention – more flying in.

We spent the rest of the day tramping over your fields,  
excited by the possibilities, ignoring  
the thistles, cradling the rifles  
that were our excuse to get out,  
talking.

## Second Hunt

I never fired the gun you gave me.  
Walking the bare farm fields –  
brown brushy thistle covering  
quivering quail. Did we have a dog  
to nose out the birds, or did we just  
talk about one? No, you confirm –  
old Cathy was dead by then  
or too arthritic to hunt,  
and the grouse or pheasant or whatever  
we were after flushed all afternoon  
too far up ahead to sense the rush of wings  
and shoot. After sunset we came up  
over the straight line of an irrigation channel –  
one twilight moment stood there –  
one duck winged overhead, you spun  
fired, in one sweep of the rifle it fell,  
landing in the water. I stood astonished,  
dumbfounded heart clapping back to the stage  
the stunned moment that had fled forever.  
While time came flooding back,  
you clambered half-down the stiff  
grass of the wide ditch – we could not reach it.  
In the water, it drifted slowly away.

When you turned your dusk-eaten face to me  
I could not see your eyes, but felt them heat  
your words, how you did not like to waste a life  
like that. There was grief  
as we walked back  
to the house like a lighted box set on the plain  
of flat, black night.

It was very cold the next morning, a frost  
made the dirt drive white –  
you went to see if it had drifted up  
against the irrigation gate.

## Gramp

*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.*

**Crowfoot, a Blackfoot Chief  
at his death, April 1890.**

### I. Firefly

a small boy, no more than four,  
stood near your knee  
(in the yard where you played yourself  
in days all the same to those stars  
at which we stared) and held  
two of your fingers in a tight fist.  
whatever you told me then of astronomy  
has been lost, but never since has  
the star-struck sky been so full  
or far. I remember falling  
head back, mouth open,  
into that blueblack silence,  
mystery black-brimmed and bottomless,  
holding your hand, while the window  
threw its warm rectangle of lamplight  
on the yard around us.  
beyond that, all eternity falling,  
thousands of fireflies  
the scattered shower of stars  
that pulsed when we sighed – and we  
standing rejoicing on its edge  
in the cheek-stinging cold.

### II. Breath in Winter

the St. Nick painted by your Dad  
on a big cardboard cutout  
is still ruddy, broken out in a belly-laugh,  
bulbous nose rubbed red  
by a midwestern winter over 80 years ago  
(the bloom spread to his cheeks  
as if he'd stopped by a small Kansas bar  
to whoop it up with the boys before arriving here,

half-way down the chimney of your snowbound farm  
under a crystal-cold midwinter Plains sky  
spread with fine-pointed stars  
that tingle and clink an icy  
Silent Night, Holy Night, his breath hanging  
in the air and holding  
in his gruff Christmas hands packages  
addressed to "Carl Pratt, Wabash Avenue,  
Kansas City, Missouri" and dated 1903).

### III. Little Shadow

The razor's edge against the wrist of time  
cuts down  
against the grain of our lives;  
the homes of moments, cast off,  
bauble away.

It slices in one long downward stroke  
unceasing  
to reach that moment when –

like a sudden flock of sparrows  
departing the wind-line of poplars –

all at once a soul is released,  
as if a whirlwind of leaves  
decided to quit the tree  
and took wing all in one motion,  
setting the wild wheatfield beyond  
afire as they go.

## Grandpoo\*

Orville of old, City of Gold,  
attar of Rose in a Persian sleeve-fold.  
City of Mercy long foretold,  
scatter of children noisy and bold  
shattering Orville with tales retold.  
Tatter of crows that ladder the skies,  
children who labor, hand-to-mouth cries –  
corvid or kinder, black rags that fly,  
shoot down the alley, down poverty row  
screaming neglect, the battering scolds.  
City of Beauty, gown of its souls,  
blindfold to woes, the world goes by.  
Shivering clothes from each blighted rose.

Orville aureate  
pioneer laureate  
in social work  
old ills lurk  
by old town walls  
the starving fall  
words sink  
impoverished calls  
crows caw  
children crow  
water boils  
hearts scald  
thin fingers indicate  
what lies abdicate,  
why's supplicate  
burghers fatter  
than larders  
dare none to pry  
high on their toes  
clothes-pinned nose  
sniff "die unabate!"

Orville arose, early rose  
cultivar of the white rose,  
the red, tears of love, rose  
of no wars, rose of spun gold,  
ruler of none,  
keeping *sub rosa*  
nor silence nor secret

drew them all near,  
those who were sold,  
whom none hold dear,  
beaten metal, pressed petals –  
Orville disposed,  
clothed, shoved in their hands  
a few coins clattered –  
a few less waited,  
a few less cold.

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*\*My Grandfather, indentured as a child, became a pioneer in the field of social work. His name, Orville, means "City of Gold". We called him "Grandpoo" because as little children we could not pronounce the French "grandpere" that Grandmother wanted us to use. His poem is in a style that works through the motion set up among its words and images more than through any logic of grammar. Some lines enjamb, some stand alone, some do both at once; some references to people and things merge. Rhyme and rhythm move out of set boundaries. The words and imagery work without trying too hard to understand. There is also no small amount of irony, which presents an impassive face to the literal reader. The weave is of children, crows, and roses; children of neglect in cities of gold, of mercy, of beauty; of gardeners who love to cultivate.*

## A Morning too Beautiful to be Born

this morning's beauty unbearable,  
as unbearable as life –  
    childhood over,  
    grandparents gone, their house sold,  
family broken up. when we  
who have grown up in others' heartbreak  
see the sun warming the cool morning  
as it did long ago,  
the long shadows of brilliant early sun,  
the kind of morning my grandmother loved  
to sit out on the lawn swing  
and we, early risers too, climbed up  
next to her – and she told us how beautiful  
the morning was –  
    it fills me with indescribable loss  
so that I rise and pace or do small chores  
and settle none too quickly  
into that quietness in which all souls,  
together with the loss of what they loved  
before, are called too yearningly  
by a morning so beautiful it will break your heart.

## David, in There

We know you're in there.  
That knowing is a hand in your hand.  
You let yourself down a rope  
inside a well. The well  
seems to open out like a storm drain,  
but it seems long and the walls  
close together and there is no light  
save that faint from the oval above.

You are thinking of letting go of the rope.  
Our knowing is a lifeline  
for you. To you it looks like it dangles  
through the hole above. To us it looks  
like a line thrown over a wall.

Jennifer tied it around your waist  
when you small (they told Dawn  
that she was responsible for the three  
of you, but it was Jennifer who saw to it).  
I know; she knows –

you are not the wall you would have us  
see. You know we know, these  
are the threads that weave the line,  
the threads of knowing you, whoever  
you are, inside.

## Dedication

*(to my Cousin Paula)*

Our encounter, the first in more than 30 years –  
the original and only had endeared you to me  
a family 4th-of-July picnic on Grandma Bobby's lawn  
when you were a young woman and I a small boy –  
now we, witnesses, seers passionately exhuming  
the family story that wants nothing so much  
as the relief of being told,  
so self-hidden at times and so flimsy until, spoken,  
we take from their hands that damage  
they did as much to themselves as anyone,  
and give those whose hurt escaped to hurt  
some small redemption. The departed stand  
troubled and wordless, some few feet off, holding  
it out to us. So few are left, how did we  
reconnect? Second children, son of the second son  
and daughter of the second daughter, each  
taking up for our survival that brilliance that flared  
through our family – seared  
but not consumed. Two halves held dear beyond  
all remembrance – will salvation be any different?  
Dipping your head a little as you speak,  
your eyes narrow slightly as if to see  
into a rain-laced wind of years –  
the look of one who looks through what is  
forbidden, though prohibitions fall like blows.  
We take from their hands carefully  
the soul that tore through them and seemed  
so private, try to recollect the scattered parts  
and see them whole in lives we never lived.

## Birds

*(for Gene)*

with birds he –  
flight grace and free  
dom. and he needs  
it for  
himself.

Gene, we remember how it was  
to be 3 and 7 and 17  
and you do it by flying –

birds are your way  
into that nonlegal language – no secret  
when I see you sight them,  
photograph them

flap 100 feet to get off the water  
with the cormorant  
dive with the grebe

this morning I watched a gull  
perch on the rail of the 8:30 ferry  
eyeing first one way than the other  
out of each side of its head  
in that blind, peculiar way birds do,  
turning and cocking their heads  
to take it all in

– one of

yours?

## Lake Merwin

indian summer, late October  
went for a swim before breakfast.  
    hunker on Ariel dock  
    raw  
shaking Jim Creek  
off my bones.

Ellen, stretched flank-length  
    on the boards  
    dries too.

southwestern Washington wet summer  
empties into fall like  
spilled water-color paints.

the grass all straw; the dry  
mornings cool.  
heard the loon early.  
blue heron, looking purple-black  
against the lake.

on the far side, Goat Mountain,  
Mt. St. Helens –  
their larch and huckleberry  
hiding Badger Creek and Steamboat Rock.

Steve appears out of the mountain's side,  
rowing towards us,  
ties up to the cleat on the dock.  
as his waves  
heave us less and less, we  
discuss the defiant child within:

    "piss straight into the pot"

then climb the switchbacks  
with the sun  
to the cabin, shower and, still naked,  
sit in the field, drink coffee  
eat grapes  
wait while Ellen cooks the eggs.

## Today

i've grown today. of course, it's only  
just after eight in the morning  
and i'm not sure what i mean by 'today'...  
this morning? this weekend? this year?  
what division shall i make?

or shall i grow like a giant into the sky  
rolling up the great mandala  
of the heavens that are so blue and sunlit  
over Lake Merwin today?

today the sun is making no divisions.  
it crawls along my arm,  
jumps from leaf to leaf of the laurel  
runs through the meadows.

Ellen reads in the sun. Dorothy  
sunbathes.  
Robert still sleeps.  
*Scarborough Fair/Canticle*  
plays from the cabin porch,  
out over the half-scythed grass of First Field.

We all rise up out of the meadow  
giant as the sky in the heaven-bending mandala  
of our own sunburned lives

today.

## Census

*(silk-screening at Lake Merwin)*

106 silk-screened Frog-Rock tee-shirts.  
calls of many birds; three I know.  
flutter of millions of pollen grains.  
one, two, three, four kleenex.  
two people, one dog.  
and now five people, four dogs.  
and now five dogs.  
two legs, hot in the sun.  
two books, one journal.  
two breakfasts.  
one banana.  
one morn-  
ing.

## Ellen

### I

courts Renoir  
in a hail of alder leaves  
in mid-October,

dances her voice  
high  
over western plains

shedding stereotypes  
like ribbons in the wind.

### II

meditative, leaving the bathroom  
she shows me:

*"I was born into a world of false gray light  
with lovers  
dashing themselves  
against the windowsill of time."*

written on a green steno pad

then stumps off  
without a word  
to her sleeping bag  
spread in the middle of First Field  
to read Tolstoy.

I want to throw the pad at her  
and gather her into an orange-sleeved hug  
all at once.

### III

the events of our lives  
follow one another  
like fingers  
over the guitar's frets.

you said *"the way he looked at me,  
my eyes might have been  
fingers touching his face."*

#### IV

Coming back from the field she complains  
*"grasshoppers under my dress"*

leaning back on the porch  
    slatted wood,  
    so old, cedar  
reeking of sun-bleached dirt.

pungent bodies, damp hair –  
resting. woke at 9,  
sat on the bench in the sun  
talking to Ellen, meditative,  
half-eaten, a green apple,  
the hand of Lake Merwin  
    around me.

