A selection of fiction and poetry, history and memoir, from some of the finest writers in the American West.

A BANGTAIL PRESS SAMPLER



FEATURING WORK BY

Paul Zarzyski, Thomas McIntyre, Fred Haefele, Toby Thompson, Allen Morris Jones, Russell Rowland, Aaron Parrett, David Allan Cates, and Tom Russell.



A BANGTAIL PRESS SAMPLER

























Montana 2014

A BANGTAIL PRESS SAMPLER

Copyright © 2014 by Bangtail Press

ISBN-13: 978-0-9623789-6-6

Manufactured in the United States of America

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts used for promotional, review, or academic purposes, no portion of this work may be reproduced or distributed in any print or electronic form without the written permission of the publisher.

Published in the United States by

Bangtail Press P. O. Box 11262 Bozeman, MT 59719 www.bangtailpress.com



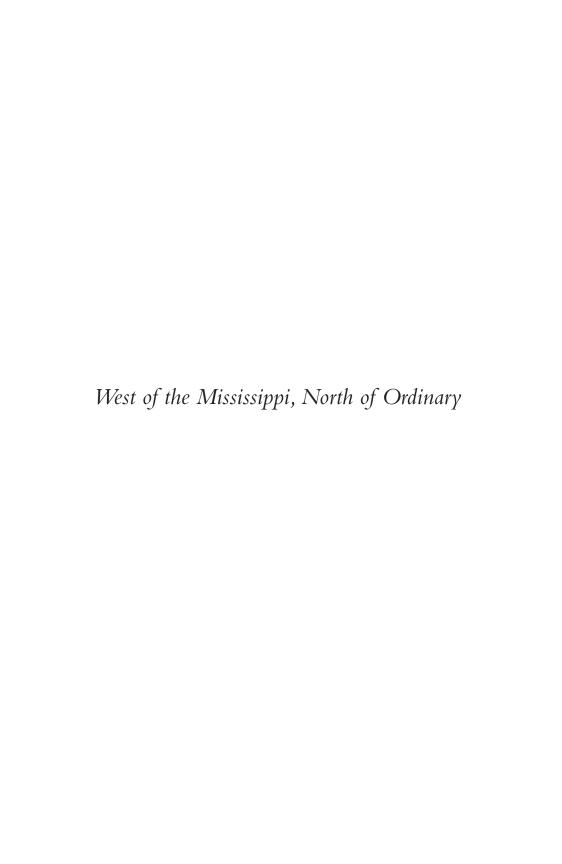
TABLE OF CONTENTS

11

From Steering with my Knees

Russell Rowland

Paul Zarzyski From 51: 30 Poems, 20 Song Lyrics, 1 Self-Interview Paul Zarzyski From Tom Connor's Gift David Allan Cates From Blue Horse, Red Desert 43 Tom Russell From 120 Songs 51 Tom Russell From Riding the Rough String 65 **Toby Thompson** From Metroliner *75* **Toby Thompson** From Montana: Then and Now 85 Aaron Parrett From The Snow Leopard's Tale 97 Thomas McIntyre From Extremophilia Fred Haefele From A Quiet Place of Violence Allen Morris Jones From High and Inside



PAUL ZARZYSKI STEERING WITH MY KNEES



"In prose literature there are labels such as as 'Kafka-esque' and 'Hemingway-esque'. In cowboy poetry there is, or ought to be, 'Zarzyski-esque' No other 'esques' come close."

Jesse Mullins
American Cowboy

"Paul Zarzyski's poems will break your heart—and then turn right around and mend it. He looks pain squarely in the eye, takes its measure, and counters it with tenderness and wisdom, all in language that should be set to music..."

Ed McClanahan

Steering with my Knees Paul Zarzyski

If you know poetry in the West, you know the work of Paul Zarzyski. You know the electricity running through his verse, his punch-line crescendos and what he's called the "pugilistic puissance" of his musical lines. And if you've heard him perform, you know that some of his most popular poems are those that have a sense of humor, that take quite seriously the notion of drawing out a smile. For the first time, Paul Zarzyski's most popular "lite" poems are collected together under one cover. From "The Whale in my Wallet" to "Bingo in the Church Basement," "Turkey Buzzards Circling Nirvana" to "Long Sagebrush Drives," nothing entertains and provokes, amuses and inspires, quite like the king of the poet lariati.

In addition to a hand-picked selection of previously-published work, *Steering with my Knees* also includes more than thirty never-before-seen original poems.

MONTE CARLO EXPRESS— POST OFFICE BOX 258, 15.3 MILES HOME

I've checked fence doing 80 in a low-rider Chevrolet springing the borrow pit like a pack mule that hates crossing running water. The torture is too much when a week's worth of mail—stacked beside me like a high school majorette beckoning with her baton decades back when this car was showroom newpresses against me. I could never wait and still can't wait to open what's personal. Steering with my knees, jackknife gleaming in my lap, the wheel tilted down full—The Monte, a roulette ball blur hugging hot asphalt—I shuffle through the stack and gamble once again on 8 miles of 2-lane straightaway. I Frisbee bills and all business glassine-windowed envelopes, in which we poets never receive checks, over the suicide seat headrest, toss junk mail to the floor-mat collage on the shotgun side, stick love letters between my teeth, and maybe I'm better off not having tasted perfume for years. *Esquire*, slicker than a hot plastic sack of slimy grunion, slithers and slides over, under, and between the seats leaving its Stetson Cologne scent like a madam's tomcat mascot marking his turf on two-for-one night in a cowboy brothel. Ol' Monte drifts left across the double yellows on a hill then right, into the shoulder brome, seed heads whipping the wheel wells clean, dust swirling

in the side mirror, the Day-Glo rubber fish in place of plastic Jesus dashing for the stuntmen grasshoppers suctioned to the windshield, their front paws clasped in prayers that must have saved us from the bridge abutment already signed with 4 white crosses for those who did not quite

make

this

curve

because of booze, because of snooze, because of tire or tie rod act-of-God failure of car or heart, or the piss-poor penmanship of a good friend loving me almost to cursive death with this letter.

For Rick and Carole DeMarinis, and to Teddy-Bob "Roadkill Penmanship" Waddell

"THE CAR THAT BROUGHT YOU HERE STILL RUNS" *

* From Richard Hugo's "Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg"

It takes more than gasoline and gumption to get you to Zortman—more than whimsy or a wild inkling to rekindle history. It takes a primal prairie kinship with Old Man Winter, with Napi hunkering in sunless gulches, a longing for short Fourth of July parades, the bestkept-secret café with a waitress who commutes 50 miles from Malta— "big city with its 5 p.m. rush minute," she quips. What can anyone say in words that Charles Marion Russell has not narrated in paint. Little Rockies, Larb Hills, predator versus prey versus wind still give this Indian-cowboy landscape its animation.

Your three eggs jiggling explicitly over-easy, hash browns crisp, rough-cut slabs of bone-in ham, one pancake seat-cushioned over its own plate, make you wish you'd packed your camera's wide-angle lens. Panned first, then filtered, the coffee is as impasto-thick as the décor—local art collaged in barnwood frames above faux-brick wainscoting.

Lucky—

the 11 a.m. lull all to yourselves you are, for once, simply where you need to be. Do not ponder why. Do not ask the waitress what brought her here from Seattle. The wall clock is not locked in *pause*. Thus, you better be willing to revel in this living limbo, this muffling of drumroll death.

Muse

over your food. Ruminate, while chewing, on each tooth's name—incisor, canine, bicuspid, molar. Salute the taste buds, bitter to sweet, as you clean your plate, pony up, inch your way out of town with a groan, your heartstrings, taut lariats stretched to whatever rogue lodestar pulled you into this still-shot of Montana past—grass ropes aching to hold for only so long.

For Dick and Ripley, an in tribute to Frances McCue's literary masterpiece, The Car That Brought You Here Still Runs.

ZEKE ZARZYSKI BECKONS HIS MASTER TO FETCH

Zeke cherishes his bucketful of blue racquetballs, like his very best one that rolled, slow motion, down a gopher hole the 60-foot putt, replay after replay after replay, the only footage on the IumboTron screen of his canine mind. I know all too well how he feels. I also have lost friends, family, youth, wealth, good looks, down similar deep dark holes into the underworld unknown—not a rubber ball's bouncing prayer in melting hell of ever retrieving what was once so dear to me. Therefore, on this day-of-no-rest-for-the-dogged-Polish-Italian-Good-Samaritan our neighbors all *digging their* just rewards in church—what precise timing, I decide, to schlep pick-axe, spade, pry bar, dynamite (if Liz has not squandered it all to bust open her garden plot in this god-forsaken landscape of hardscrabble clay) into the pickup box with Zeke, who, panting, pacing, can't wait to show me which one of the countless gopher holes pocking his stomping grounds swallowed his beloved ball. Long past communion and Sunday brunch, I, both hands blistered, bleeding, with Zeke, both front paw pads raw from spelling me between boulder extractions. finally spy the blue-eyed Cyclops peering up at us from somewhere near Shanghai, way down slope

east of Greece. Rattlesnakes, black widows, brown recluses be damned, I reach shoulder-deep into the shaft and, inch-by-gingerly-finger-tipped-inch, roll ol' blue toward the surface, with Zeke the whole while licking my one ear not cookie-cuttered into the dirt—as though something really, really, really critical has been lost in that hole, as well.

PORCH LIGHT WEB

All summer long the miller moths crap their muddy runny watercolor crap between brush strokes of pricey oil paintings adorning my living room walls, goddamn pointillism-tainting dust-bag vagabonds—miles from the nearest trout stream, from their eco-heroic food chain niche—sons-a-bitches, anyway.

Stinking even worse

than rotten cantaloupe innards when I splatter the flitting bastards across the Zenith TV screen, my Reebok Cross-trainer or current issue of *Bon Appétit* hurled across the room, I finally learn to arm myself instead with vacuum cleaner equipped with fixed-bayonet baseboard attachment, its thin slot offering maximum long-distance suction: thh-whip...thh-whip...
thh-whip...thh-whip...
thh-whip...thh-whip...

Bingo! Gotcha!

Voilà! I locate the nocturnal Insectivorous vampireis menaces sound asleep come sunup on the flip side of every hanging work of art that I oh-so-slowly tilt up away from the wall just enough to slide the nozzle within...thh-whip... thh-whip...thh-whip...ahhhh, coitus interruptus of a Lepidoptera ménage à trois!

But the *real* thriller

begins at dusk, when I pop the top on a frosty Tecate, pour myself a shot of *reposado*, steer with my knees the La-Z-Boy recliner over to the picture window, and slurp with a vengeance the ocher refried *frijoles* dripping from the butt-end of a burrito as I flip the outdoor porch light switch ON!

Like a drive-in-theater teenager, I cheer the villain in tonight's feature film, The Return of the Ravenous Arachnid, her kaleidoscopic eyes incited by the sudden web-pluck cornucopia of spitfire corn dogs, rocket ship pigs-in-blankets, supersonic spring rolls, apricot crepes in flight, aerodynamic cannelloni, blintzes-on-the-wing—the mother of all Godzilla spiders (oh yeah, you go, girl!) at the all-she-can-roll-up-and-suck-dry (thh-whip, thh-whip) miller moth buffet.

For Ruthie McRae, Carol Stewart, and Nancy Duval

Paul ZARZYSKI

Foreword by Tom Russell



"...his subject—carried out in unforgettable poetry and prose—is the timeless duel between love and death."

Rick DeMarinis

"...fifty poems and lyrics as exquisite and heartfelt as any I've read, and one memoir essay that draws you deep into the making of the man and the poet."

Judy Blunt

"With Zarzyski, the heart is always out there in front, showing its compassion, though the mind is always there, too, with its obvious complexity, its Whitman influences, and its instinctive knowledge of the American tradition."

Greg Keeler

51: 30 Poems, 20 Song Lyrics 1 Self-Interview Paul Zarzyski

There are so few writers who can make us smile even as they're breaking our hearts. With 51 Paul Zarzyski gives us not only 30 of his finest poems but also the lyrics to 20 songs co-written with the likes of Ian Tyson, Tom Russell, and Wylie Gustafson. And with 1 self-interview, brilliant and auto-biographical, he shows us what shaped him as an author and artist, performer and poet.

From 1 Self-Interview

You say "joyous poem," and I immediately think to myself, "So what's new, considering 95 percent of his work is celebratory?" The exceptions being an occasional eulogy or lament—"All This Way for the Short Ride" comes immediately to mind, or, six million times the sorrow, your poem, "Shoes," which arose out of your visit to the Holocaust Museum in D.C. You do write quite a bit out of grief, as did Hugo. And then there's anger—your poem "The Hand," for example. Care to address what seems for you rare, yet extremely effective, poetic catalysts? Grief? Anger? Or, if you prefer, ire?

"Ire" smacks of euphemism. "The Hand" was written out of 200 proof fury—undiluted rage. I was holed up in that old ranch house on Flat Creek south of Augusta, in the foothills below the Rocky Mountain Front. Middle of winter. Late 1980s. Numerically in sync with the wind-chill temps dipping to eighty-something below zero one night. I was all but hugging the wood stove. Had propane as a backup, but in that open country pounded by severe winds, power outages (which would render the propane heaters worthless) were common. My mission, therefore, was to sleep on the couch in the main room with one ear open and to keep the fire banked, as well as the television tuned in to the latest news and weather up-

dates. I might've been watching Nightline or some other latenight news magazine show—I don't remember for sure. They aired a segment on apartheid, complete with a camera crew on location somewhere in South Africa. What I witnessed—set thousands of miles away in an arid landscape almost two hundred degrees warmer than the climate just outside my window-offended and infuriated me. Despite my physical and emotional distance—my immediate anxiety over the blizzard conditions—I considered the contents of the TV segment as a personal, far more perilous assault on my world. The local station interrupted the programming with a "severe weather warning," which, as I recall, included the information that propane at such-'n'-such a frigid temperature will jell. Insulating the regulator on the tank was highly advisable. Ripley Hugo had given me Dick's immense, heavy, hooded fishing parka after he died, beneath which I could sheathe myself in layer upon layer of cotton, wool, silk, goose down, polyurethane, you name it. Thus bundled, I not so much walked as "plodded like an astronaut or deep sea diver," is how I phrased it in a poem titled, "Feeding Horses In Richard Hugo's Fishing Parka."

The thousand gallon propane "pig" was set a mere twenty paces from the back door. I wrapped and lashed with baling twine an old sougan (cowboy's heavy, patched blanket) around the regulator. I'd just eaten my ritual, before-bed bowl of Wheaties while barely fending off the guilt of possibly shorting the horses on their Arctic ration of alfalfa, so it didn't take much self-convincing, as long as I was hazarding the storm, to prod me toward the barn to pour Cody and Buck their late-night Wheaties flakes as well. Halfway there I turned my back to the wind, noted the flicker of light ever-so-slightly visible from the kitchen window, and became mesmerized by the swirling snow quickly filling in my tracks. "I stood there amazed," to borrow a phrase from the "Home on the Range" lyric, until the only tracks remaining were the ones I was standing in. Never before, or since, have I felt so connected to this earth, felt so aware of each breath, of the exchange of carbon dioxide for oxygen in the lung's microscopic capillaries.

Never have I felt so alive, as well as felt the significance of being so alive. I believe I also experienced for a nano-moment a heightened degree of tranquility in which I could have happily taken my last breath, although I could not have exercised that option, thank my luckiest star, because of my need to get back to the house and engage the poem I knew would confront me. If I hadn't just been accosted by the apartheid footage, I probably would have heated and hammered that minus-eighty windchill factor moment into something ornate, joyous, at the poetry forge. (Someday, I'm certain, I will write that poem.) Instead, after a couple of hours of fitful sleep, I leapt out of bed, fed the wood stove, boiled some stout joe, and, still seething, wrote the "The Hand," or, I should say, assisted the poem as it wrote itself. I'm living creative proof that anger does have the capacity to impetuously trump joy on the scale of artistic stimulants. The piece is one of three, maybe four, out of my entire repertoire, that did not beg much, if any, revision. I sent it to Wally McRae with a simple inquiry, "Is this a cowboy poem?" He returned the copy bearing his brief reply penciled, with several hundred foot-pound-pressure, into the cellulose of the page; his sixteen agitated, squiggled letters read, "You Damn Right It Is."

The Hand

In South Africa, a white aristocrat grabs the hand of an elderly black man sitting in the dirt on the edge of a lush crop. The white man picks the black man's hand up as if it were a self-serve gasoline nozzle, pulls it toward a reporter and mechanically squeezes the wrist to spread wide the thick callused fingers and palm. The white man holds his own hand open side-by-side. "Do you see the difference?" he asks. "What does his hand look like to you? How

can you say we are the same?" "Do you see the difference?" he asks again, the reporter stunned by what he is hearing, while the black man sits inanimate, his working cowboy hand filling the camera's close-up lens with a landscape of canyons, coulees and arroyos, buttes and mesas, mountains and plains the black man might have ridden, hands shaped by pistol grip, lariat, and reins, had he been born of another geography and time—just another wind-burned hand of a cavvy man, sinew and knuckle, flesh and blood, pocked, porous, scarred, and dark as lathered latigo. The hand alongside the aristocrat's tissue-paper appendage always reaching to take even another man's hand, and own it, and hold it open, because he knows the fist is as big as a man's heart and this is the difference he fears.

...You studied with Hugo in the seventies. What did you learn from him about ars poetica?

Years ago I wrote a poem titled "Scars Poetica." It was prompted by songwriter Dave Alvin's fine book of poetry, *Any Rough Times Are Now Behind You*. Renowned sports writer Red Smith pronounced, "Writing's easy—just open a vein and let it flow." Yes, and every time you open that vein, it leaves a little scar. Maybe Mr. Smith was paraphrasing the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, who said, "Poetry is the bloodiest of arts—one must offer his heart to others and feed on it himself." I was quoted, and footnoted, by my friend Ralph Beer in his novel *The Blind Corral* as saying, "If there's not at least a little bit of hurt in your life every day, then you're not living hard enough." That dictum was easier to fulfill back in the days when I was riding bucking horses. On second thought,

maybe it's a lot easier to subscribe to today when my focus is almost purely on writing rather than divided between the riding and the writing, the latter, of course, the more arduous of the two contact art forms. In any case, that poetry is all about pathos and pleasure, music and message—as well as the infinite extensions therefrom—is the colossal lesson I learned from Dick Hugo. I'm convinced that no other creative writing teacher could have conveyed those poetic essences to me, at that moment of my greenhorn life, as demonstratively as Hugo did.

One spring the two of us decided way too prematurely to fish Twin Lake up in the Mission Mountains. The road, with its twenty inches or so of heavy, wet snow, was damn near impassable. I chained up all four wheels on the Ford and somehow we managed to claw and buck our way in, only to find merely a trickle of open tributary water and the lake capped in honeycombed ice, which did not deter us from spud-barring a number of holes and completing our mission to wet our lines. At one particularly hairy moment on the ride in, I remember Dick, chain-smoking times three his usual nicotine intake, proclaiming how at ease he felt with me at the wheel. We were miles from the pavement, it was impossible to turn the truck around on such a narrow road, and I didn't have the heart to say, "Dick, our chances of making it in or having to walk out are fifty-fifty." Apply this scenario metaphorically to the classroom and reverse the roles, and you'll know exactly how I felt sitting shotgun next to Hugo in the writing workshops. As self-effacing as Dick so often came across, he was nothing less than a literary genius, a brilliant teacher—incapable of putting flimsy thinking or grooveless music into words. Read his poetry. Read The Triggering Town and The Real West Marginal Way. I doubt I'll be able to summon up even a tenth as much puissance as Richard Hugo evoked via his bouquet of sharpened number 2 pencils sticking out of their Chinook Salmon-labeled tin can vase. Nevertheless, I'm the most fortunate uneducated aspiring writer to have ever entered an MFA program, period.

About the Author

Paul Zarzyski left his Hurley, Wisconsin home ground in the fall of '73 for Missoula, where he studied creative writing at the University of Montana with Richard Hugo, Madeline DeFrees, and John Haines, received his MFA degree, and later taught Dick's classes after his passing. While teaching in The Program and riding bareback broncs on the ProRodeo Circuit, he attended in 1987 the



Kenton Row

first of his twenty-eight consecutive National Cowboy Poetry Gatherings in Elko, Nevada. He's made his living since as a performance poet at venues that include The Library of Congress, The Kennedy Center Millennium Stage, and The Mother Lode Theater in Butte, where he was featured in 1999 on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion." He's appeared, as well, with the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra and the Spokane Symphony. He has also co-written songs with esteemed musicians Tom Russell, Ian Tyson, David Wilkie, Wylie Gustafson, Don Edwards, and others. The author of twelve books, chapbooks, and limited-edition chapbooks, and five spoken-word CD recordings, Paul's life's work was celebrated with the 2005 Montana Governor's Arts Award for Literature. He currently lives west of Great Falls with art historian and C. M. Russell scholar, Elizabeth Dear, their Aussie dog, Zeke, and horses Pecos and Lash.

David Allan Cates's *Tom Connor's Gift* is extraordinary. The prose is ravishing, the characters are surprising and irresistible, and many of its scenes are so intensely moving that they bring tears of gratitude and pleasure.

David Huddle

"Tom Connor's Gift is the gift we all seek, the gift of love in the face of grief, violence, loss, and heartbreak."

Annick Smith

"Tom Connor's Gift delivers us precious monsters: our first true love and our true lasting love. Coursing between anecdote and musing, this is a novel only grownups can understand."

Bryan Di Salvatore

"Tom Connor's Gift is a fearless and instructive odyssey into the rustic places of the heart that still baffle and dictate our lives."

Rick DeMarinis

"Tom Connor's Gift is a gift all right—hilarious and moving—a two for one: two voices, two stories, two struggles to come to terms with love and longing, in prose that is vivid, urgent, brave, and true."

Dinah Lenney

Tom Connor's Gift David Allan Cates

A recently-widowed doctor, stunned by grief, retreats to a cabin on Montana's Rocky Mountain Front. Inside she has a puppy and a stack of letters from an old lover. Outside, there's a bear. As she revisits the letters from Tom Connor, we come to see, through his eyes, the dusty, broken alleys of Central America during the war years. The two narratives taken together explore themes of life-long love, about what we can see only when we are ready to see, and how hope can grow in the darkest of places. The third in what the author sees as his "homecoming trilogy" (after Hunger in American and Ben Armstrong's Strange Trip Home), Tom Connor's Gift shines a light on the transformative act of storytelling itself, and is destined to be received as one of the most important novels of the year.

how do you stay married to a man? how do you stay in love?

T put the letter down and get up and pour myself a cup of wine. **▲**The mention of the rum makes me thirsty. Does that mean I'm becoming an alcoholic? His unabashed carnality makes me something else, which I take as a good sign, although part of what I feel when I feel it is panic that nobody will ever want me again, nobody that I would have anyway. I sit back down again at the table with the wine and use my palm to smooth out the crinkled paper that the letter was written on, put it back in the envelope, then take it out again. About the only thing I know for certain about desire is how fast it can change. When my daughter was in high school she said she was staying overnight at her girlfriend's house, but she wasn't there in the morning when we called. When she came home around noon we confronted her with this inconvenient fact, and she admitted that she'd stayed overnight with her boyfriend, but they didn't have sex. She said they both decided they weren't ready for sex. I told her that was nice but if she wasn't ready for sexwasn't ready to look at this boy the next day and know he was the first one, wasn't ready to protect herself against STDs or pregnancy (although, why would she believe me?)—then she shouldn't climb into bed with him. She thought I was being overly protective. She thought I didn't trust her.

"I want you to think about a couple of things," I told her. She snorted, but I pressed on. "First of all, you need to remember that whether or not you can imagine it or not, he could force you, and so until a girl knows a boy very *very* well, she should never put herself in a position that contradicts her intentions. Like get in bed, under the covers, in her underwear, with a boy she doesn't want to have sex with."

This made her angry. She thought I didn't like her boy-friend. She was right, but that was beside the point. She said, "Mom, we're not talking about 'a boy' and 'a girl.' We're talking about me and Jace, and he would never force me."

"Okay," I said, "Of course not. But even if Jace is a perfect gentleman, and even if you might not be ready for sex when you climb into bed with him, well, fifteen minutes under the covers has been known to change a girl's mind."

She blushed and looked away, turned away. We were having this conversation in the farmhouse kitchen. From where we stood we could see over a half-wall counter into the living room, the woodstove room. On the ceiling of that room was a ceiling fan. Every few seconds our border collie Pete jumped up at the fan. He'd get about four feet off the ground and appear up over the half wall, blue eyes wild and hypnotized by the fan. Then he'd fall back to the floor again where we couldn't see him. Then he'd pop up again.

"All I'm saying, Kate," I said, "is you have needs you don't know yet—needs that'll make irrelevant the question of whether or not you're *ready*."

"Mom," she said. "How can you be so cynical?"

"I'm not being cynical," I said, and watched Pete jump. "It's just the way we're made."

Kate spun around and flashed me another angry look—only now she was crying as well. Pete jumped again. He'd do

this silently and forever, as far as anybody knew. Nobody else in the house seemed bothered by it.

"One more thing," I said, and I tried to be gentle. "I don't think you can believe for one second when Jace tells you he isn't ready for sex."

Despite her tears, she screamed at me. "You don't even *know* him!"

I wanted to touch her but when I reached out she spun away. "No," I said, "but I know boys, and as far as Jace saying he isn't ready for sex—as far as any boy saying he isn't ready—you can be pretty certain that the moment you decide *you are ready*, he will be too."

Pete jumped and jumped again. I couldn't stand it anymore and walked out of the kitchen and grabbed him by the collar and put him outside. When I came back into the kitchen Kate was still there, slumped away from me, face down, all the air out of her. How had I made such a mess of it?

"It's just the way boys are made," I said, and tried to smile, tried to turn my tone a little bit playful. "And although it's often annoying, it's also pretty handy in its way."

How's that for a frank sex talk? Poor Kate to get stuck with a blunt mother like me. Or *struck* with a blunt mother. She had that look, anyway, as she blinked her big watery green eyes a couple of times, blushed a carnation pink, and ran upstairs to her room as fast as she could.

From the table in the cabin I look out the big window at the blue sky fading to gray dusk. I stand to check out the meadow, look for the bear but don't see him. The stove needs a fire. There are still a few hot coals from this morning and I could build it up fast with a few sticks but I think I'll wait. The cabin is so small that if I build a fire before it gets cold, the stove will make the cabin too hot and then I'll want to open the door, but I'll be afraid to do that because what if the bear comes around again?

I touch the pepper spray in its holster on my belt just to reassure myself. In case I grow any *cojones* I'll shoot a *gringo*. This thought amuses me but also reminds me of writhing around

on the floor last night trying to cough out the sharp little hook of pepper spray in my throat. I decide to go outside and pee before it gets dark. When I get back—with more wood, of course, that I stack on top of the already full box behind the stove—I grab my cup of wine and sit down again with the letter. I have to admit I don't remember at all the peaceful scene at the shore of the lake listening to Elvis. I remember reading it early in the morning in my rocking chair in our one-bedroom (the twins had the bedroom, Mark and I slept on a fold-out couch in the living room) apartment in Durham, North Carolina, while I was trying to nurse the twins. They must have been less than four months old and I was back at work already doing my residency in the hospital and feeling overwhelmed. It's amazing I remember reading the letter at all, because when I think of those times, those first two years with the twins, which corresponded with my first two years doing an E.R. residency, well, frankly, the specifics of that time seem blasted away from memory by the trauma itself, the difficulty anesthetized by the passage of time. When my dad was beginning to lose his mind to Alzheimer's, he went through a stage of reading all of his papers, his letters, everything he had around the house, and he was lucky because he had a lot—transcribed interviews and many fat fragments of a never finished memoir that told the stories of his life. He read about how he'd taught and practiced law for decades. How he'd become a judge, played the piano and the guitar, raised pigeons, gardened, built a cabin with his own hands in Northern Wisconsin, and then because he wanted to learn to sail, he built a sail boat. He read how wanting to learn to sail forced him, at age fifty-six, to finally learn how to swim. Yet he was so detached from what he was reading, he'd often look up from the page to tell me something his father had done.

"No, Daddy," I'd say, "that was *you* who did that. Those are your stories. You wrote them."

He'd look at me as if I must be kidding. "How?" he'd say.

"You mean how did you write them or how did you do them?"

He shook his head, incredulous. "Both."

"You had a lot of energy," I said. "You were young. And you had Mom to help."

He nodded and smiled and I wasn't sure who he was thinking about when he said, "Yes, Mom."

So how did I manage? Two words: sleeplessness and Mark. I was young, too, just twenty-four when the twins were born, and of course there were times—especially before they were born—when I wondered if I was ready, despite the vow I'd made to myself after terminating my first pregnancy. But what I was learning then, what having children and doing a medical residency both teach (and what much later I'd try to tell my daughter) is this: what *you're ready for* and what *you need to do* are two different things, and often doing what *you need to do* makes the question of what *you're ready for* irrelevant.

Which finally brings me back to exactly where I was when I read this letter the first time: early one morning under a green light in our apartment after a day and night of work made even longer by a three-hundred-pound woman in a diabetic coma who was literally dragged by the feet (her body was rolling on one of those wheeled planks mechanics lie on when they slide under your car) into the emergency room and down the tiled hallway by her desperate husband just as I was getting ready to go home, and if that wasn't enough, they were followed by a man who'd shot himself in the head and walked in (yes, walked) just as I was getting ready to go home again. I suppose in situations like that it should be easy to focus on what is needed—but at the time I was distracted by other needs, too many needs, as my breasts were leaking even as I tended his wounds, milk soaking through the pads in my bra and wetting the front of my scrubs. I think I started crying on the way home from the hospital. I'd missed six important weeks of my residency, staying home with the babies, and in the two months since I'd been back I felt so far behind I'd never catch up. We were working easily a hundred hours a week and still I thought I'd never learn what I was supposed to learn. I was missing my babies, too. I was determined to be a good mother,

and what that meant to me then, the only thing that meant to me then (the only thing I could do for my babies, really, as I was gone so much) was breast feed. The plan was I could feed them when I came back from work and feed them before I left for work, and pump milk at work for Mark to feed from a bottle the next day when I was gone. I thought I could keep breastfeeding for six months despite my long shifts and long weeks. All of the literature said it was the best thing for the babies. The nutrition, of course, but the mommy factor, as well. If my babies didn't have me holding them and touching them and talking to them, they could at least have my milk. It meant a lot to me. It made me feel as if I were there with them even though I was not.

So I arrived home leaking and tired and carrying a heavy agenda for how it was supposed to be. My husband would have the twins changed and clean and present them to me, the great provider. I'd feed them until all three of us drifted off to sleep, and then Mark would take them from my arms and put them in the crib, and lead me back to bed without waking me and hold me tight until morning, when I'd drag myself up and shower and head back to the hospital. Instead, I found Mark asleep in bed with two empty bottles on the pillow and the sleeping twins next to him. My breasts started leaking again just looking at the babies. We had a little rule never to wake sleeping babies no matter what, but we also had a little rule that he wouldn't feed the babies before I got home, that he would save that feeding for me. I picked them up and held them and they woke and started to cry and I started to let out even more milk. Mark woke too and said the babies weren't hungry, that he'd waited as long as he could but had to feed them, and now that I'd woken them up again, I could jolly well hold them again until they went back to sleep.

Pretty soon we were all crying. Well, not Mark. He just lay back down and lifted his head occasionally to shout back when I shouted at him, until finally he couldn't even do that, and his head just stayed right on the pillow and he went to back sleep. I couldn't believe it. The babies were screaming and I was pac-

ing and scolding and he fell asleep right in the middle of our argument. I wondered if he was on some kind of drug, and that made me even madder. It was an absurd thought-Mark didn't smoke marijuana until he was dying and barely even drank—but I thought it anyway because anger was my drug and it was coursing wildly through my veins and needed to be fed. I walked with the screaming babies, one in each arm, feeling sorry for myself and for the twins for having a drug-addict father. I had the kind of sleeplessness they use to torture prisoners, and let me tell you, I would have said anything, done anything, to get some sleep. What I did finally was sit down, which is what the babies wanted, an end to the frantic jiggling. They settled down enough so I could try to get them to take some milk and they did take a little, but barely any, and then they fell asleep with their mouths still clamped gently on my nipples. I was afraid to move and too boiling inside watching Mark sleep to go to sleep myself, and that's when I noticed the letter, and that's when I read the letter—my milk crusted scrubs hiked up over my bare breasts, trying not to wake my over-fed babies, and boiling mad at my sleeping husband for doing everything he was supposed to do—that's when I read the letter.

Of course the letter made me even angrier. His description of the woman and sex embarrassed me—as though I cared who he was having sex with—and it seemed that's all he wrote about. I balled up the paper in my fist, which is why the paper's now crinkled and also why I don't recall anything about the peaceful scene at the end. Did he have the slightest idea what he was talking about? What a woman was, what she could do? I'd been stretched and torn and sewn and sore and only now perhaps healed, at least the flesh of me. I looked at Mark sleeping in the bed and tried to calm myself, but I was resenting my fatigue and my feeling of incompetence at work and incompetence at home, and most of all resenting how much I needed Mark to make it all work, and resenting him for not wanting me, and resenting the fact that the babies had taken that from us. Taken it all from me, anyway, as I hadn't had even a stirring

like that in many months. Would I ever feel it again? And if I didn't, what would that make me, some kind of sexless freak? I'd cut my hair super short and start wearing sexless clothes and prattle endlessly about my babies. Mark would turn into my drone husband trailing along behind me following instructions. The thought sent me tumbling into despair. I looked at Tommy's letter. Screw him, I thought, and his six-beer mornings and wild nights. What does that have to do with anything that matters? My mother used to say the work of adulthood was buying groceries, raising children, and staying sane. Mark and I were doing the best we could. Tommy was living like a child. Fuck him, I thought. From anger to despair to comfortable anger again, I crinkled up his letter even tighter in my fist and tossed it across the room into the corner.

Again I looked at Mark sleeping. I'd fallen for him barely more than a year ago and yet it felt like ages, and lately like the great ice age. Thirteen months ago he lay on top of me with all of his weight, which was nothing compared to the weight of the babies he put inside me or the weight of the things I'd need to learn and the things I'd need to bear. I sat with my sleeping babies on my lap and looked at how the weight of him sagged the hide-a-bed, but after putting the twins back in their crib and shutting the door, I climbed in with him anyway. There was nowhere else to lie down. I felt him move next to me in bed, hard and trembling, felt this with bitterness, almost, who did he think I was? My breasts were still leaking milk and I hated how it made me smell, and yet I hadn't even showered yet—I'd save that for morning. I felt empty inside, completely spent except for the heat of the anger, a burning feeling focused just exactly where the tip of his penis touched my hip.

He put his arm around me. "Welcome back, baby."

I moved away, tensed for a fight, but soon heard by his breathing that he'd fallen back asleep, which I held against him as well. I envied Mark how he'd fed the babies, and I was mad at him for not waiting, and I could understand why he didn't—how would he know when I was getting home?—which made me all the more angry, how I had no control over when I left

work or even any control over whether I could feed my own babies. My breasts hurt and I thought I should pump them, but I thought fuckit, fuckit fuckit, I'm tired of that fucking pump, and so I lay there and thought I could feel them begin to dry out, feel this gift of milk begin to ebb, and that made me mad, looking at Mark and thinking how he was making my breasts dry out, taking this life away from me, and somehow I jumped from that to how while I was holding the man with the gunshot wound to the head, wet circles suddenly darkened my scrubs over my nipples and how he just lay there and watched, eyes wide open. Amazed. Maybe it saved his life. My god. Sometimes you run to the bathroom to replace your pads and change scrubs but if you've got a man who's just shot himself in the head and you are trying to get him to calm down so you can look at his wound, and you are holding his head, and cleaning his wound and you can't run to the bathroom and change your pads and your scrub tops you might be thinking, at least for a second, you might be thinking you son of a bitch, if you'd had better aim you'd be dead and I'd be cleaned up and home by now.

Mark and I fell in love probably four times in the twenty-four years we were together, each more miraculous then the last. Each falling was a surrender into deeper levels of vulnerability, and each falling we fought with every cell of our bodies. It was a pattern in our marriage that both threatened it and saved it. We'd resist surrendering and resist and resist, and then, exhausted and in need, we'd find each other again. It was the ebb and flow of love—which even after all of these years the only thing I know for sure about is what it's not. Love is not the same, ever, ever, ever. I suppose that night was the second. I mean, the first was the original tumble and pregnancy when we fell laughing together down the rabbit hole. This time, I went to sleep feeling wounded, incompetent, scared, but so tired I somehow fell asleep anyway, and then woke in his arms, grateful he was there with me. Where did the anger and bitterness go? A good sleep does marvelous things. I remember thinking, how did this good thing happen to me? I remember thinking, what did I do to make this good thing happen to me? I remember thinking I will love this man until the day I die. Last night I had been so caught up in my body, the birth, the babies, my work, I hadn't really looked at him, and suddenly, there he was—

"Are you ready for this?" he asked, poised over me.

I nodded. I shook my head. I pulled him down on top of me. I hurt, I wasn't quite ready, but I needed him just where he was with a need fiercer than any I'd ever known. It woke me up and shook me to my bones. I'd been afraid of losing my anger, the chip on my shoulder. It had been my strength, kept me upright, getting up, doing what I had to do for the babies, getting me to go back to work, and now I'd have to do without it—I'd have to do it with this man, who I loved, and there was nothing scarier I could think of. My bones shook. How deep could I go? Deeper. No. Deeper. No. More. I hadn't the strength to resist. I clung to him and each time we came together it was a surrender, a falling into a place of dependency I never imagined possible. Such tender nothingness, such huge weakness, so tired, so sore, so weak. I was a wreck, I was destroyed. I was in love again. I remember pulling him toward me. I remember instead of a barrier, as it had been feeling of late, my skin felt like an opening, and when Mark touched me I lost my solid boundaries. My breasts wet and my vagina wet and my mouth wet and afterward when I cried and cried and cried, my eyes and nose were wet as well. Mark held me, held me, held me, and like that we plunged into the abyss. We'd only known each other a year and a month. How could we have come so far?

When we finished, I heard the babies beginning to wake, and my breasts let down milk and he said he'd get up and bring them to me but just as quickly I let go and let myself fall back to sleep again before he returned. I say let go because it felt like I'd been pulling a rope as hard as I could, afraid to let go of it, afraid I'd fall, but when I relaxed my grip, I didn't fall at all. Instead, whatever was on the rope floated away, but I was still where I'd always been, and I wondered why I'd ever thought the thing that floated away was so important. I dreamed I sat

knitting booties in a bizarre green room with a stuffed Santa Claus head mounted on the wall. I kept hearing gunshots and when I finally got up to look out the window into dirt road a man with a big plastic President Reagan mask was walking the length of a line of Mexican bandit prisoners giving each a jelly bean like communion wafer before shooting them in the head with his pointer finger. When they all lay dead, he lifted his mask—it was Tommy under the mask—and he blew the smoke off the tip of his finger like a gunfighter in an old Western.

I woke with the sheet twisted and the blankets bunched up at the foot of the bed. There was still an hour and a half before I had to be at work, and Mark, who'd collected Tommy's balled-up letter from the floor and set it on the counter, must have also already fed the babies and somehow gotten them back to bed, and now was on his way out the door for a run. He paused when he noticed my eyes were open. I curled up into a ball to stay warm. Without saying a word, he stepped over and spread the blankets to cover me up again.

The last time I talked to my daughter, she called from Kuala Lumpur shortly after the funeral to see how I was. I wasn't good. I mean, what was there to say? I was an empty shell and every cell in my body hurt. I told her that and then there wasn't much else to talk about. Except there was. Even over ten thousand miles I could feel the weight of the silence. I could tell she had something she wanted to ask me. Finally I said, "Honey, what is it?"

What I heard next was a voice so sad it squeezed the blood from my already broken heart. "How do you stay married to a man?" she asked, the voice of my daughter who'd just lost her father, the voice of a little girl, the voice of a very young woman living half a world away and trying to do a very big thing. "How do you stay in love?"

I was numb, exhausted, worn down by the wild swings of grief. If I'd been feeling more cheerful I might have tried to make something up or even tried to tell a dumb joke, but the fatigue and pain had made me nothing if not honest.

"I don't know, sweetheart," I said. "I really don't know."

About the Author

David Allan Cates is the author of four previous novels, most recently Ben Armstrong's Strange Trip Home, winner of a Gold Medal in the Independent Book Publishers Award. He's published numerous short stories and poems,



and his nonfiction has appeared in magazines such as *Outside* and *The New York Times Sophisticated Traveler*. He's the executive director of Missoula Medical Aid.

blue horse red desert

"Tom Russell is Johnny Cash, Jim Harrison, and Charles Bukowski rolled into one. I feel a great affinity with Tom Russell's songs, for he is writing out of the wounded heart of America." *Lawrence Ferlinghetti*

"Tom Russell is an original, a brilliant songwriter with a restless curiosity and an almsot violent imagination."

Annie Proulx

"Tom Russell's art brings together primitive, Native American, Southwestern and Mexican influences as he does in his music, with an eye as keen as his ear."

Monte Hellman

Blue Horse, Red Desert Tom Russell

Known to American audiences primarily through his music, singer-songwriter Tom Russell is every bit as talented on the canvas as he is the page, just as devoted to exploring his chosen art form when there's a brush in his hand as a guitar. And so it's perhaps no surprise that the same sensibilities that inform his music—the passion and compassion, his sense of western history and feel for his own context—are also tangibly on display on his canvases.

Through the course of presenting more than sixty of Russell's finest paintings, *Blue Horse*, *Red Desert* spans some of the most productive years of his career. We see the humor of such pieces as *Free Range Chickens Crossing the Rio Grande*, we share in his sense of umbrage with *Custer's Last Stand* and *Juarez / Guernica*, and we appreciate the awareness of his predecessors in homages to Fritz Scholder and Edward S. Curtis.

With a brilliant biographical introduction by Russell and an afterword by Paul Zarzyski, *Blue Horse*, *Red Desert* is destined to be seen as a milestone in the blooming career of a true American master.

From the Introduction

When I was a child my grandmother took me to her weekly painting lessons. A dozen old women facing paint-splattered easels. Still lifes and portraits. A hothouse room crowded with ferns, cactuses, and snoring dogs. And painters. Classical music streamed out of a red Zenith radio. The women hummed to Mozart and Chopin and Verdi and Bach as they threw paint on the canvas. They had runs in their stockings and splotches of blue cerulean and Indian red on their aprons. Cigarettes. Black coffee. Cheese and pimento sandwiches. Bohemian spirits. And paint. Lots of paint. Flying. They weren't painting for the critics, or for the Museum of Modern Art. I don't believe any one of them was living on a grant. They were housewives, teachers, poets, and just plain ol' crabby, eccentric ladies who lived up the street. The aroma of oil paint and kerosene mixed with preludes and waltzes and the coughing of little dogs. And laughter. These painterly female spirits were floating above the world. They were having fun. It was a multimedia circus fugue—sound, light, and color.

Gossip and aroma. I sat chewing on a cheese sandwich. Digging it.

A few years later my grandmother painted me pictures of Muhammad Ali and football players and Indians. She gave me her mandolin, bought me a banjo, and cooked prime rib and apple pies. An *Americana* childhood. I still have the mandolin. And the *paintings*. One of her Sioux Indians stares down at us from the bedroom wall here in El Paso. It reminds me of those hothouse afternoons.

I was a dreamer. The kid in his bedroom with heroes tacked up over my head. Pictures ripped from magazines and sports journals and folk music quarterlies. And my grandmother's paintings. At first the walls were covered with athletes. When I became a teenager, the athletes were given over to folksingers. Hank Williams, Bob Dylan, Ian and Sylvia, Tim Hardin, Dave Van Ronk, Peter LaFarge, Fred Neil, Gordon Lightfoot and Ramblin' Jack Elliot. Those lived-in faces. Authentic voices. Ballads and balladeers. Beautiful beat-up guitars. Brazilian rosewood with scratches and wounds. Cigarette burns. Bullet holes. Dream machines. Guitars absorb every situation they work in, from coffee houses to honky-tonks to Carnegie Hall. They are the wild harps strapped to the backs of wandering minstrels. That was the life for me. But I kept that painting idea in the back of my head.

Years later, in a pawn shop in San Luis Obispo, I picked up a 1946 Martin D-18 guitar and went in search of the folk crusade, not knowing it would take forty years and a lifetime to arrive at a watering hole where you could sit down and rest your camel, restring your guitar, and contemplate whether you were a real troubadour with anything to say. After twenty-six albums, a few films, and songs covered by many of my heroes, I think I'm finally growing confident with the music journey. We're *getting there*. The lights of Nashville, New York, and the "big time" shimmer way off in the distance. We've discovered that "getting there" might take us down dirt roads and back alleys, towards a curious and "outsider" dimension far from those lights. Too late to turn back.

I'm getting ahead of myself. I wanted to take you to Nigeria. I didn't have the guts and heart for that real music life until I'd graduated from college, went to West Africa, and taught criminology during the Biafran War. It was during the Nigerian experience that I walked away from academia and began my journey in the minstrel trade. I played more guitar than I taught. Ah! *Africa*! Pink sunsets, pink gin, and Graham Greene novels. War, dysentery, tropical heat, malaria, and mosquito nets. And *art*. A living museum of tribal art.

In Ibadan I took carving lessons in the marketplace from a man named Sunday Olu Idowu. He taught me to carve African heads and horse figures, in relief, on African oak and ebony. We sat through wet afternoons and carved and watched the ladies go by with baskets of fruit and vegetables on their heads. What a parade. And the Fulani herdsmen with hundreds of longhorn bush cows. Two Fulanis could move a large herd through the city, using only chants and herding sticks. Real cowboys. Ibadan was the largest indigenous black city in the world and it hummed day and night. Seven endless rolling hills of mud huts with tin roofs. Brothels and palm wine bars with high life and juju music. Magic, music, and art. In abundance. I still have the set of chisels that Sunday Idowu bought me in the Ibadan marketplace, and I remember the nights at Sunday's one room flat, when his wife cooked Chile-drenched beef that we washed down with fresh palm wine. It was a dizzy year.

In Ibadan I encountered my first *mystical* artist. I was watching a talking drum exhibition at the University of Ibadan. Forty talking drummers were directed by this eerie looking white woman in a dramatic, Bette Davis Easter hat. This was the Austrian artist Suzanne Wenger. She'd walked away from her German anthropologist husband and married a Nigerian drummer "from the bush." She'd risen up through the Yoruba cult and was now a high priestess who'd transformed the upcountry town of Oshogbo into a shrine, following the artistic journey all the way back to ancient tribal roots.

She died there a few years ago in her nineties. Her village is now a world heritage site.

Forty years ago I drove up to Oshogbo to see her work. The village was a wild homage to Wenger's vision. There were giant, vagina-shaped mud huts and river shrines and carvings hanging from trees, and even the town gas station was covered with plaster spirit carvings. I didn't get to speak with Suzanne. She spoke Yoruba, they said, if she spoke to you at all. But I bought one of her pamphlets in which she railed against white colonial civilization for trouncing and ripping off African art and culture. I'll never forget one of her lines: "Anthropologists threatening-stepped with their iron-intellectual bootheels into temples and spirit shrines...they crushed ancient taboos..." This woman was dead serious. Her art was dangerous, much the way Frida Kahlo's paintings were dangerous. No arch bullshit allowed. Open up a vein and throw blood on a canvas or a juju statue. Kneel down in a grove of sacred trees. Talk to the spirits. Dance to the beat of an ancient drum. When asked in 2007 how she achieved all this, Suzanne kept saying, "It comes by itself."

It was all very appealing to me. *Living art*. Passion and rage. Tribal roots. On the way out of town I met a famous painter named "Twins Seven-Seven," who was the seventh son in a long line of twins in a royal family. He painted and made music. The whole experience left me with the overpowering notion that art was tied in with deep magic, and a blood and bone hoodoo and drum music. Art was a spirit which transformed, elevated, and preserved cultures.

When I returned to America I brought home a carved divining bowl, a smallpox god, carved doors, and a talking drum. I was careful not to rip off any *antiquities* because Suzanne's ghost would haunt me forever. The Nigerian art is here, in our adobe in the desert, with my grandmother's paintings, old Navajo rugs, Hopi kachinas, and carved Mongol horsemen. *Juju*. They all speak of the same spirits. *God spirits*. William Faulkner said, "The proof to me of immortality, that

there is a God, is in the fact that man writes books and paints pictures and composes music—they are the proof to God that man exists."

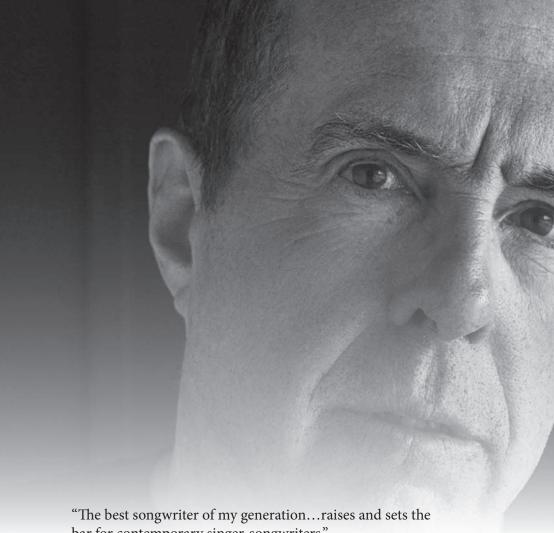
After Nigeria I lived in Vancouver, Austin, and San Francisco, before landing in New York in 1980. The wandering bard. I drove a cab, tried to write novels, and played honkytonks from Long Island to Oslo, Norway. I wrote songs. For ten years I lived in a Brooklyn, bohemian *bunker*. I stole the concept from William S. Burroughs. His bunker was an old YMCA building on the Lower East Side. My bunker was a boarded-over storefront on the side street of a Puerto Rican neighborhood. Salsa, rap, muggings, fireworks, pistol shots, pizza slices, and Cuban sandwiches.

My neighbor in the next bunker was a realist painter from Ohio, Richard Estell. We talked art and explored the raw integrity of our landlady's homemade red wine. She fermented it in her bathtub and bottled it in half-gallon, plastic soda bottles. You picked grape skins out from between your teeth. On spring afternoons this tough old Italian woman would sit out on the front stoop and read ribald Italian classics from thrift store paperbacks. When she finished a page she'd rip it off and let the wind carry it into the gutter. Then she'd cackle. "You shoulda read it! Ha ha ha."

Richard Estell painted a great deal and played blues harmonica in local bars. He was the real thing. His painted images of the old Gowanus Canal where the Mohawk, high-iron workers lived; the ones who built the bridges and skyscrapers of New York. He painted the rear fire escapes of the old brownstone tenements. Puerto Rican ladies rested in the windows, their arms on old pillows, as they gossiped with neighbors and screamed at their kids. He painted up the neighborhood. The vanishing New York tenement life. You couldn't turn it down. It moaned and groaned all night. Richard encouraged me to try painting, and I drew a few things on cardboard, but I was too busy with the music and the survival routine. My time was

spent writing songs and novel manuscripts, and plying the music trade on the road.

This went on for almost fifteen years, until I decided to leave New York for the West. Rowing back towards home. The old New York had gone *safe*. The Brooklyn neighborhood had become "gentrified." The nights were quieter. The white money moved in. The Cubans and Puerto Ricans migrated eastward, deeper into the ghetto. I longed for the West. The *frontier*. El Paso and the great Chihuahua desert. *Juarez*. Solitude. Dry heat. Border towns. I was lured by the sun and light, and that wonderful expanse of sand and cactus and thorn, and by two songs: Marty Robbins' gunfighter ballad "El Paso," and Bob Dylan's "Just like Tom Thumb's Blues," which begins with the line, "When you're lost in the rain in Juarez, and it's Easter time too." *Indeed*.



bar for contemporary singer-songwriters."

Mike Regenstreif, Montreal Gazette

"The most powerful voice on the contemporary folk circuit..."

Boston Globe

"The greatest living country songwriter...he's written songs that capture the essence of America. A trait that can only be matched by the country's greatest novelists..."

John Swenson, Rolling Stone

"The lyrics are jewels."

Robert Hunter, Grateful Dead Lyricist

120 SONGS Tom Russell

Singer, songwriter, painter, essayist...Tom Russell is known as one of the most compelling performers in the world and is recognized as a master American lyricist. And now, with 120 Songs, Russell presents his first-ever collection of lyrics, handpicked and individually introduced, and complemented by a set of his original woodcut illustrations.

From classics like "Blue Wing," "Gallo del Cielo," "Navajo Rug," and "Outbound Plane" to newer songs like "Guadalupe," and "Mesabi" this volume is the only available anthology, in print, of all of Russell's finest songs and unpublished rarities. Each song includes an introduction and guitar chords, and the main introduction also includes details of Russell's brief encounters with Bob Dylan and the Beatles.

BLUE WING

This song saved my life one afternoon in Edmonton Maximum Security Prison when the show wasn't going over very well. "Blue Wing" warmed up the boys and I was able to make it out alive. Recently we polled our fan base, asking what people's favorite song was, and "Blue Wing" won the poll. I've run into sailor's wives in England who have blue wing tattooed on their arms or legs. Ex-convicts from the British Columbia Penitentiary told me, face to face, how much they appreciate the song. The color, detail, and emotional elements of this story were influenced by my early days in the bars of Vancouver, B.C. But Little Willie John? The great songwriter Otis Blackwell visited my bunker, when I lived in Brooklyn, and told me how he wrote "Fever" with Little Willie John. Otis mentioned that Willie died in prison. Somehow, in my mind, Little Willie meets a Native American salmon fisherman and they concoct a dream song. I wrote the song in Ian Tyson's writing cabin in the Canadian Rockies.

Dave Alvin did a killer version (probably the best version) of this song on his King of California, record. Dave took my version, which was originally a country treatment, and turned it back around into a more Woody Guthrie, folk feel. Then I started doing it like Dave. Dave said the song saved his life one time when he was trying to write songs in Nashville. Johnny Cash once told me, over breakfast in Switzerland, how much he admired the song. He wanted to record it. I've heard that it exists in his archives somewhere. Later he recorded my song "Veteran's Day." Tracy Grammer does a fine version of "Blue Wing" on an EP titled Book of Sparrows, and my version appears on Poor Man's Dream, The Long Way Around, and Veteran's Day: The Tom Russell Anthology.

Chords

Key of C. Capo on the 5th fret, in G chord positions. Finger picked.

Verse	Chorus
G	G-C
G-Am	G-D
Am	G-C
D-G	G-D
	Em

Blue Wing

He had a blue wing tattooed on his shoulder Well, it might have been a bluebird, I don't know But he'd get stone drunk, and talk about Alaska The salmon boats and forty-five below

He said he got that blue wing up in Walla Walla Where his cell mate there was Little Willie John And Willie, he was once a great blues singer And Wing and Willie wrote 'em up a song

(They said)
"It's dark in here, can't see the sky,
But I look at this blue wing and I close my eyes
And I fly away, beyond these walls
Up above the clouds, where the rain don't fall
On a poor man's dream"

They paroled Blue Wing in August, 1963 He moved north, pickin' apples, to the town of Wenatchee But winter finally caught him, in a rundown trailer park On the south side of Seattle, where the days grow grey and dark And he drank and he dreamt a vision, of when the salmon still ran free And his father's fathers crossed, that wild ole' Bering Sea And the land belonged to everyone, and there were old songs yet to sing Now it's narrowed down to a cheap hotel, and a tattooed prison wing

"It's dark in here, can't see the sky..."

Well, he drank his way to L.A., and that's where he died But no one knew his Christian name, and there was no one there to cry But I dreamt there was a funeral, a preacher and an old pine box And halfway through the sermon, *Blue Wing* began to talk

He said, "It's dark in here, can't see the sky..."

GALLO DEL CIELO

"When Joe Ely sang me Gallo del Cielo, I said who the hell wrote that? Great song." Bruce Springsteen (Letter to Author)

"Joe did a hell of a song tonight...A Tom Russell song. It's about a fighting rooster. It's called 'Gallo del Cielo.' It's good. And I'm hard to impress."

> Bob Dylan, From Clarence Clemmons's, *Big Man*

If we believe songs are like *our children*, and have to make their own way in the world—well this one-eyed rooster has gone out of the house and down the road and raised its fair share of hell. "Kicked ass," as the man said. I think this is a good spot to tell about the side roads and back alleys *one song* might travel. The providence of the rooster! In that respect *Gallo* deserves a chapter all its own. Of all my songs this one has garnered the most intriguing anecdotes and recorded covers. The song is more famous than I am. *For sure*.

There's a laundry list of stories. Gallo has been mentioned and acknowledged by Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, Robert Hunter of Grateful Dead fame, Jerry Jeff Walker and the President of Mexico. It's been sung around campfires and recorded by dozens of folks including Ian Tyson, Joe Ely, Jason Boland (recently) and a ninety-year-old western legend named Katie Lee...for *starters*. There's a famous cutting horse stallion named Gallo del Cielo and cabins, spas, ranches and backyard chicken operations named after the one-eyed bird. I'm sure there are pit bulls, pet alligators, and private airplanes.

Two truck drivers have written me long, passionate letters about how the song changed their lives one dark night—out on the lost highway, as they tuned into some small radio station. I think of all the anecdotes, those letters move me the most. Songs have changed my life and I'm honored that a song like this can *move* people at odd moments. I'm just happy, in this age, that folks would listen to such a long, detailed saga.

Where the hell did it come from? A seven minute, eleven verse epic about a mythical fighting rooster? A *corrido* in English? Most of it fell down on me in a two hour span of writing. I wrote it in 1978 in a garage in Mountain View, California. I had color wheels and ideas rolling around in my mind. Shards of background material. I'd been down to the Tarahumara country in Mexico and heard a few Pancho Villa stories, but nothing like this. The plot came out of the blue. A *sky song*, as Townes Van Zandt might term it—songs that fall out of the sky. Like the rooster. But hell, I'm so drawn to the country Gallo came out of: The frontier, the border, the Rio Grande, Northern Mexico...that songs seem to emerge from the ether and the historical soil and the passionate heart of the people.

I think there's a little Marty Robbins "El Paso" flavor in this one, and a nod to Mexican border *corridos* I heard as a kid. Add a few cockfight scenes from the novelist Nathaniel West, and off we go. Cockfighting used to be legal in New Mexico, just up the road from our hacienda, but I've never seen one there. I saw a few fights in Puerto Rico when I was working a carnival on the road to Bayamon. Never became an *aficionado*. But I loved that Steinbeckian landscape and atmosphere conjured in the rooster's journey. The *Tortilla Flats* ethos. Cockfighting is a blood sport which can be traced back to Saint Augustine's time. And that old mystic, Augustine, was an aficionado of the game cocks.

Here's a key Gallo anecdote which turned around my life in music: In 1980 I moved to New York from San Francisco. I was going to be a novelist. Quit music awhile and drove taxi for a year. One night I picked up Robert Hunter, lyricist for the Grateful Dead, sang him "Gallo" *a cappella* in the cab. Robert loved the song. He came back to town and invited me up on stage to sing it at a show in the Village. He got me back into the

music business. I hail him. I have a recording of Robert singing the song at the Glastonbury Festival in England. He states, "Here's a song I learned from a cab driver in Jamaica. Jamaica, Queens, New York."

The great Ian Tyson recorded "Gallo" on his first cowboy culture record, *Old Corrals and Sagebrush*, before I'd ever met him in person. He informed me the song was actually a *polka*. Tyson and I went on to write a dozen cowboy songs after he was on the road to reinventing western music. The definitive and most passionate version of "Gallo" must be Joe Ely's on the record *Letter to Laredo*. He also did it on one of his live records. Joe nails it. Rips it up. He even sang it for Bruce Springsteen, and Bruce wrote me a very nice letter, part of which is quoted above.

Most recently the song was mentioned in a very odd "tall tales" manner by the late Clarence Clemmons (Springsteen's sax player) in his book *Big Man*. There's a scene, also quoted above, in which Kinky Freidman, Clarence, and Bob Dylan are talking about Dylan seeing Joe Ely play in a roadhouse. Dylan mentions "Gallo."

I could go on and on with the anecdotes. The song evidently has a mythical, inherent magic all its own. The bird keeps flying. The legend lives on.

"Gallo" was on my first record, *Heart on a Sleeve*, and on the later records, *Poor Man's Dream*, *Cowboy Real* (a duet with Ian Tyson), *The Long Way Around*, *Songs of the West* (a duet with Tyson), and *Veteran's Day: The Tom Russell Anthology*.

Chords

I've usually played it in either F or E, but always in the "D" chord positions, capo up on either the second or third fret of the guitar.

Verse	Chorus
D-Em	G-A
A-D	Em-A
D-Em	G-A
A-G-A-D	Em-A-G-A-D

Gallo del Cielo

Carlos Zaragoza left his home in *Casas Grandes* when the moon was full No money in his pocket, just a locket of his sister framed in gold He headed for *El Sueco*, stole a rooster named *Gallo del Cielo* Then he crossed the *Rio Grande*, with that rooster nestled deep beneath his arm

Now *Gallo del Cielo* was a rooster born in heaven, so the legends say His wings they had been broken, he had one eye rollin' crazy in his head He'd fought a hundred fights, and the legends say that one night near El Sueco

They'd fought *Cielo* seven times, and seven times he left brave roosters dead

Hola, my Theresa, I am thinking of you now in San AntonioI have twenty-seven dollars and the locket of your picture framed in gold

Tonight I'll bet it all, on the fighting spurs of *Gallo del Cielo* Then I'll return to buy the land Pancho Villa stole from father long ago

Outside of San Diego in the onion fields of *Paco Monteverde*The pride of San Diego, he lay sleeping on a fancy bed of silk
And they laughed when Zaragoza pulled the one-eyed *del Cielo*from beneath his coat

But they cried when Zaragoza walked away with a thousand dollar bill

Hola, my Theresa, I am thinking of you now in Santa BarbaraI have fifteen hundred dollars and the good luck of your picture framed in gold

Tonight I'll bet it all on the fighting spurs of *Gallo del Cielo* Then I'll return to buy the land that Villa stole from father long ago

Now the moon has gone to hiding and the lantern light spills shadows on the fighting sand

Where a wicked black named *Zorro* faces *Gallo del Cielo* in the night But Carlos Zaragoza fears the tiny crack that runs across his rooster's beak

And he fears that he has lost the fifty thousand dollars riding on the fight

Hola, my Theresa, I am thinking of you now in Santa Clara Yes, the money's on the table I am holding now your good luck framed in gold

And everything we dreamed of is riding on the spurs of *del Cielo* I pray that I'll return to buy the land that Villa stole from father long ago

Then the signal it was given, and the roosters rose together far above the sand

Gallo del Cielo sunk a gaff into Zorro's shiny breast

They were separated quickly, but they rose and fought each other thirty-seven times

And the legends say that everyone agreed that del Cielo fought the best

Then the screams of Zaragoza filled the night outside the town of Santa Clara

As the beak of *del Cielo* lay broken like a shell within his hand And they say that Zaragoza screamed a curse upon the bones of Pancho Villa

When Zorro rose up one last time, and drove del Cielo to the sand

Hola, my Theresa, I am thinking of you now in San FranciscoThere's no money in my pocket, I no longer have your picture framed in gold

I buried it last evening with the bones of my beloved *del Cielo* And I'll not return to buy the land that Villa stole from father long ago

Do the rivers still run muddy, outside of my beloved *Casas Grandes*? Does the scar upon my brother's face turn red when he hears mention of my name?

Do the people of *El Sueco* still curse the death of *Gallo del Cielo*? Tell my family not to worry, I will not return to cause them shame.

GUADALUPE

was the one in the back pew, sitting for hours, watching the ■ pilgrims, tourists and Indians file past that image—Our Lady of Guadalupe. The image on the cape of Juan Diego. The Mother of the Americas. Mexico City. Outside, on that hill, the older shrines sank into the Mexican earth. When I thought of the experience, years later, in my house in El Paso...the Franklin Mountains were turning pink outside my window, then blood red with the sundown. The color of old mission wine. I couldn't get the Guadalupe image out of my head, and it merged with those magic red mountains. The original story? A woman, a spirit, appeared to a poor Indian on a hill in Mexico. Five hundred years ago. She spoke in his Indian tongue, *Nahuatl.* He gathered Castilian roses in his cape—as she'd instructed—and when he opened the cape, later, her image was there. And a beautiful and powerful image it is—whether it's in a picture print, on a candle glass, or tattooed on the back on a convict. It's haunting. This song has nothing to do with Catholicism, or any other form of religion or black magic. It has to do with hope and belief and spirits and images and Indians. Take from it what you wish. It's my favorite song that I've written. Gretchen Peters does a powerful version on our record, One to the Heart, One to the Head. My version appears on the record, Blood and Candle Smoke.

Chords

Key of B, Capo on 4th Fret, played in G chord positions. Finger picked.

Verse	Chorus
G-G-Am	G-C-G
Am-D-D7-G	G-Am-D7-G
G-G-Am	G-C-C-G
Am-D-D7-G	G-Am-D-G

Guadalupe

There are ghosts out in the rain tonight, high up in those ancient trees Lord, I've given up without a fight, another blind fool on his knees And all the Gods that I'd abandoned, begin to speak in simple tongue And suddenly I've come to know, there are no roads left to run

Now it's the hour of dogs a barking, that's what the old ones used to say It's first light or it's sundown, before the children cease their play When the mountains glow like mission wine, then turn grey like a Spanish roan

Ten thousand eyes will stop to worship, then turn away and head on home

She is reaching out her arms tonight, Lord, my poverty is real I pray roses shall rain down again, from Guadalupe on her hill And who am I to doubt these mysteries? Cured in centuries of blood and candle smoke

I am the least of all your children here, but I am most in need of hope

She appeared to Juan Diego, she left her image on his cape Five hundred years of sorrow, cannot destroy their deepest faith So here I am, your ragged disbeliever, old doubting Thomas drowns in tears

As I watch your church sink through the earth, like a heart worn down through fear.

She is reaching out her arms tonight...

About the Author

Tom Russell has released twenty-seven albums of original songs. His songs have been covered by Johnny Cash, Joe Ely, Doug Sahm, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and others. His newest record is *Aztec lazz*.

For more information on Russell's catalogue and art, go to www.tomrussell. com. His paintings are currently shown by artbeatgalleryco.com, Rain-



bow Man Gallery, www.rainbowman.com, and Yard Dog Gallery, www.yarddog.com.

RIDING the ROUGH STRING

REFLECTIONS ON THE AMERICAN WEST

"Toby Thompson is a writer and journalist of the old school, a standup guy who knows music and literature and walks the walk and understands the human heart. I'm honored to be included in his work."

James Lee Burke

"The mountains and rivers, the high plains and the good Montana people (and the funny and the not so good or funny)—the dead-on info, the stories, that's the main thing, the stories)— Toby Thompson has it right. *Riding the Rough String* is a fine sport and an all-day pleasure."

William Kittredge

"...His sharp eye and interviewer's ear caught every nuance. *Riding the Rough String* sets it all down with verve and assurance."

William Hjortsberg

Riding the Rough String Toby Thompson

From one of the most highly-regarded journalists in America comes this unique series of profiles, meditations, essays, and explorations. For more than fifty years, Toby Thompson has been considering what it means to live and work in the West. Starting from a foundation of literary portraiture in which he profiles some of the most engaging writers in America—Gretel Ehrlich to Thomas McGuane, William Kittredge to Hunter S. Thompson, Tim Cahill to Gary Snyder—his wide-ranging curiosity embraces subjects as diverse as the history of the famous barroom lithograph, "Custer's Last Fight," the deeper meaning of Montana pickup trucks, wild nights of Livingston, Montana, in the 1970s, and the making of the film A River Runs Through It.

For anyone interested in the literature and culture of the American West, *Riding the Rough String* is an essential publishing event.

Stacey's

The first night I danced at Stacey's was in August of 1985, a blistering Saturday when truck engines ticked in the neon and perhaps three hundred revelers crowded about the horseshoe-shaped bar. I'd arrived with a pal from New York and Jamie Jean, a singer who fronted a local band and was the toast of two valleys. We elbowed through cowfolk, Jamie in snug Levi's, a Hawaiian shirt, and shorty boots, I in buckaroo vest and bulldogging heels, and my friend in a tweed sportcoat and corduroy trousers—no doubt the squarest outfit ever seen at Stacey's. Jamie's hair was roached into a rockabilly pompadour, and her smile was bewitching. Quickly I had her on the floor, twirling, two-stepping, the scent of her hair in my face and her belt buckle tapping mine. The band played shuffles, swing tunes, Cotton-eyed Joes, the crowd whooping at familiar intros, dancers packed tightly as we spun round the saloon. Smoke blanketed its stuffed animals and rodeo portraits, and the fragrance of spilled beer rose from its duckboards. We danced, drank, danced again. Near closing I ducked to the Gents, bobbed out, and there she sat, enveloped by tweed, her

head on my buddy's shoulder. He'd stolen her heart.

I like to think Stacey Crosby watched this, his lank frame curled over a Schlitz, a Lucky Strike in hand, and his angular face split by a grin. He would have been fifty-nine, myself forty, and like him, I'd grown up around saloons. His father had been a bootlegger, mine a contentious tippler, and I was a decade past my four-year search for the Great American Bar—a journey that had floated me from Key West to Seattle, and resulted in a book that somehow missed Stacey's Old Faithful Bar, fourteen miles southwest of Bozeman, in tiny Gallatin Gateway. I'd never meet its proprietor, though in the years before his death, I boogied many a mile across his dance floor.

On another Saturday, this in 2006, Stacey's daughter, Toni Donnelly, greeted a stranger toting a canvas sack with, "What's that you got for me, a bag of money?" She's a feisty ex-emergency room nurse who, with her two sisters, inherited the bar, but owns majority interest and runs it. "A chip off the old block," her sister Marti Klette—a waitress at the restaurant—told me. "Very much like our dad." The barroom was cheerful in the afternoon light (with that razor clarity peculiar to Gateway) and idlers sat by the picture windows as a Chilean fashion model posed near an upright piano. Commercial shoots occur periodically at Stacey's. "They just did scenes here for Plumm Summer," Toni said, of a film being shot around Livingston. The space holds a cowboy legitimacy difficult to recreate—it has long been a hangout for Flying D hands (icons of Montana ranch culture)—and on every foot of the barn-sided walls hangs some memento: a wilderness scene painted on a moose antler; another on canvas above the piano; signs reading, "If you feel the need to carve your name in our bar, you might need to pull a boot out of your ass," and the ubiquitous photographs of rodeo greats (Benny Reynolds, Larry Mahan, Walt Linderman) inscribed to Stacey, himself an ex-bull rider and roper. The bar is fashioned from barn siding, and though stylistically plain seems rugged as a stockade fence.

"They had some fights," Toni said of oldtimers. "Dad would holler, 'You come here and you're breaking my glasses and busting my barstools and you're using good air I could keep breathing!' Mae Ping, the first owner, was famous for shutting off the lights whenever a fight broke out. 'There's no glory in the dark,' she'd say. But when she shut them back on, one night, somebody'd slit the piano player's throat. So much for that theory."

Toni is an attractive, middle-aged Montanan, a brunette, but Mae Ping was a comely four-foot-eleven-inch, redheaded French women, "just a little firecracker," who founded Old Faithful about 1926, when Montana repealed state Prohibition. Its building was two-story brick and built by "the Anceney Station people," Toni said, as a kind of company store. It had a bank, and butcher and clothing shops, and "it was mostly for the people who worked on the Anceney Ranch," now Ted Turner's Flying D. The town was called Salesville, for Zach Sales, who owned its sawmill. "A lot of people here were farmer-ranchers, but we had loggers back then, and mill workers too."

The men wanted companionship, and Old Faithful kept prostitutes upstairs. "Mae always denied that," Toni recalled. "She said she rented those rooms to those girls, and what they did was between them, God, and the IRS. But a fellow met my husband and said, 'I have a token from the Old Faithful that was my great-grandfather's.' Because Mae didn't trust the girls with money. If someone wanted to go upstairs they had to pay the bartender and get a token."

Salesville was a lively town, but nothing like what it became in 1927 when the Milwaukee Railroad built Gallatin Gateway Inn, a posh stopover for tourists en route to Yellowstone Park. Visitors arrived by train, rested, visited Mae's saloon, then toured the Park by bus. The inn survived until the early fifties, when automobile travel killed it. The town, now Gallatin Gateway, retreated to its sleepy status.

"The Inn was grown over when we were kids," Marti told me. "And that was our playground. They had left everything—tables still set. Every family in town had tablecloths and dishes from the Inn."

Though Gateway today has a ghost town air, it kept its population through the late seventies. "Every house that you see had kids in it," Marti said. "R.G. Roberts had his cabinet shop there and the cheese factory was still functioning. We'd get



Stacey's Old
Faithful Bar has
been a part of
Gallatin Gateway
(a community
originally called
Salesville) since
about 1926.

cheese curds every morning. The café in town was open." And as children the Crosby sisters had their run of Stacey's. "Mae always said, 'This isn't a bar, it's a community center," Toni added. "The Gateway kids sang with the band, they played pool, they'd have a Hershey bar here and a pop. You could sit on the bench and watch everybody dancing and having so much fun. It was a wonderful way to grow up."

Stacey's wife, Phyllis, who died in 2003, was raised in Ashton, Idaho. But Stacey was a castoff kid from Butte, whose hardscrabble father shipped him and four siblings to Great Falls's Ursuline Academy after their mother committed suicide. "Dad said, 'You can put a fancy name on it, but it was an orphanage." A Bozeman family took him in, and by age seventeen he was bartending, first at West Yellowstone's Stagecoach, then at Bozeman's Eagles, which he managed. He seemed to find a home in saloons. He and Phyllis bought Old Faithful in 1963 ("Dad might have been the personality, but Mom was the backbone that held it all together"), and moved with their

daughters upstairs. Mae's prostitutes were gone, but the quarters had no kitchen, so Phyllis cooked downstairs and her family gathered in the saloon galley to eat. "One night," Marti remembered, "my mother told Dad, 'These girls are hearing too much! I want them out of here.' So we moved up Wilson Crick, past Broken Heart Ranch," where all three daughters live today.

Toni learned much at her father's knee. "He was an entertainer," she said. "He was a storyteller and very quick-witted. People were just *drawn* to him." She laughed. "That's not to say he wasn't wild. Us kids would wake up and there'd be rodeo cowboys sleeping on the floor. And I'm sure it wasn't easy being married to him. One fellow said, 'I was at the bar when your dad got his divorce papers served.' Because my mom tried to divorce him many times. "He said, 'Your dad crumpled them up and threw them on the counter, then he got thinking about it and spread them out and says, *Jesus Christ, pard. Perry Mason couldn't get me out of this one.*"

An article on the far wall describes a reporter's visit to Stacey's in 1987, during which the 150-pound Stacey bragged of out drinking 240-pound bulldoggers in five-day marathons, and "went through several cases" of beer, during the interview—"enough to bury a normal human."

Toni admits, "He'd go on these binges. But he was fun to be around. He'd keep telling stories. And he drove up Gallatin Canyon a lot. When he took his old black horse we knew he was going to the Corral Bar, because that horse was trailer broke. If he took another we'd think, 'He's really going to the cabin riding."

Hard drinking is a Montana tradition, and Old Faithful's regulars did not stint. Some, like the Flying D's cattle boss Johnny Flowers, wintered at the bar ("Til the grass got green"), and lawmen, like one eastern Montana sheriff, made Stacey's a must-stop while transferring prisoners to Deer Lodge. "He'd hit the top of the hill with his lights flashing," Toni said, "and us kids were going, 'Mommy, are they going to take daddy away?' He'd bring his prisoners in and handcuff them to the poles. He'd look at us and say, 'Don't take any checks from that guy on the end.' He'd give him a bottle of Jack Daniels and

say, 'Pard, where you're going you better drink up now.' Another night, they caught a young man stealing equipment out of the musicians' pickups. So they set him on the bench and said, 'Get a rope, we're going to hang him.' A bartender called the sheriff and he said later, 'Toni, I've never met a person so happy to see me. He said, *Take me away, these crazy bastards mean to hang me!*' Dad said, 'Pard, we could have had it done but none of us could remember how to tie a hangman's noose.' That would have been right around seventy, or seventy-one. They were pretty crazy about then."

It was a period when hippies weren't welcome at Stacey's. A long-haired cannibal named Stanley Dean Baker had been arrested for a murder by the Yellowstone River, with two finger bones in his pocket, and hair-trimming parties had become popular. "Hippies were the bad people," Toni remembered. "We were the cowboys, the good people. One day a bunch of hippies thought they were going to take over Gateway. Dad said, 'Phyllis, you better get Dell on the phone,' and half the MSU rodeo team came barreling round this corner, just as the hippies were converging on Stacey's. These big old bulldoggers said, 'We hear you want to take over Gateway. You think you're gonna start here in Stacey's?' And there were ponytails and asses and elbows flying everywhere. The hippies didn't even make it in the front door."

Fights used to be expected in Montana saloons, and one test of a Great Bar, I'd found, was how well it processed this manner of chaos. One required *form* to frame or isolate chaos. Stacey's had form (and Plexiglass in its pool room windows), but since Toni had taken over, she said, "I haven't had a single darn fight in here or anything. No trauma, no nothing. I think, 'Come on guys, just a little trauma.' Things have mellowed some." One reason might be that in 2005, she refurbished Stacey's, adding a steakhouse at the eastern side of the building, and following Gateway's lead, a nod toward gentrification. "We redid the bathrooms, we took out the false ceiling and put the plank floor in. And did lighting for all the pictures. This used to be a horseshoe bar, but now it's not. People were very angry with me. We got calls from California: 'When's the last day it's going to be Stacey's?' We had one fellow come in and say, 'Your

dad would be rolling over in his grave.' I looked at him and said, 'That's precisely why we had him cremated.' I thought, 'How dare you...my mom and dad would have been proud of anything us girls would have done.'"

Stacey died of stomach cancer in 1990, and 500 people attended his funeral. "It was wonderful," Toni said. "We had it at that Catholic church by the MSU field house, and it was so full people were standing outside. They loved him so—he was always for the underdog, always helping people. We came back here, and everyone who had ever worked for us got behind the bar. People were throwing down money, and it paid for all Dad's hospital bills. Afterward we had one can of beer left—it was nonalcoholic."

It was late now, a Western band played and visitors from all over the valley were roistering with locals. One group of twenty-somethings, in snug Wranglers and kilt-toed packers' boots, stood by a picture window. The girls were lovely, the boys stout and apple cheeked. I asked one why he liked Gateway. "Cause I can live fifty yards from the river and one hundred from Stacey's," he said. He rodeoed, but was loading hay for the summer, and his girlfriend grabbed him before he could say why, and they muscled toward the dance floor. Toni had been joined behind the bar by a stylish blonde, Michelle, but Toni was the star, joking and kidding with regulars. "When I'm tending bar," she'd told me, "I'm definitely my father's child. I can't believe what comes out of my mouth. I grew up here and I've watched them all perform. And of course, I sang with the bands for years. I remember my dad saying, 'Well, Phyllis, we've got her out of her shell, now how are we going to get her back in?"

People often ask me if I'd ever found the Great American Bar, and I say no. During the seventies, Montana saloons were at the top of my list, and the Montana Bar in Miles City, Luigi's in Butte, and the New Atlas in Columbus were candidates for best-in-show. If I'd found Stacey's it would have ranked—but in my leathers and longish hair, I might not have been welcome. Tonight I was just another boomer dodging jitterbuggers from Gateway and swing dancers from Bridger Bowl, as they celebrated a spirit that seemed undiminished. Ghosts

lingered, it was said—of Mae Ping, her soiled doves, her slain piano player—and even that of Stacey. As I watched the rough cowboys and urban partiers, I thought, nothing substantive has changed.

At the electronic poker machines, my sweetheart was gambling. I walked over as a grizzled mountain man slipped a five into her dollar slot, negotiating a pick up. She flipped it back, not missing a deal. I glanced toward the bar, but Toni wasn't watching. I liked to think Stacey Crosby was.

Big Sky Journal, 2007

About the Author

Toby Thompson is the author of five books, including Positively Main Street: Bob Dylan's Minnesota, and Saloon. He has written for publications as diverse as Vanity Fair, Esquire, Rolling Stone, Men's Journal, Playboy, Outside, Big Sky Journal, and The New York Times. He teaches in the Creative Writing program at Penn State, and lives in Cabin John, Maryland and Livingston, Montana.





"An intrepid tripper in the Merry Prankster sense, and an urban Thoreau."

Tom Wolfe

METROLINER PASSAGES: WASHINGTON TO NEW YORK

"A first-rate collection, impressively diverse and vastly enjoy-

"A first-rate collection, impressively diverse and vastly enjoyable."

Carl Hiaasen

"...graceful and entertaining, to say nothing of [the] energetic reporting..."

Tom Brokaw

Metroliner Toby Thompson

An essential companion to *Riding the Rough String*, his collection of reportage, personal essays, and profiles, *Metroliner* explores the two poles of Toby Thompson's life on the East Coast. For more than forty years, he has ridden the rails between Washington, DC and New York, capturing not only the sensibilities of these two cities but the tenor of his time as well. From the Smithsonian to the secret fishing spots of Manhattan, from profiles of Norman Mailer and Jackie Gleason to the White House press corps, *Metroliner* represents a career's worth of reportage from one of America's most accomplished writers.

The Bassmaster

Guy De Blasio has a 200-year-old map of Manhattan he's bought from the Museum of Natural History or some such place, and it's spread out across the kitchen table of his apartment in an old Italian neighborhood of Greenwich Village. The map shows trout streams at Wall Street, spring creeks at Minetta Lane, and about thirty species of marine life in the Hudson and East Rivers. The river species include sturgeon, shrimp, shad, catfish, herring, tommycod, porgies, spot, blueclaw crab, the feisty bluefish, and striped bass. Since 1976, De Blasio has seen all but two of these species in Manhattan waters: the lobsters and sheepshead. With the exception of sturgeon, which he hooked, he's landed them all.

"I flash this map whenever somebody moans about the rivers being dead," De Blasio croaks. "Then I get out my log."

De Blasio's log—which contains the size, time, and lunar peculiarities of fish caught—is mouthed into a cheap Japanese tape recorder at pier side or in the backseats of taxicabs as he hurries around Manhattan seeking to mine the vicissitudes of tide. His pursuit of prime incoming or outgoing water is no less

hysterical than that of a subtropical flats guide, and probably more arcane. Behind skyscrapers in midtown Manhattan and from rat-infested piers, De Blasio has landed fourteen-pound bluefish, twenty-pound striped bass, and six- to eight-pound shad, in. numbers difficult to believe.

"My brother and I caught a thousand striped bass in 130 fishing days this year," De Blasio reports. "That's keeper-size, over sixteen inches."

What unlikely anglers the De Blasios are: Guy and his brother Bill, seated in this Thompson Street apartment a half-block from the Village's most startling parade of punk roisterers, junk thespians, transvestites, chic druggies, and professional hit-men. A postal worker and a part- time elevator operator, the De Blasios are legendary among street fishermen. They speak like characters from a Martin Scorsese film. Hooded in watch caps and bright windbreakers emblazoned with Penn reel and J. W. Lure badges, they are armored against more than the night. The angling they do is perilous: Guy has been thrown from a pier into the East River by street punks, and there is always the threat of gangs. Billy totes an axe handle when he fishes alone. Over his heart is a badge that proclaims, I'M A FENWICK MAN.

THE DE BLASIOS ARE masters of a type of fishing that has persisted quietly in Manhattan for centuries, but now, because of complex socio-ecological factors, flourishes. The rivers are cleaner, thanks to the Environmental Protection Agency's 1972 Clean Water Act. And people are hungrier, due to the economy. But there is no neat explanation of why tough street kids are abandoning tape decks and basketballs for fishing gear appropriate to Manhattan waters.

"The fishing's simply fabulous," *New York Post* fishing writer Ken Moran has offered. Street angling in New York is a phenomenon relegated largely to piers and bridge abutments—any place the urban angler might escape summer heat and unfold in something resembling a breeze. One such pier extends a hundred yards into the East River below Brooklyn Bridge, underscoring the bridge's Gothic arches with a carnival of activity, Latin to the extreme. To reach this pier one

must cross a parking lot, sidle around a chain link fence, and wade through various junked armchairs, automobile parts, and elevator grates. Once braved, the pier is as close to the Caribbean as many Manhattanites get. It's a cherished access to the river, frequented by sunbathers, picnickers, lovers, and, not surprisingly, fishermen.

As traffic booms overhead, anglers work big surf rods, hooking fifteen-pound stripers in a body of water widely thought of as dead, but in fact clogged with migratory fish. "Play 'em light," an oldtimer coaches, as street kids jig with bloodworms filched from voodoo shops in Spanish Harlem or spoons rigged from strings of aluminum pop-tops. Aloof street punks hoot like Rotarians, joshing each other roughly, but afraid to grab bass wriggling and slapping about their feet.

"His tail, man," one simpers.

"Your ass, Ricco."

Taped music beats Latin rhythms against the traffic, a stiff breeze sings, and to the freshly initiated it is dreamier than an evening in old San Juan.

ALL GREAT AMERICAN cities were founded on water, and the history of urbanization has been, in large part, the Minkoiling of citizens against this elemental balm. Yet the piers and rivers of Manhattan offer street fishermen access to a kind of wilderness. And their sport, long considered aristocratic, here takes on an anarchic tinge. For the underclass folk who fish here, it is the classic invasion of wilderness to harvest game. And despite warnings and restrictions on consumption—one fish a week, none for pregnant women or children—there is evidence that poor families have been subsisting off river species for years.

Now middle-class anglers have joined, them, lured by reports of cleaner rivers and better fishing, and attracted by the staggering runs of striped bass publicized during the spring and fall. There are heartening tales of fly fishermen in *chest* waders stumbling over rocks off the East Eighties, taking bass two blocks from their apartment buildings; stories of gypsy bait mongers, old black men who cruise the piers in station wagons full to the scuppers with bloodworms, skimmer clams,

sandworms, and lugs.

Still, this is frontier sport; scoffed at by the general public, and anglers share a camaraderie. How hip to take game species from urban waters thought to hold little more than "Hudson River whitefish" and suicidal dogs.

A trading post for street anglers is Spiegel's sporting goods, off Nassau Street in the downtown financial district. There, kids from Chinatown, Little Italy, and housing projects fronting the East River mix easily with Wall Street traders and others hooked on the local sport. Spiegel's is a hole-in-the-wall shop, but it is hung with every sort of tackle. John Lobber, Spiegel's fishing manager, will talk bait, tides, and lures to anyone. He will outfit the novice with a seven-foot Ugly Stik to get him casting, and 15-pound monofilament, jelly worms, and Trout Magic Tails to get him jigging. A copy of *Long Island Fisherman* will provide the tidal charts, and Lorber will rig a sturdy treble-hook on twenty feet of sixty-pound line so that the novice can haul his catch in.

"I don't fish the piers with less than three friends," Lorber advises. "It's too dangerous. Some fishermen pack a gun."

Lorber will differentiate for you the colors of a healthy striper (bright green along the back) from a poisoned one (tinged reddish). He will explain their feeding habits and tendency to forage near heated water around sewage drains. He will pinpoint hot spots, date the various runs, and philosophize about fishing. He might even sell you a rod fashioned by his own hands. And when street anglers are mentioned, he'll speak of Guy De Blasio.

THE FIRST THING ONE notices about De Blasio's apartment is a pair of huge Igloo coolers in the hall, then how amazingly tiny the place is. This is the apartment of a man on the run, no hearthside angler fingering Tonkin cane on a winter's eve. De Blasio fishes four nights a week from March through November and is not averse to wetting a line in a snowstorm. The apartment is thinly decorated but for his trophies, which include a sixty-five-pound striped bass taken outside New York Bay, and related souvenirs: photographs of tumultuous catches, Fenwick Master Fisherman awards, an occasional

article composed for the *Long Island Fisherman*. The bass's great belly sags overhead, the fish the size of a teenager.

De Blasio's toddlers fidget in an interior nook as we talk fishing, Bill De Blasio having just detailed a two days' catch of 746 weakfish at Verrazano Narrows.

"We don't just catch fish," Guy says. "We take scale and gonad samples for the Conservation Department and work hard at our own expense for the future of these rivers. There's this story I may write called 'Fishing, What's That?' about a kid who finds a fishing rod and doesn't know what it is. I want my son to know about fishing, even growing up in New York."

De Blasio is thirty-four years old, and by all accounts has been obsessed with fishing most of his life. Raised in Greenwich Village, he was taught to fish by his grandfather, off the Fourteenth Street pier. From the first, he had an uncanny instinct for finding fish—to such a degree that Village psychics fingered him early for success. De Blasio's grandfather, a Neapolitan immigrant, was a dory fisherman out of Sheepshead Bay, and De Blasio became a deckhand at eleven, mating charter boats, hauling tar lines in dories, and working party boats.

"In the fifties when everybody else played stoop ball, I was fishing. In the sixties when everybody took drugs, I was still fishing."

Not until the 1970s did De Blasio abandon professional fishing and take a job more traditionally geared to supporting a family. This land-based servitude, if anything, pushed him more forcefully toward angling. He was driven to prove that the Hudson River estuary is still one of the world's great fisheries, despite pollution. This he managed to do with astounding catches: fourteen striped bass over twenty pounds in midtown Manhattan, eight-to-ten-pound shad by the gross, a fourteen-and-a-half pound bluefish farther uptown, and evidence that tropical species such as triggerfish, jack crevalle, and albacore were frequenting the rivers. He caught fish for newsmen off midtown piers and proselytized at every opportunity for the health of the Hudson River.

"We have three conservation officers in the city of New York," De Blasio says. "Somebody had to help."

De Blasio will talk all night about conservation, but only with prodding will he divulge favorite fishing spots. Striped bass, the aristocrat of coastal gamefish, is why.

"Bass bring money, and money brings greed," De Blasio says. "The species is overfished. Approximately eight million stripers migrate around New York, and thanks to a ban on commercial fishing from the Battery north to Fort Edward, the Hudson is a last great haven. Still, people poach. Undersize bass with high PCB counts are being sold all the time to restaurants in Chinatown—mostly by street kids. Wouldn't take long for the big-money boys to move in."

De Blasio recommends these spots for sportfishing the island: beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, the rocks off East 86th Street, the seawall along FDR Drive, the lighthouse beneath George Washington Bridge, the 200th Street train trestle, 125th Street and the West Side Highway, the 69th and 34th Street piers in the Hudson, and various piers behind the World Trade Center.

"Watch that 34th Street pier, though, it's all busted up and crawling with rats."

If Manhattan's proposed Westway project—a freeway along the Hudson—is built, it will destroy the old piers and most of the fishing.

It's not just access for street fishermen, De Blasio says, "but a disturbance of ecological balance. Baitfish live around those rotten pilings, and gamefish are drawn there to feed. Dredging would disrupt things further."

BILLY HAS TO WORK the night shift, but Guy has agreed to hit a few piers—though it is late December and nineteen degrees. He rigs a couple of six-foot rods with twelve-pound Andy line, no leader, salty dog jigs with a lead head, and Penn 930 reels. "There may be one terribly confused fish out there," De Blasio says. "The big striper runs are spring and fall, but we caught bass in December last year. Of course it wasn't cold."

Even in Greenwich Village it is tough to hail a cab at midnight in December carrying fishing rods. Cabbies swerve around us, and pedestrians laugh. "All my life," De Blasio moans. "A cross to bear." Finally a driver stops, and we are winding through Little Italy, the financial district, to South Street and Brooklyn Bridge. The driver leaves us in a dark, empty parking lot fronting the East River and burns rubber getting out of there.

The joke is on him. Beneath the bridge the East River is lighted by a combination of full moon and cityscape, just this side of ethereal. A hundred yards into the river, the skyline is a child's diorama of illuminated bridges, skyscrapers, and neon crèches flashing from project windows. The World Trade Center stands to the west, Delphic as Easter Island. A moon tide muscles through at six to eight knots. Ducks sit on water broken by rotted bridge pilings and discarded hardware. Bait swirls in the eddies. The *Watchtower* thermometer across the channel reads 17 degrees.

We walk the length of the pier, jigging pilings where grass shrimp live, and suddenly we are fishing. This is a condition that has little to do with taking fish; it's a mixture of concentration, lassitude, and communion. I am *in* the East River, its waters are on my hands; I share an intimacy with Manhattan previously unexperienced. My lure is bumped, then bumped again probably the tide. De Blasio courses along the pier, silent, consulting some private oracle. He reels in, takes the lure in his mouth. "River's warm," he says, tenderly. "Could be fish." I cast toward a skyline orchestrated with sparkling architecture and understand why dreamers fish the mountains. The least bit disoriented, I'd think I was working the northern Rockies.

We hike past Peck Slip and the Paris Bar, open all night to serve Fulton Fish Market, and the South Street houses are something out of Melville. What piers remain in this nineteenth-century neighborhood are commandeered by tennis bubbles. Most are fenced.

"Money's got access to this river and they don't care anything for it," De Blasio says, furious. "People who love to fish can't hardly toss a cast."

We work another pier, the one De Blasio was thrown from, but nothing's hitting. We plug a few into the steam of a sewage outlet, and still no luck. "Too cold," he concedes. Our faces are purple in the artificial light, the wind a good sixteen knots.

"I used to watch *American Sportsman*," De Blasio says, puffing, "and there was always some guy fishing Hawaii or the Bahamas. I can't afford that, I'd think. This depresses me. I'm a lower-class guy who fishes what's available—fortunately, a lot. Cable TV may let me put together a fishing show. What I plan is to gear it to the poor fisherman. Tell him how, when, and where to catch fish. That's a dream. Another is to run a little boat station someday, where I rent skiffs, give information, have a big pot of coffee on the stove, and live in an atmosphere that's positive. People don't know what they've got around New York. They're laughing at us, and they're the ones who are fools."

We trudge through the deserted financial district, hunting a cab. One brakes, then another, each accelerating uptown at the sight of our fishing rods. It's like hitchhiking; one must meditate on a ride. A cab spots us, takes the bait, slows and turns.

"Must be a fisherman," De Blasio grunts.

"How was that ice fishing?" the cabby says. "You guys crazy? Ain't nothing in that water but blind eels."

"Now wait a minute," De Blasio says, and trots out the rap.

"That right?" says the cabby "Bass? In these rivers? You know, I do a little blackfishing out of Peconic Bay, raise some fluke, and always come home with seafood in the cooler."

"Blackfishing's sweet," De Blasio says. "You use those green crabs for bait, or worms?"

"Crabs. Nothing beats crabs. We go out with six or seven guys, rent a boat...."

It is one-thirty on a December morning in the empty canyons of lower Manhattan, and two sport fishermen are cranking it up. I recline against the cracked leather seat, inhaling gelatinous air. Familiar landmarks pass.

"Twenty pounds," De Blasio is saying, "right there behind Korvette's."

"Korvette's?" the cabby whistles. "No!"

"In the tradition of Joseph Kinsey Howard and K. Ross Toole, Aaron Parrett interrogates Montana as both place and idea, revealing that what has long distinguished the state—robust island communities surrounded by a sea of redemptive space—has largely survived."

Edwin Dobb

U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism

THEN AND NOW

"Aaron Parrett has told Montana's story entertainingly without shying from the darker bits. The result is a romp through our state's history that is at once lighthearted and intelligent."

Molly Holz

"Aaron Parret's *Montana: Then and Now* stitches together the tapestry that is Montana's 150-year-long history with the perspective born of years of sincere appreciation and study. This account gives us pause and at the same time gives us hope, that Montana's next generation realizes its role in preserving the unique qualities inherent in the 'last best place."

Stephenie Ambrose Tubbs

Montana: Then and Now Aaron Parrett

When Montana Territory was established in 1864, it was a land of tepees and ramshackle cabins, of lawless vigilantes and miners scraping out meager livings. One hundred and fifty years later, the dramatic changes to the Treasure State are overshadowed only by the startling similarities. On the occasion of Montana's 150th territorial anniversary, Aaron Parrett compares where we started with where we are today, and along the way shows us a Montana we never could have previously imagined.

La Gioconda Smile on the Montana Face

In 1943, the great historian T. K. Whipple, in his book *Study Out the Land*, in a chapter called "The Myth of the Old West," offered a new variation on an old theme: While he was unwilling to give up romanticizing the West altogether, he thought that earlier versions of the myth focused too much on the great personalities—Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Jim Bridger, and so on. In reality the story of the West was comprised of a history forged by ordinary men and women. "All America lies at the end of the wilderness road," he wrote, "and our past is not a dead past but still lives in us."

His sentiment might very well stand as an epigraph on the story of Montana for the last 150 years. "Our forebears had civilization inside themselves, the wild outside," he went on. "We live in the civilization they created, but within us the wilderness still lingers."

Whipple's version of the Old West myth strikes me as an improvement over previous versions that privileged the aristocratic European and the Noble Savage, but there's no denying the romanticism in it. "What they dreamed, we live," he wrote,

"and what they lived, we dream. That is why our western story still holds us, however ineptly it is told."

What Montana means to us must derive in part from history. But to echo a sentiment from the introduction, a large part of what it means to us comes from those aspects of the place that have remained relatively aloof from history, those majestic mountains and endless prairies and stately waterways. One hundred and fifty years have brought undeniable changes to those features, but enough of them remain undisturbed to gratify whatever inkling of the romantic remains. I celebrate the fact that I can walk from the heart of downtown Helena and in fifteen minutes find myself alone, enveloped in the dusty hills of Davis Gulch. Or that I can wander on foot from the gritty streets of uptown Butte and in ten minutes find myself scrambling alone through the scrub brush on Woodville hill, tracing the paths Mary MacLane took over a century ago.

The kind of romanticism I am talking about is more aesthetic than nostalgic, more informed by art or literature than history. Many historians I know have trouble getting excited about Montana history, simply because it's such a narrow sliver of American history. But I think that dearth of history helps describe what—if anything—makes Montana unique against the backdrop of the rest of the country. One of the greatest contrasts operant in Montana is just this ambivalence between Joseph Kinsey Howard's 1941 observation that "Montana has packed a lot of history into one century" and the realization—equally astute—that the landscape here retains the imprint of a pre-historic past.

I'm no outdoorsman or bagger of peaks—I haven't field dressed an animal since I was a teenager, and I seldom hike more than a few miles in a day. But I take immeasurable comfort in knowing that I could at any moment get on a footpath in the Swan and walk for eighty miles or more without seeing a highway or an office building. And when I emerged, perhaps somewhere around Choteau, it would not be impossible for me to walk all the way to Great Falls without seeing much

in the way of buildings or people. What makes Montana so immensely valuable are all those things that you can't put a price on—that comfort in relative solitude, that reassurance of knowing, as the little bumper sticker enjoins, you can still "get lost in Montana."

Most of the places where people live in this country are no longer places where you have that kind of luxury. People in Los Angeles have to drive a couple of hours to get to Yosemite, and once there, it's not like they won't run into hundreds of other people. Look at a detailed map of the country east of the Mississippi and try to find a point anywhere that you could imagine yourself walking without hitting a road or a town after just a few miles. Even the celebrated Appalachian Trail passes through some dense urban areas, and hikers are seldom out of cell phone range.

"The whole shitaree. Gone, by God, and naught to care savin' some who seen her new," says a character in A. B. Guthrie's homage to Montana, *The Big Sky* (1947). That novel is arguably the most famous book to emerge from Montana, eclipsed perhaps only by Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* (1976), with thanks due to Robert Redford and Brad Pitt. Professor William Kittredge quoted Guthrie to have said that he wrote *The Big Sky* "to show the way people kill the things they most love. Like a child with a kitten, they squeeze it to death."

I would argue that Guthrie, like a lot of place-oriented romantics, suffers from an overly-dramatic aversion to change. In other words, the "whole shitaree" of Montana is hardly gone—on the contrary, it is alive and well, and will probably proceed with greater health into the twenty-first century than a lot of its neighbors, precisely because so many people who live here and love this place are involved in taking steps to ensure that the inevitable changes coming along don't "kill the thing they most love."

I would say that the most important indicators of that health are indicated in our 1972 constitution, and in particular, the provisions it made to protect the natural environment and the commitment it made to Indian culture. In a very real

sense, these are the two most important elements of Montana that connect to that remote past. The fact that Montanans came together in 1972, crossing political and cultural divides, in order to articulate an enduring commitment to not simply preserving, but cultivating these two aspects of Montana hold, at least for me, the promise that, as William Faulkner said about humanity, we will "not merely endure, but prevail."

As much as I like A. B. Guthrie and the inimitable power he had as a storyteller, I have to part ways with him when it comes to assessing the past and envisioning the future. In 1864, the country was still young—it hadn't even been together as a union for a single, whole century. But the country to the west—the great plains and the Rocky Mountains that are the backbone and soul of Montana—were already very old, even if the new wave of "civilization" sweeping over it was merely in its infancy.

The elasticity of terms like "old" and "new" betray our inability to conceive of ourselves as part of geologic time, time measured in millions of years. Because Montana lies at the intersection of so many versions of time—geologic, cultural, historical—our state is a fertile ground for the imagination, as evidenced in the plethora of writers who call it home. The ambivalences that course throughout our brief measure of historical time often result from the difficulty we have in maintaining philosophical perspective.

If Bud Guthrie was Montana's Empedocles—the philosopher who resisted change and who threw himself into a volcano to immortalize himself—then I have to prefer Maclean, who strikes me as much more a version of Heraclitus. Like Maclean after him, Heraclitus was "haunted by waters," most probably because they represent the fundamental quality of existence: change. The first impulse of the philosopher confronting change is to deny it, to concoct some clever proof of change as illusory, perhaps in accordance with some romantic yearning to hold onto the moment of twilight that bathes all things in the most perfect light. But Heraclitus wisely chose not to deny change at all, but to recognize it as the fundamen-

tal condition of life. He recognizes that all things flow, like water, and that "one can't step into the same river twice."

I asked a lot of people in the last year this question: "Do you think things are better now than they were in 1864?" It's one of those questions that leads to a lot of interesting answers; it is so vague that people find themselves pursuing unpredictable avenues in trying to formulate an answer. No matter how you parse it, for most people it boils down to a series of tradeoffs. On the one hand, we have far better health care and technology, but on the other hand, we have lost a lot in the way of freedom and privacy. Other people avoid the judgment involved—whether moral or aesthetic—and simply approach it in terms of difference: things aren't better or worse now, they are just different.

I was curious to hear how a Montana Indian would respond to the question. I started with my friend Earl Vielle, a Blackfeet from Browning who also has ancestors who were Gros Ventre. We met for coffee one afternoon in Great Falls. Mostly we talked about our families, our jobs, and how we have lived in different places in Montana and what those places mean to us, individually.

Earl towers over me—he must be six foot eight to my five ten—and he used to be a boxer. He told me of his days as a bouncer at the old Silver Spur bar in Helena, just down the street from the house I grew up in in Helena. I was surprised to hear that name, and as he told a story about working there, I remembered all the hundreds of times as a kid I walked down the alley behind the old Quonset hut with the big neon-lined cowboy boot above the door on my way to Lincoln School. I realized, like a lot of landmarks from those days, the Silver Spur had disappeared.

I asked him whatever happened to that place. He laughed. "It's sitting in a field out in the valley there beyond Helena somewhere. They moved it to make way for Mountain West Bank."

After a while, we got around to my question. Better or worse? Earl mulled it over for a few moments. "I don't know,

1864. That's a tough one. That was before we were on the reservation. The buffalo were still there. That's before the Baker Massacre. I can't say things have gotten better since then, no." He doesn't elaborate, but then he doesn't have to. We move on to other things and talk about books for a while and then we both have to get back to work.

For American Indians in the East, even those tribes from as close to Montana as Minnesota or Kansas, by 1864 the damage had been done—the homeland lost and overrun. But in 1864, the Blackfeet were rulers of a vast territory that stretched from Saskatchewan and the Dakotas to Central Montana. Things would not get any better than that for a long time. Six years later, the Baker Massacre would snuff the lives of 173 women and children and kill the spirit of a whole people. Another small-pox epidemic would rage through the tribe in Central Montana and kill six hundred. Within twenty-five years, the plains would be littered with the rotting corpses of the last buffalo, and the remaining Blackfeet sequestered on the reservation.

I also posed the question to Brandi Foster, a woman I grew up with in Helena, who is now the Director of American Indian and Minority Achievement for the Montana University System. She is Ioway / Sac and Fox. She considered my question for a moment or so, and then agreed with those who deemed it a meaningless question. "Especially from the specific point of view of someone who is Indian," she said. "But to say that things are just *different* is too bland an assessment." She thought for a moment and said, "I compare my life to my great-grandmother's life. Her life was simpler, more connected to community and to the earth, no question. But there are trade-offs. We have greater access to technology, more access to health care, etc. But her life was more *authentic*, if that's the right word."

Authentic is probably exactly the right word. Existentialist philosophers seized on the word *authentic* for similar reasons: for them, it described a life lived in accordance with one's own spirit no matter what forces might impinge from the outside. There's a big difference between judging some arbitrary past

time as "better" than the present, and acknowledging that that earlier period was more authentic. The former approach is simply romanticism exposed, but the latter conveys a maturity one has to possess in order to adequately confront the future. Authenticity is tied up in practice, in the way we actually live our lives enmeshed in the fabric of the landscape. It's a function of the times we live in, and in the manifold culture we inhabit. My goal in this book has been to show that recapturing that authentic aspect of life may not be so far out of our grasp in Montana as it is in other places.

As we turn the corner on 150 years, it's probably a worthy occasion to sit back and think about where we've come from, the ground we've covered, and where we'd like our children's children to be in another century and a half. Last night my wife and daughter took me to dinner and a movie in the heart of Helena's new Northern Town Center. When I was a kid, this section of town was a grimy industrial corridor, replete with railroad tracks and hobo camps. A bottling plant and a junkyard used to sit where the Exploration Works and the Carousel are now. Walking south toward the new Cinemark Theatre, which can't be too far from where the old Quonset hut of Capital City Bowl used to be, we pass through a few blocks of gentrified shops and restaurants arranged behind prefab boulevards, with faux industrial signs above their doors. Aside from the December-in-Montana chill in the air, I wouldn't be able to distinguish this section of town from Pearl Street in Boulder, or Portland's Southwest district, or Five Points in Atlanta, or any other rejuvenated trendy business district in any number of American towns. For that matter, Montana Avenue north of the railroad tracks looks just about like Missoula's Brooks Avenue, or Tenth Avenue South in Great Falls, or any other box-store and fast food-lined avenue in America. Most of us live in a homogenized landscape, with a McDonald's at every interstate interchange, and a Walmart on the edge of town. It's impossible to deny that Montana has escaped this trend.

I'm reassured by the fact that in 1864, most places in the country also looked alike—the buildings were brick or false

wood fronts, the roads were dirt, the advertising signs all shared a similar style. People followed the New York styles then as now, even if the aesthetic was a little different. Nowadays, our iPhones and laptops interface seamlessly with cable television, speeding communication but also hastening our cultural flattening of affect. We can message a friend on the other side of the planet but we wander through America more lonely than we probably should be. Every street in America looks the same in an unfamiliar way.

Again, a person feels this sort of dislocation with less force in Montana. Even though I'm standing in a neighborhood in Helena that's trying maybe too hard to be SoHo, I know that the rest of the world hasn't reached Montana yet—at least not entirely. Our story is so recent, so shallow, that you hardly have to dig before reaching bedrock. Our proximity to the past here keeps us closer to each other than in other places, more in touch with 1864 than we might imagine.

A brief glance back across the last century and a half can be both comforting and unsettling, which probably reflects some fundamental quirk in the way we think about time and the unavoidable effect it has on us. The older we grow, the more we find ourselves looking back, trying to recapture ourselves in an earlier age. Our personal memories—of our families, our neighborhoods, our experiences—provide us with a kind of entry into the collective past we all share. I doubt I'm alone in admitting that as a child I looked at old family photos and just assumed that my grandparents and everyone before them lived in a world that was black and white, just like the photographs. And even though we're often wrong in our basic assumptions about what life was like for people living a hundred and fifty years ago, the pleasure of reading about them in part consists of recognizing that we always have more in common with them than we think. Our worries, our delights, our problems, our philosophies differ from those of our forebears in degree, not kind. The circumstances may be different, but the people in them we always recognize as our own.

One change certain to come to Montana in the next hun-

dred years—even in the next twenty—is a considerable increase in population. When I was younger, I used to sympathize with the bumper sticker that said, "Montana is full—I hear Idaho is nice," and like most of the people I grew up with, I'd complain about all the Californians and New Yorkers moving in. But one day it occurred to me that where you're born is an accident of fate and hardly any kind of entitlement. To complain about an influx of Californians in Missoula or Bozeman exposes you as a chauvinist, but only a fool would try making that argument on a street corner in Browning or Poplar.

Imagining what Montana will be like in another hundred and fifty years poses an even greater puzzle than trying to make sense of our past. Social scientists suggest that one of the most vexing aspects of trying to respond to impending global climate change comes from the fact that human beings seem cognitively unable to think more than a generation ahead. In other words, even though we seem to be able to look backwards with relative ease, we have profound difficulty thinking about a future any more distant from us than what things might be like for our children. The study of history, coincidentally, demonstrates that almost no human community has ever planned concretely for a future beyond a generation, perhaps two at the most. It seems that when we speak of "future generations," the people we are thinking of are our children—maybe our grandchildren if we have them. Beyond that, the vision gets too abstract for us to change our behavior for their benefit. Cynics like James Howard Kunstler (author of *The Geography* of Nowhere (1993) and The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century (2005) paint a depressing picture of a landscape ravaged by global warming. The news for Montana actually doesn't look so bad: we might see an incredible rise in population, but at least the weather should be better. Some models suggest that Montana will become more temperate.

Optimists lose patience with the doomsday crowd. What's interesting is that the optimists tend to reassure us about our future by reference to the past. Humans are by their very na-

ture adaptive. The optimists project that whatever challenges the future brings, we'll survive, even prevail.

One hundred and fifty years down the road remains a mostly unimaginable destination, even if the journey ahead is inevitable. But since no one of us now living is likely to be around for the tricentennial, it will be our responsibility in the interim to make note of our present, preserving our sense of it for new arrivals as they appear. Philosophers and historians both admit that the present is moving always and irrevocably away from us into the past: we are condemned to live in the continuum of time. One hundred and fifty years hardly registers on that continuum, but it's enough to hint that while circumstances and culture can change rather fast, the things that make us human tend to change imperceptibly and over the span of geological time.

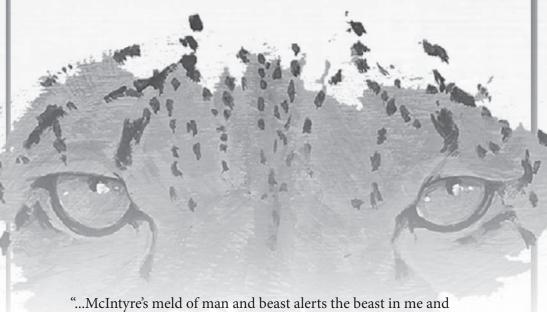
History is merely the cultural gloss we put on the brief sliver of time we are fortunate to call our own.

About the Author

A aron Parrett is on the faculty at the University of Great Falls, where he teaches literature and philosophy. His work has appeared in many books and journals, most recently in *The Complete Mon*tana Gothic and *The Old-Time* Herald. He was born in Butte at St. James Hospital



The SNOW LEOPARD'S TALE



alarms the man."

P. J. O'Rourke

"...mesmeric. Tom McIntyre has compressed so many things into so few pages that I can think of only a few other short books that can compare...."

Iohn Barsness

"...haunting, beautifully-written, and thought-provoking..." Ted Kerasote

"...it is a gem, an uncanny evocation of the cold ancient dusty highlands of Central Asia, and could only have come from Tom McIntyre. It is his best."

Stephen J. Bodio

The Snow Leopard's Tale Thomas McIntyre

There are a few creatures left in the world who live still untamed, prowling through the rocks, blinking slowly at the encroaching civilization far below. On China's Bountiful Black Mountain, a snow leopard hunts alone, artifact of a vanishing age. But hungry, desperate, when he is finally forced away from the cold stones of his mountain home toward the tents and fires of the valley, he encounters an impossible, startling world. And as we follow him on his journey, as the talented pen of Thomas McIntyre shows us how we appear through the leopard's eyes, it's a vision that will finally startle us as well.

More than fourteen years in the making, at the intersection of magic realism and artful allegory, with the detail of our best nature writing and a language as resonant of poetry as much as fiction, *The Snow Leopard's Tale* is a novel for the ages. Like all the best stories, it will change the way you see the world.

Where the mountains ended in the sky, Xue Bao parted **V** three eyelids. The third, red-stitched membrane floated off corneas clear as bright pools of water. Outside the hollow where he lay curled under overhanging dry gray stones, the sun rose smoke orange, shaded by the dust whorled by the wind of winter's end. As his head lolled between loose front paws, Xue Bao watched the morning light seep toward him across the rocks. The raw air carried the sharp bark of a marmot; and he listened on, his nose distinguishing scents. After a time he unwound his body and on his side stretched heavy-muscled legs, spanning his toes, claws revealed like petals opening. Rising to his paws, he swayed his back, yawned eburnean fangs, shook down from neck to thrust hind right leg, flicked his tail, and strode from beneath the shelf on Bountiful Black Mountain into the sunrise that spilled across the east in the rufous tint of sand-fox fur.

Xue Bao traversed rocky pitches. The mountain's naked crests screened the silhouette of his body and long tail. He moved almost invisible in the dawn but was substance surpassing shadow.

He was large for his kind, powerful-shouldered, deep-chested, his gripping paws large for his body and fringed in fur that let him travel atop the crusted snow of north-facing slopes. Thickened pads protected his paws from the knapped blades of fissured rock, while remaining sensitive to the inscription of the smallest spall.

He was longer than the tallest man was tall, half that length a black-tipped tail so furred two hands could not circle it. He carried his tail low; and when he moved in a low-bellied glide it brushed behind like the stroke of a plume.

Xue Bao had a short face, pink nose, small ears, white chin. Long vibrissae bristled translucent from whisker pads, an old furless scar chasing the broad bridge of his muzzle. He called in a wordless voice, never a roar.

Xue Bao's finest beauty, next to ensnaring eyes the milk blue of tomb jade, was his hide. His fur was amber-and-gray brume that clung to him. Large black rosettes floated in the fog, the patterns various, clouding into immaculate belly and chest, all of it kept washed by his tongue. No other fur was as warm and dense, and stinging winds never passed through to prickle his flesh.

When he hunted in this fur, Xue Bao sheathed his claws until he pounced, then brought them out like mica hooks. The long ivory canines splintered bone and locked strangling bites on vulnerable throats, serrated side teeth shearing through hide. With claw and fang he brought down animals many times larger than he. Made intemperate by hunger he once leapt onto the longhaired humped neck of a wild yak; but the bellowing bull tossed its broad horned head, wheeling Xue Bao high in an arc through the air. Righting himself before the ground, Xue Bao landed heavy on his paws, crouching stunned, muzzle slashed, glaring at the bull, then ran, making no ventures toward full-grown wild yaks after that.

Xue Bao was born in the spring high on Bountiful Black Mountain in a stone den lined with the fur of his mother's coat. His mother, clamping the scruffs of their necks, carried a twin and him from lair to lair and laid them down to sleep silent and secreted while she hunted, waking them when she returned, rasping her tongue on an ear and touching her nose to theirs, bearing the scent of new blood. She lay, and Xue Bao whined and found her milk, flexing his toes against her white belly, his brother suckling and mewing beside.

From his mother, his brother and he learned to hunt. In imitation they pantomimed concealment, slinking, stalking, succumbing to the temptation of clumsy bouts of tumbling sham combat. They made first kills, springing from crags, catching and holding with claws, breaking fragile cervical bones with canines, suffocating with clenching jaws. Then one morning the brother was an immobile ball of matted fur at the base of an eroded loess bluff. As Xue Bao watched, his mother raked the earth-powdered corpse from a slip of xanthous soil, smelled it, abandoned it. His mother and he hunted on.

In time his mother was transformed. They rubbed faces and the next day she sissed when he drew close. Her tail lashed as she rotated her ears, the white spots on their backs flashed toward him. She lunged, cuffing at him with her paw, not letting him lie beside her any longer or share her kill. Driven out, Xue Bao became a nomad appropriating shade and night, wandering until he found his own part of the mountain, driving off an aged male leopard who could not fight to hold it.

Bountiful Black Mountain etched upon him its wind, snow, glaciers, chines, ravines, caves, ledges, paw-wide trails, and animals. He spent his waking hours rounding his near-vertical reach of it, his life an encompassing of the mountain.

Along narrow trails he scuffed to dark sandy soil with his hind paws and marked the spot. He found his own scent under beetling rocks; and rampant, he rubbed the sides of his face against the scented places. He dropped and turned, lifting his long tail stiff, jetting the rock with pulsed opalescent streams. If the scent of another male lingered on a rock, Xue Bao tracked him and drove him away. If the scent were a female's, Xue Bao sought her on the echoing of her call.

On the mountain, crepuscular Xue Bao hunted from first light to midmorning and from the end of day to late into night. He hunted big animals and small, finding enough, killing only the one he needed. Sometimes an animal (never a grown yak) was too large to eat whole, even over several days; but golden-feathered eagles, sail-winged griffons, and obsidi-



Joel Ostlin

an-pennated black choughs came down to scavenge what was left behind, able to feed because Xue Bao's teeth opened hides too thick for their beaks to pierce.

On Bountiful Black Mountain dwelt sheep, colored a mix of blue, gray, and brown, with short white legs, white bellies, blue-black chests and faces, and rock-smoothed olive horns turning out and back. A band could number sixty with sixty noses, sixty sets of ears, sixty pairs of eyes, sixty networks of triggering nerves for Xue Bao to hunt among. It took an hour, sunlight passing over a cragged face, for him to steal a hundred feet, hunkering in shade, and plunge down the cliff after one blue sheep, only to have another see him before he leaped, putting the band to flight. Or at the end of a headlong rush Xue Bao pounced and missed or had the sheep tear from his claws sunk in its flanks before he could close his jaws on its throat. For all that the hunting was never so testing that the mountain did not give him what he needed, Xue Bao squandering nothing during his rounding of it.

Then one late-winter morning in his fifth year, Xue Bao fell upon a band of wild sheep digging with the hard rims of their cloven hooves for tuberous roots on the warm south face of a cliff above a deep gorge. He came down on the back of a sick-

le-horned ram, driving it to the ground and the air from its lungs with a loud expiration. Xue Bao's teeth cracked the ram's neck, disarticulating vertebrae, severing the spinal column, the sheep's sudden paralyzed weight driving Xue Bao down the cliff, haunches first, pebble stones sifting beneath them. Jaws clamped, Xue Bao fought against the skid into the gorge. Clinging to the ram's body, he braced his hind paws and dug the claws of his front into the cliff, the scratching tips scoring the stones.

The remainder of the band bounded back and forth, seeking escape. A ewe sprang below Xue Bao. Its lamb of the season leaped after the ewe, trying to stay close. It landed on a rock that clattered from under it, empty air below. The ram's lifeless bulk caught on an outcrop, and Xue Bao pulled himself onto the dead sheep, watching the lamb fall, cryless, solemn.

The band fragmented. For minutes Xue Bao only breathed. Then he cut into the stiff-haired hide with carnassial teeth. He crouched atop the ram, riving, swallowing, his jade eyes open, looking. Steam wisped from the ram's flesh; muscle fibers twitched as last sparks of electric current fired through dying nerves. Xue Bao ate, tearing off great bites until the meat cooled, blood incensing his fur, maddering the white of his chin.

Belly full, Xue Bao had to drink. He switched down the cliff, tail swinging, into the gorge and found water seeping from a crevice. He lapped the trickle running over algal-green stone. When the blood thirst was slaked, Xue Bao, feeling too heavy to climb back, walked, soft pawed, up the gorge. He came upon the lamb on the ground, shattered but its hide intact. The birds that scavenged by sight would not find it, deep in the umbra cast by the cliffs, not even to peck the soft iridescent eyes. Instead of carrying the carcass back to the ram's and staying by them for the days it took to eat it all, sated Xue Bao walked on until he found his faint scent from some past time in a gap under leaning blocks of stone. He slipped in, turned once on the cold rock floor, and slept into the night and through the next day.

Awakening in lowering darkness, Xue Bao did not go back to the dead sheep even then. He hunted for a new kill, better, fresher meat. He prowled the mountain for blue sheep where he had always found them, now finding none. On the third day he went back to the carcass, hungry for even rotting scraps. All he found of the ram was stripped ribs and crushed bones, surrounded by coarse foreign scents and tracks, large but narrower than Xue Bao's pugmarks and punctuated by the indents of claws, overprinting one another. Below in the gorge something had discovered the lamb and carried it off, leaving the same alien spoor.

Xue Bao saw no more wild sheep, alive or dead. Marmots ceased their barking. He hunted pika, but there were none. Xue Bao had known hunger often; but after eight days, his fat and flesh were wasting, his hide caparisoning his skeleton, numbered ribs waxing beneath it.

On the ninth morning griffons quartered the salmon-washed sky. Xue Bao surmounted a ridge and stood, the sun behind. Below in a patch of snow stood a dark large swepthorned ram, being killed.

Three wolves marked the points of a fated constellation. Two were gray near-grown cubs with black hackles on their scapulas and spines. The third, the she wolf, was redder on her head and forequarters. Wolves came from low country. Xue Bao had never scented but only seen them before at distances where their dog's eyes were not good enough to see him, but now these had climbed above their range to hunt animals that inhabited his black mountain.

One of the wolf cubs sprang side to side before the ram, dipping its head as if in sport, which it was for the cub. The sheep was larger than any one of the wolves and scythed its lowered horns to hold the cub off its throat and muzzle, its braced hooves embedded in the snow. The she wolf and the other cub darted in as the ram kicked, their shown incisors snapping at the white patch of its rump. They closed their jaws on the ram. It took time, but the she wolf began pulling wet viscera from the sheep. The ram bleated, staggered, collapsed, lifting its open-mouthed head and letting it fall soundless. The second cub came to the back, crouched beside the other two wolves, and fed with them. Tufts of soft fur wafted. Red tinctured the snow.

Xue Bao stepped off the ridge and walked toward the wolves, round paws padding loose and heavy, head down and held forward, tail curled at the tip. One of the wolflings lifted its long-snouted head and stopped eating. It stood, then the other. The she wolf stood, silent, regarding.

Their ears were up and their mouths closed as they roved out in a line. They looked past Xue Bao, studying the air beyond and without him. One wolfling shot its eyes toward Xue Bao who held the cub's gaze until it turned its head sideward and took a hesitant step in retreat, hackles rising in involuntary response. But Xue Bao could not make them all back away; and they were flanking and probing toward him, mouths open, when Xue Bao knew the sheep was theirs.

He turned uphill, swiveling his head to watch the wolves trailing like cloud shadow over the bare slope. After a short way they stopped and went back to the sheep. As Xue Bao crossed the ridge, the griffons sideslipped out of their gyres, landing beside the carcass with a hop. The wolves returned; and as they lay down again around the ram, the large birds waddled away in distress, holding their wide wings up as if repelled by contact with earth and snow.

After that there were no blue sheep or the flesh and bones of any other animals, dead or alive. The next day, the only sound audible to Xue Bao his muted pant, he came to a ridge that ran off the mountain. His head felt almost too immense for his gaunt body, weighing on his bowed neck. He looked down the ridge, then back at the mountain's summit. In either direction lay silence. He took a step into the silence, heading down.

Xue Bao walked on slopes and cliffs and through defiles he had never before surveyed, moving to lower country, not sleeping in the day, not finding even faint scents of wild animals here. The inertia of descending slopes carried him on, drawing him off Bountiful Black Mountain without his looking back.

With large-pawed steps he descended the mountain's lower hills. Late in the day he was too fatigued to keep on and sought shelter in a rock-strewn wash. He found none with his smell, or any smell similar, but discovered a cave with thin slate tablets tilted against the rock outside its entrance. White-green lines like claw marks scored the tablets, and on one was the figure of one of the big dogs that accompanied the herders into the mountains in summer. Inside the cave were heaped large charred bones.

Xue Bao saw long disarticulated tibia and fibula, the broken wings of the pelvic girdle broad as a carrion crow's span, coop of ribs high as his own shoulder, a huge skull, domed, sutured, flat faced and unsnouted, the teeth ebonied and worn and gapped in their arcade in the jaws—even the best too blunt for hunting and none large and square enough for profitable cudding—all sunk into blackened taphonomic process.

Xue Bao needed shelter, but recoiled from the bone-pale pile as he entered the cave and crossed to the farthest corner to curl in a rigid knot. He wrapped his long tail around his muzzle, eyes blinking closed, sleep finding him almost against his will at last.

The slightest sound always woke Xue Bao; but he heard nothing as he lay unconscious through the night, inhaling the osseous air of the cave, his body twitching and his jade eyes ticking behind closed tripartite lids. Ropy saliva hung from his mouth and his lips parted over long yellow-white canines. His large paws swiped the cave floor, as if he hunted in his sleep. Or sought a means of escape. What he dreamed he would not remember. He never recollected dreams, or knew upon waking that he dreamed at all.

Late in the morning he awoke not from the buoyant black emptiness that had always been his sleep but in an oppressive exhaustion as if he'd been in desperate flight from a place of peril. He slunk from the cave, pressing against the side of the opening, keeping his distance from the bones.

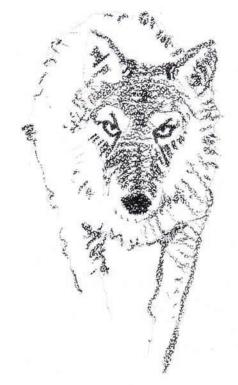
Xue Bao flinched as the ocher sunlight of this foreign country struck his eyes outside the cave. Blinking, he set off, journeying through the day, stealing between coverts, watching, listening, scenting, slowed by apprehension. He had not covered a great distance before it grew dark, so he walked and hunted on through to daybreak.

At dawn he saw a compound of earthen-colored buildings on the small bare flats below. He crept to a ledge and looked down, ears flattened, only his jade eyes showing. The buildings were mud brick, enclosed by a wall the height to which a standing man could reach and lay a final course of sun-dried blocks. In the dirt yard three tamed yaks were gathered. Their coats of long shaggy fur, brushing the ground, were patched in white (the coats of true wild yaks solid black). Frayed ropes cinched crossed pieces of wood, smoothed by wear, to their backs, other frayed ropes bridled their muzzles and heads. Xue Bao recalled their size, and his body remembered the sensation of wheeling through air. After that he didn't look at them anymore.

Poles with colored cloths beating like wings in the wind were planted around the yard. Spindled on rods in a recess in a wall was a row of large yellow hammered metal canisters bright as standing flames in the dusty sun. A woman with a saffron hide and a head of short black fur appeared and walked to the canisters, turning them with the flat of her hand and setting them spinning. They whirled and flashed, and when the woman finished at one end, she went back to the other so that all the canisters spun at once. Across the yard another woman with short black fur on her head and a saffron hide around her shoulders scuttled dried yak dung from a large mound into a battered gray metal container with a handle and carried it through a low dark doorway, lifting her black-slippered foot over a raised threshold, then reappearing with the container, emptied, to gather more dung from the heap.

Xue Bao watched for a long time, the pupils of his jade eyes shrunk to black singularities, searching for a way to stalk the women. He never saw humans as prey before, but now they looked easier for killing than yaks.

He saw no concealed path that would let him reach either of the women and pounce, and what would be the way to kill them? Like a sheep? Where to bite on such short necks? In a while he heard small bells chiming in the distance. Two straight-shouldered stocky ponies, one gray, one chestnut, with long unshorn rippling black manes, trotted toward the walled buildings. Men mounted on the bouncing backs of the pigeon-breasted animals had long sticks of metal and wood slanted across their backs. Pressing his belly to the



Joel Ostlind

ground, Xue Bao slid back from the ledge and into a wash, following it to a place of cleft rock where he hid and slept through the day.

When Xue Bao awoke, unrested, and went out from the cleft, scattered clouds crossed the moon. Traveling through shrouded foothills, he passed more man-tall mud-brick walls. He smelled dung smoke and saw lights, small and twinkling as stars, over the walls. Ponies and sheep (different from blue sheep—these with fleece white and curled) were penned, nickering and baaing. He kept his distance from the enormous black-and-brown dogs chained around the herders' houses. The dogs, larger than wolves, had fierce eyes sunk into folds of black hide, white spots in the fur above; and as far as Xue Bao kept from the walls, they caught his scent, their alarmed barking like the sounding of yellow-metal night gongs warning him to come no nearer.

He passed herds of long-furred, tamed yaks, bedded on the open ground. They scented him and rose from hind legs, heavy brass bells clapping, butting witless calves into the center of the fold, nervous even after Xue Bao moved far from sight and smell in the darkness. When he passed a second herd of yaks that night, Xue Bao was no longer in the narrow confines of canyons or in rolling foothills but had come out on the smooth sandy ground of a plateau, widening the gap between him and Bountiful Black Mountain with each soft step.

Dirty snow patched the plateau. The wind blew harder than on the mountain and in its foothills. Xue Bao found the shank of a long-dead wild ass with sinew dried black on the bone but could not bring himself to try to eat it. Farther from the mountain than he had ever been, he continued from it nonetheless, looking for better hunting ahead.

At first light Xue Bao saw tiny, black-horned, tan-and-white gazelles springing through the cropped grass and snow. He stalked them in full daylight without cover. Over and over he slunk on his belly for hundreds of yards. He pressed himself tight as a snow bank to the ground; but when he raised his eyes the gazelles were always farther off, their slender-legged, slanted, united running like the skimming and shifting of birds in flocked flight over the gazelle-colored plateau. The last time he raised his eyes the gazelles dissolved in a shimmer of reflected radiation in the frozen air, their rumps flagging flashes of white. Xue Bao raised himself from the ground, all his strength spent. He looked for canyons in which he could trap gazelles or ledges from which he could leap upon them, but saw none. This was prey for the lowland wolves that did not hunt alone but ran in packs.

On the treeless plain the one elevated place was a wind-sculpted sandstone tor. Pulling himself up the loose dirt on its side, Xue Bao climbed to the level top twenty feet above the ground, finding a spot that was not spattered with eagle and griffon chalk. No wild animal would walk beneath for him to pounce onto; but it was at least a place where Xue Bao could try to sleep through the day, unseen from below. Curling around himself with his tail around his muzzle he closed jade eyes.

That day Xue Bao ran in his sleep without rest through a dream he would not remember. He woke past dark, the moon a drumhead sailing across the vault of the sky. Xue Bao sat, watching the moon, wearier than when he first lay down. As he watched, the orb's upper edge began to dissolve.

The moon's light erased into the dark. Xue Bao was more transfixed than afraid. After a time the moon was gone. Only a faded ember, the color of the sand fox's red crown, rested on the black shingle of the sky that sparkled with burning stars. As if released from thrall, Xue Bao lowered his head and looked across the plateau.

Under the starlight the black shape of a pony approached, walking from the direction of the wind. Xue Bao saw that it would pass beneath the sandstone tor. He'd forgotten his hunger during the moon's leaving the night; but now it returned, filling his belly and head with a feeling of flame and ice.

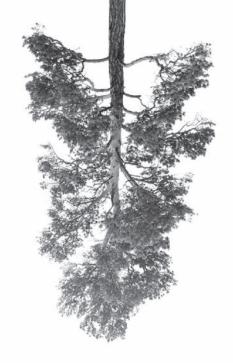
The pony neared, and Xue Bao hunched his body, gathering what strength he had left in the muscles of his hind quarters.

About the Author

An award-winning professional writer for more than thirty-five years, Tom McIntyre has authored thousands of magazine articles and television scripts, and is the author of such critically acclaimed books as Days Afield, Dreaming the Lion, and Seasons & Days. Born and raised in California, he moved to northern Wyoming almost twenty years ago with his wife, Elaine, and son, Bryan. The Snow Leopard's Tale is his first novel.



dam Jahie



EXTREMOPHILIA river rats, timber tramps, biker trash, and realtors FRED HAEFELE

author of Rebuilding the Indian

"Extremophilia contains fantastic, intelligent writing about a life well-lived, unfolding in the way that the best lives proceed: in exciting rushes and tumbles that are punctuated by spells of luminous, mysterious beauty and sudden, if sometimes brief, understanding."

Rick Bass

"The West, as filtered through Fred Haefele's utterly distinctive sensibility, is a gorgeous giant with a dark laugh. Romantics don't quite understand that, but these clear-eyed essays do. Read them."

Deirdre McNamer

Extremophilia:

RIVER RATS, TIMBER TRAMPS, BIKER TRASH, AND REALTORS

Fred Haefele

From working as a timber faller and a tree doctor to profiling environmental protestors and parsing through his own preoccupations with Ken Kesey, Fred Haefele has followed his curiosity into the most extraordinary corners of the place he's chosen to call home. This anthology of seventeen pieces of nonfiction gives us access not only to one of our most talented writers, it shows us the unique emotional and social topography of a region. It's an essential addition to any western bookshelf.

Jesus Just Got Evel

Evel Knievel was a great American hell-raiser. He grew up in a hard-nosed mining town, jumped tailings piles on his Schwinn, learned quickly that his strong suit was his guts. From 1965 to 1981, he made three hundred motorcycle jumps of ever-increasing distance and audacity. Starting with a pen full of rattlers for a failing Honda dealership in Idaho, in a couple years he was stunt-jumping nationwide: cars, Mack trucks, double-decker buses, the Caesar's Palace fountains, and most famously, the Snake River Canyon, a jump spoiled by a premature parachute. In the course of these years, he suffered numerous concussions, broke thirty different bones, spent half his time in the hospital. He made millions of dollars, partied with the stars, flew around in a Lear jet, drove his kids to the fishing hole in a yellow Ferrari V-12. His style came from various sixties icons: the white-caped outfits from Elvis Presley, the motor mouth from Muhammad Ali, the rockabilly hair from Jerry Lee Lewis. But put him on a Harley-Davidson

Sportster and he rode like nobody else in the world. He also crashed like nobody else.

When he died of pulmonary fibrosis on November 30, 2007, his family announced they would "throw" a funeral, and that the event would "bear Evel's signature," which could mean just about anything, knowing Knievel. The funeral would take place in his hometown of Butte, Montana, a gritty, hard-partying mountain town whose St. Patrick's Day revels draw crowds in the tens of thousands. Factor in this proclivity with Knievel's many stuntman pals and enough black leather to start a shoe factory, and Butte officials anticipated a send-off of near unprecedented fervor. But if you were looking for someone to pop a screaming, block-long wheelie out of the parking lot and lead Knievel to the sweet hereafter, well, you'd come to the wrong place.

Monday morning, December 10, was cold and blustery. We got a late start driving down from Helena, but managed to park just a block from the Civic Center. Five minutes before the event, we strolled easily past a fleet of phantom-gray stretch Cadillacs, an NBC satellite link, and a squad of extremely husky ushers in snow white XXL mourning suits. Moving briskly to the sign-in desk, we took a program, went inside, were able to find a seat immediately.

At the south end of the hall, beneath a bank of red poinsettias, Evel Knievel lay in state. His coffin was rustic pine and he wore his signature white racing leathers, which featured a red, white, and blue chevron down the front. To one side of the coffin sat a snow white pickup, a matching chevron across its hood. To the other side was a photo gallery of his most spectacular jumps. Above the funeral bier a huge slide projector marched through photos of his life, accompanied by a soundtrack of country songs.

Because of this year's extended elk hunting season, there was plenty of camouflage in the crowd. Lots of Carhartt work jackets, lots of black leather, of course, and a significant number of people who walked with limps. There were a surprising number of toddlers, most of them not at all into it. The media had projected overflow crowds in the thousands, but at five

past eleven, as "My Way" played for a second time, the 7,500-seat Butte Civic Center was half empty.

Special guests included actor Matthew McConaughey, narrator of the History Channel's Knievel biography; ABC Sports producer Doug Wilson; the Crystal Cathedral's Reverend Robert Schuller, who'd baptized Knievel last April; professional stuntman Gene Sullivan, of the Jump for Jesus Motorcycle Club; former heavyweight champion Smokin' Joe Frazier; and former Montana governor Judy Martz, who'd grown up with Knievel. When Martz spoke, she blamed the empty seats on the weather, explaining it was too cold for the Harley crowd to ride. But bikers can also drive cars, and besides, it wasn't really that cold, and so some of us got the uneasy feeling the absentees knew something we didn't. The rumors of an admission charge had proved false. On the other hand, the event soon began to resemble a bait and switch; it promised to be a tribute but ended up more a revival, with the Lamb of God methodically thrashing another wild Dionysian heart.

Certainly the funeral delivered its moments of fancy. The first of these came when Reverend Schuller introduced Martz as "Montana's twice-elected governor." Martz was, most emphatically, one term, but she did not bother to correct him. She moved quickly past the subject of how Knievel became who he was, went on to describe his eleventh-hour epiphany at length, ended with the statement, "He is probably now worshipping with the Saints."

For some of us the task of picturing Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Evel was too tall an order. It was easier to imagine him jumping the Berkeley Pit, a massive Superfund site up the mountain that's reported to be wider than the River Styx. Mostly, though, this inflationist oratory set the tone for the rest of the funeral, which consisted largely of triumphant accounts of his conversion. Indeed, from these accounts, and in a hunting community like Butte, it wasn't far-fetched to think of Knievel's soul as a certified Boone and Crockett, the kind of trophy soul only Hunter Thompson's might outscore.

Knievel's friend and producer, Doug Wilson, provided some relief with his assertion that Knievel "was actually not a very good motorcycle rider. Are you kidding? All those crashes? On the other hand, he was an absolutely world-class showman." Wilson went on to relate Knievel's response when a woman from the BBC asked if his failure to jump the Snake River Canyon had damaged his credibility. Knievel turned to her and replied, "No canyon or woman I jumped ever damaged my credibility."

The only one to bring it all home was Evel's son, Robbie Knievel. A daring stuntman after his father's heart, Robbie embarked first on a puzzling, extremely high-risk monologue on the art of "duck-plucking," finally righted himself, and came roaring back to declaim, "I am the son of the Greatest Daredevil in the World!"

Almost before the words were out, the crowd whooped, shouted, and cheered, and for the first and only time that day, the Butte Civic Center came alive. There it was in spades: the bona fide, bare-naked Knievel bravado, that thing the beleaguered audience came to hear.

Beyond argument, the grieving process is very personal, and each of us is entitled to find comfort the best way we can. But the dying Knievel was so frail, all the star-powered salvation rhetoric so relentless that in the end the saving of his soul seemed more like a corporate takeover than an act of grace. Along these lines, it seemed reasonable to ask, if Knievel's salvation was such a rock solid slam-dunk kind of deal, then why were so many people selling it so hard?

Reverend Schuller provided the closing remarks. With the best tan in the house, he spoke at length on the integrity of Evel's conversion, as if we might be harboring doubts. It was unfortunate that it took place on April Fool's Day, but Schuller is an extraordinary speaker, with a voice that could soar from a gravelly whisper all the way to a cosmic thunderclap.

"The eyes have it! The eyes do not lie!" Schuller kept insisting. He certainly gave it his all. Indeed, if he'd had a tachometer, he would have revved it out right to the redline. Yet in the end, the harder he worked it, the more people stood up and filed out, satisfied, apparently, that there was nothing more left to see.

We went directly to a bar. We ended up at the M&M, a Butte landmark that up until a 2005 remodel had not closed its doors for a hundred years.

"Couldn't believe my eyes," said the bartender, shaking his head. "This was supposed to be the biggest deal ever, but the Met Bar (across the street from the Civic Center) was almost dead, and that was always Evel's favorite."

We ordered a round of beers, and some of us had whiskey. All of us, as it happened, were over fifty, and in light of this fact and the gravity of the occasion, we began to talk earnestly about the aging process. In particular we talked about the question of memory—what was memorable, and what was not. Eventually we came to grips with the fact we'd driven seventy miles to the funeral of the most outrageous guy to live in these parts, and it wasn't very memorable at all. Were we within our rights to complain, or was this simply bad form on our part?

We ended up watching the big-screen TV above us, which featured, of all things, live CNN coverage of Evel Knievel, lying in state.

"Talk about your relativism," somebody said.

We looked all around the mostly empty bar, sipped our beers the way you do when it looks like you'll end up partying by yourself. Where was everyone? we wondered.

About the Author

Fred Haefele's work has appeared in publications including Outside, Salon, Big Sky Journal, and The New York Times. He is the author of the award-winning memoir, Rebuilding the Indian. He lives with his family in Montana.



A QUIET PLACE of VIOLENCE

Hunting and Ethics in the Missouri River Breaks

"I know of no recent book that explores the hunter's ethic with more probity, more satisfying anecdote, more visceral wisdom than *A Quiet Place of Violence*."

Nick Lyons

"A rich, complex work that deserves an enduring place on the bookshelf right next to Ortega y Gasset."

E. Donnall Thomas, Jr.

"...at once a joy to read and an important defense of the hunt."

Stephen J. Bodio

A QUIET PLACE OF VIOLENCE:

HUNTING AND ETHICS IN THE MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS

Allen Morris Jones

In this landmark work, Allen Morris Jones spends a year exploring one of the wildest ecosystems in North America, hunting and examining the philosophical issues of blood sport. In the process, he creates both a compelling defense for the hunt as well as one of the tradition's first formal ethics.

If you're a hunter, *A Quiet Place of Violence* will help put into words those aspects of the hunt that you have found most essential; and if you're a non-hunter, it will offer insight into the allure of this otherwise puzzling pursuit.

Possession

Hunting requires optimism. You get up at five o'clock, walk until eleven, rest, and hunt again until dark only because this next hunt is the one.

I walk from the house on a path I have already traveled four or five times this season. I'll be walking around beneath the grain fields through the Breaks in order to come up onto the flat fields from the unexpected below.

These early snows always make it look like it should be a lot colder than it is. A light skiff erases surfaces but without covering the edges, and the horizontal arrangement gives the world a tough cast.

I bugle below the first field, staring up at the scalloped horizon, and am met with silence. After a few minutes, I move further along, just below the next set of fields, and bugle again. Immediately there's a deep response, and then two high ones from the satellite bulls. They're not close, but they're there.

Genetic or associational, can there be any greater feeling of anticipation than in the first moments of a stalk? Your eyes are bulging with sudden adrenaline and you find yourself taking note of the slightest currents of wind, the smallest movements in the brush, the most incidental flights of birds. All this even while your conscious attention is focused on the animal in front of you. You are awake.

A smaller bull bugles again, perhaps a little further away. I pick up my speed.

The snow has started to melt, and by the time I reach the base of the hill below the field, I'm walking on layered stilts of gumbo and snow. I stand to scrape the clods off and look up to see a small five point bull craning its head down at me.

I freeze, holding my breath to small pulses.

Five minutes later the bull grows impatient, disappearing back into the timber, toward herd.

Nothing to do but play it through.

In the trees I bugle again. I hope to keep the bull from spooking and to fix the positions of the other elk. Somehow, there is an answer. And then several answers—all above me and still in the field.

Hunting alone, the nature of possible scenarios changes dramatically. Last year with my father, a bull hung up seventy or eighty yards out and began circling us for our scent. I backed away, breaking limbs and grunting. Dad stayed ahead, positioned behind a juniper bush. The bull was encouraged enough by my retreat to come on in, spooking only as Dad rattled his arrow across a branch. But alone, with no bugler to distract the bull, quiet stalking is often the best.

If you are hunting well, the state of inclusion perpetuates itself. To fulfill your project, you need to know the land, what forms it takes, and how you can work with them. To kill your bull, you need to know the animal, his habits, and his capacity to avoid you. Most importantly, you need to know yourself, how far you can reasonably walk in a day, how quietly you can stalk. Some hunters announce themselves with trumpets while a very few can slip through the woods in their suits of rustling leaves and trickling water.

If I could move around in front, below them, I might be able

to lay an ambush from a narrow finger of timber that I know is there, connecting the field to the ravine.

I scrabble along the sidehill for a half mile before topping out into the string of timber.

The herd is already spread out in the open, not as close to the timber as I had hoped, and still over a hundred yards away. A few of the cows are looking in my direction, ears alert. A few more stand in the timber. I freeze. At the end of the line, a good six point, larger than the earlier bull, stretches his nose out to a cow.

There's no way I can make it around to another ambush without attracting attention. I try a cow call. Twenty heads and a pair of antlers swivel toward me. The cows stand still and the bull steps back and forth, his fight-or-flight impulse triggered. Should he run away? Or should he chase after me?

There is movement off to my left. Two bulls that I hadn't seen, a raghorn and the five point, stand at the edge of the timber on my side, less than seventy yards away. I ease to the side and put a small tree between us, hoping the herd won't spook at my movement.

Cow call again. I lift my bow and prepare to draw, the broadhead trembling across the rest. I hear heavy steps in the wet grass, and smell the elks' musky odor. The raghorn steps out fifteen yards away, staring directly at me. His nostrils quiver. I wait. I can't breathe. I can hear the five point walking up close behind him. He steps between me and the raghorn. Ten yards away, no more. After a few seconds, a few hours, they both turn to look at the herd on the other side of the field. I draw and shoot.

And I die a little as the arrow goes in high. Sometimes the very short distances can be harder than the very long.

But the despair turns into elation as I watch the five point stumble as he runs into the timber. The brush crashes.

The elation dilutes to sadness: Success, but failure.

I sit down where I am. My trembling hands move like flags over my face, over the ground, finally into my pockets.

A badly wounded elk, if it doesn't die immediately, will usually go only a short distance before lying down, sick. If giv-

en enough time, maybe just a few minutes, it will die there. If it's forced to keep walking, it can walk its wounds away. I expect to find this one lying just inside the trees. But I've been wrong before.

I'm confident that crash came when he fell. Almost confident. I stand and walk through the field to the timber on the other side.

Twenty feet within the timber, where the steep banks cut into the sun and the temperature drops until I can see my breath, I find the arrow unbroken on an open patch of needles. Thirty feet further on I see an antler curving up out of a deadfall.

I wish there were someone with me, someone else looking, so I could holler back that I've found him and that he's a good one—just to holler. I do it anyway; it feels wrong not to.

Caught in the brush, the antlers twist his head back as if he were just now getting ready to bugle.

I find a place on the dead log slightly above him and sit down, grabbing the antler between the third and fourth points. Solid. Cool.

His legs stretch out in mid stride, black enough to carry a reflection. That's what's made some of the tracks I've been seeing. The thick, knotted hair across his stomach stinks of mud and urine.

HUNTING IS NOT AN ATTEMPT to take possession of the animal, as so many hunters have argued. If that were the case, the attempt is doomed to failure.

I cannot possess the elk. It's dead. But I can possess the memory of it in the moment before I killed it, which is enough. It's more than enough. What I have brought away is my relationship to the animal, not the animal itself.

It is not so much a desire to possess as to be possessed.

And to be possessed, you must hunt him. To hunt him, you must kill him. The words of this hard verity are etched arrow deep into every sandstone bluff, screamed by every dying rabbit, whispered against the cheek of every hunter. We fight for

our right to live, marking out our territory in a spray of blood, reddening our teeth and nails on life's hard truths.

And in front of me now, arrested, lies a dead mass of energy. But it is dead only until it flows back into the process: through me.

ITS STOMACH FACES THE downhill side. Good luck.

I take off my pack and jacket, roll up my sleeves, break off a few branches to clear the way, and open my knife. Alone, with no one to pull back on the rib cage or arrange its legs, this is going to be a messier job than usual.

Beginning in the middle of the stomach, slightly off to one side to avoid the thickest of the hair, I make a small incision with the edge of the blade. A few inches give way and the white paunch presses out. I slide my first two fingers down into the incision, placing the knife between them, edge up, and make a single long cut up to its rib cage. The paunch expands, pulled by gravity, and when I go back and cut down into the pelvic area, it spills out: stomach, upper intestine, the first lobes of the liver, the small knot of gallbladder. The rest is obscured by a warm wash of blood that swallows my hands and lower arms.

The arrow went in high, it died almost immediately, there's all this blood...I must have sliced the aorta.

The pancreas, the thick neck of the lower intestine, the hard kidneys, these come out next. I reach blindly back up and cut almost randomly, severing all the connections that I can feel. Two of the four or five scars on my fingers have come from this kind of cutting. The largest portion of viscera, now free, slides out into the dead branches.

The year has been wet enough and the growing season long enough, that his fat lies in chunks everywhere; my hands are greasy.

I reach back and carefully extract the bowel and then the bladder, clamping it shut with my thumb and forefinger. Only then do I move back to the testicles, which can give the meat an unpleasant flavor if left close.

For the sternum, I take out and assemble the small game saw I've been carrying all these weeks. It will let me empty the chest cavity of lungs, heart and esophagus without getting bloody past the elbows: an indulgent nicety.

Another wash of aortal blood.

BLOOD IS HEAVIER THAN water. A bull like this carries five to six gallons of it. If I were Cree I would drink a few swallows to keep from being disturbed by the sight of it in battle.

Within the chest, the lungs are flaccid and spongy, holding their strong lines of contour even as I cut them apart. Inflated, they have a capacity of six gallons.

The blood has spread from the carcass in an expanding arc, soaking through one of my pants legs, turning it tacky and stiff.

I remove the ten-pound heart, still twitching with its physical memory. If I were Crow, I would set it aside as a gesture of respect. I do it anyway.

It's a distancing mechanism, this knowledge. But you have to go through it, just like you have to read the billboards driving through town. The necessity of killing does not make you any happier about doing it, not after you become conscious of yourself.

To remove the cape, I make a cut from the sternum to the top of the shoulder, then another from the crest of the back to a point between and slightly behind the antlers. This done, I grab the corner at the shoulder and pull it away, cutting. Fat stands in layers above the shoulder.

With the cape hanging lose, I cut and twist the neck vertebrae just below the skull, removing the head and setting it aside. Its eyes fall back into its skull. If I were a Flathead, I would close them.

I cut away the front shoulders and rear hips at the joints, setting them on a plastic bag to be boned later. The straps, loins, and ribs I will have to do here.

I remove the skin and make two cuts along the top ridge of the vertebrae (the knife bouncing along the contours of bone) and then horizontally above the ribs. A cut at the front and back, and the first backstrap is cleanly off. I next saw the largest series of ribs away from the vertebrae, using this new space to get at the internal loins.

The elk, now little more than a backbone and half of a ribcage, is easy to turn over for the other strap and ribs.

I set the four legs and ribs off to one side, covering them with an orange plastic tarp. I tie the head, straps, and loins onto my pack frame. It's heavy, but the cabin's no more than three or four miles away. Once home, I'll be able to drive the truck back to within a hundred yards to pick up the legs and ribs. Truthfully, I wouldn't have to pack out anything. But it's a way of paying dues.

Almost exactly two hours after hearing the first bugle, I begin my hike back to the cabin.

About the Author

During his twenty year career in publishing Allen Morris Jones has worked as a magazine editor (Big Sky Journal) novelist (Last Year's River, Houghton Mifflin), editor, and critic. As a freelance writer, he has published short stories, essays, and poems in a variety of print magazines and online journals. As a book editor, working primarily for Globe Pequot Press, he has overseen the



acquisition and publication of more than one hundred titles. He is currently the owner and publisher of Bangtail Press.

"Rowland's people are on a search, and he writes them with wit, humility, and a satisfying sense of trajectory."

Leif Enger Author of *Peace Like a River*



"You don't have to love baseball to love this story about one (aging) boy of summer who is brought to a bittersweet reckoning with his past. I found myself laughing, cringing, and knuckling down..."

Kim Barnes

"...an elegant and potent investigation of community and home, of healing and forgiveness...this wonderful novel is a grand slam of indelible characters and infectious drama, and a flat-out great read."

Alan Heathcock

HIGH AND INSIDE Russell Rowland

Pete Hurley is not the first person to have the idea that building his dream house in the country will bring him some kind of peace and happiness. But he may be the first to arrive in Montana with a World Series ring, a three-legged dog, and a thirst for self-destruction.

High and Inside documents with stark clarity one man's struggle with the dark side of fame, as well as his internal battles with alcoholism and a crumbling sense of self-identity. A community of people who love him and a generous inheritance aren't enough to counterbalance Pete's apparent determination to sabotage every healthy aspect of his life. It's a downward spiral that won't end until he's forced to confront not only his own ugly past but his unfulfilled future as well.

With wit and compassion, sharp humor and startling insight, author Russell Rowland gives us not only a portrait of fame and addiction, but also an indispensable glimpse into the character of the modern West.

From Chapter Three

My land. What a wonderful phrase. These words feel good in my mouth—like soft, warm, homemade caramel. My. Land.

My land is lush. It's green, thick with grass, brush, and a stand of sturdy pine. It smells of fresh, moist soil. The Bridger Mountains are not close, but they are extremely present, their rocky peaks angular across the horizon. When I stand in the middle of my land, I'm amazed how much I feel the mountains. Without them, my land would be more vulnerable, and less beautiful. The mountains provide a visual image of something—what to expect, maybe. Hopes. Dreams. In open spaces, there is too much unknown.

"Dave!" I call out, realizing that she has wandered off. Looking to the stand of pine trees, I assume that she has followed her instincts to explore. I enter the woods, and the temperature drops ten degrees. The rich pine smell fills my nose. I call out again, but hear nothing, see nothing.

Fifty feet into the trees, I encounter a barbed wire fence. There are several "No Trespassing" signs posted. So I traverse the length of the fence, calling Dave's name, scanning what little is visible. I'm not panicked. Dave is a dog, after all. She's resourceful, an adventurer. Even if she hears me, she may not be interested in being found just yet.

I'm mostly thinking about this revelation that Simone wants to see me. The last time I saw anyone from her family other than Charlie, it ended badly. It was just days after the accident, days after I left their daughter paralyzed. And the message I got that day was clear. So why would things suddenly change?

After seeing no sign of Dave, I cross the fence and push deeper into the trees. The floor of the woods is soft, dark, moist soil, mostly free of living plants, but covered with a thick blanket of pine needles. The smells are rich, earthy and wonderful. I can feel the air, as cool and soothing as a liquid. Squirrels scamper from view, and a deer elegantly pokes her hooves into the wheat grass in the distance.

I become so absorbed in the atmosphere that I forget my purpose. After roaming for fifteen minutes, I crouch to study a rotting tree stump that is crawling with life. Then I stand, take two steps forward, and come face to face with a rifle barrel.

"Damn." This quiet exclamation takes all the breath I have.

The face at the opposite end glares at me, steady and serious. The eyes do not appear wild, or angry—just steady, challenging. "Who are you?" A woman's voice—as the picture comes more into focus, I realize that a big felt cowboy hat and hair pulled into a ponytail have disguised her sex.

I take a deep breath. "Have you seen a dog?" A pause. "A three-legged dog?"

Her brow furrows, and she frowns. "You serious?"

"My dog wandered off. She's only got three legs."

"Is that why she wandered off?"

I smile, although it doesn't seem like a very good idea. She does not smile. "Could be. But I don't think so. That was just offered as information—a way of identifying..."

"Who are you?"

I hold out my hand, offering to shake, reaching as far as the gun will allow. "Pete. I just bought the next lot over."

"Pete what?"

I'm annoyed with this oily appendage in my face. It seems extreme. Maybe even illegal. "Do you mind?" I tilt my head

toward the gun. "I've never had a gun pointed at me. I don't like it much."

Although her eyes soften a bit, her brow lowers until it nearly hides her eyes. She appears to be young, fresh-faced, with apple cheeks and a full mouth. Like a teenage boy without the peach fuzz. "Maybe there's a good reason for it," she says.

"Yeah, I suppose there could be. But I'm your new neighbor, not just some random homeless person. I'm sorry I climbed over the fence, but I wanted to find my dog."

"Where are you from? You have an accent." Slowly, she tilts the gun and allows the barrel to slide through her hands. The stock comes to rest on the ground next to her foot. But she looks nervous, tense, ready to pull it back into position at the slightest hint of danger. And it's at this point that I recognize that the expression in her eyes is not threatening, angry, or crazy, but simply afraid.

"Back east," I answer. "Massachusetts."

"Why'd you move to Montana?"

"To build a house."

Now the scene is odd. It's like party conversation, but with a twist.

"So you come here often?" I ask in my best lounge lizard cool.

This prompts a very slight grin.

"What's your name?" I ask.

"Annie," she answers with a glint. "Annie Oakley."

"Ahhh...congratulations on the resurrection thing."

She doesn't laugh, but the smile becomes a little wider. Very little. Her face reddens. Seconds pass, and it's apparent she has nothing left to say.

"So you haven't seen my dog?"

She shakes her head. "Three legs, huh?"

I turn, heading toward my property, first backwards, then a little to one side, always with an eye on Ms. Oakley to assure her I'm not going to make any sudden moves. I'm in a cowboy movie, striding with the senseless confidence that my bravado will trump any danger. I'm John Wayne.

"Let me know if you see her," I say.

"What's her name?"

"Dave."

Another slight smile, but she won't give me any more than that. "Okay. Dave the three-legged girl dog. Got it."

"I'd invite you over for lunch sometime, Annie, but I think it would be hard to eat and hold a gun at the same time."

I've nearly lost sight of her.

"My name's Leslie," she calls out. "Leslie Monday."

"Ah. So you use an alias." I wave. "Good strategy."

I weave my way through the trees, calling Dave's name as I go, and after climbing back into my land, and nearly emerging from the forest, I hear the uneven rhythm of three legs padding over the soft bed. I'm happy to see the brindle coat winding between the pines.

"Where you been, girl?" I crouch and Dave's tongue bathes my cheeks. "Did you get a good look around?" Dave smiles, breathing hard, and leads me out of the trees, as if she can't wait to show me something. We break from the trees into the open, where my land spreads out before us.

"What do you think, Dave?"

She looks at me, barks once, and trots forward, her torso rocking like a hobby horse. I would say that she's never been so happy except that I don't remember her ever being anything other than happy.

"Are we home?"

About the Author

Russell Rowland was born in Bozeman, Montana, in 1957. His first novel, In Open Spaces, made the San Francisco Chronicle bestseller list and was named among the "Best of the West" by the Salt Lake City Tribune. His second novel,



The Watershed Years, was nominated for a High Plains Book Award, as was his third novel, *High and Inside*. His next book, due out in 2015, is a survey of Montana's fifty-six counties.

About Our Name

Bangtail Press was named after the Bangtail Mountains, a low range of hills northeast of Bozeman, Montana. Scenic and accessible, the Bangtails are a local destination for hunters, hikers, skiers, and campers. It was the perfect name for a small book house with aspirations. But it seems that the word "bangtail" has other connotations as well.

In the mid-1800s, for instance, "bangtail" referred to a horse with a tail that had been trimmed flat across. It was a way of distinguishing a given horse from other members of a herd. Related to this meaning, perhaps, "bangtail" was also early cowboy slang for a wild or unbroken horse. In a nod to the press's roots in magazine publishing, those envelopes with perforated flaps used in mail solicitations are also called "bangtails." Less auspiciously, perhaps, "bangtail" was used in Victorian England as a street reference to prostitutes.

In any case, at the intersection of mountain ranges, cowboy vernacular, racehorses, magazine publishing, and Victorian streetwalkers...Bangtail Press!