

Sample of *Somewhere in an Oregon Valley*

Extra space between paragraphs and three periods means I've left out part of the narrative and skipped ahead to my next selection from the book.

I include the table of contents to give a further idea of what the book is about. The excerpts in this sample make up about one fourteenth of the book.

6,950 words.

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February 27. I kept two kerosene lamps turned up high on my work table and wrote into the early hours of the morning. About three a.m., I took my guitar from its case and played and sang several songs, softly, because my wife, Laura, slept in our bed six feet from me, and our daughters, Juniper and Amanda, nine and seven then, five years into our time in Whitney Valley, slept in the next room, twenty feet from me.

I built a song about spring coming to our mountain valley, and I wrote down the words and chords. I fed wood to the fire in the back room heater, walked through Juniper and Amanda's room, and fed the front room heater. I walked out onto the front porch and shone my flashlight on the thermometer. Ten degrees below zero.

The waning moon hung high in the clear sky. Snow two feet deep covered the wild mountain meadow around our old, ramshackle house. The meadow sloped a hundred and fifty yards from our house down to the north fork of the Burnt River. Across the river from the house, the meadow rose to the base of the ridge, about a quarter of a mile from the river, where the forest west of us began. Soft moonlight reflected bright from the snow. Densely growing willow bush along the river shadowed the iced-over stream black in moonlight. Smells of cold plants and frozen water drifted in cold air above snow.

A killdeer's insistent call carried across the snow-covered meadow and startled me. The bird had come north too soon. Surely it would freeze.

My breath condensed to ice in my beard and mustache. Cold drove toward my bones. I walked back into the house and checked my daughters. They stretched out straight in their beds. Had they been too cold, they would have curled up tightly, and I would have added more blankets. ...

We are caretakers of this twelve-hundred acre ranch we live on. I irrigate the meadows, and we harvest wild meadow hay late in summer. The major thrust of what we do for a living is not destructive to the earth nor to the habitat of the wild animals around us. We expect everyone to understand we can be benevolent, intelligent caretakers of the Earth. We expect

humankind to overcome the desire for material accumulation beyond need and inordinate power over others and to get on with the job. As Amanda says, with upturned palms and raised shoulders, “How many worlds are there? Just this one, right?”

I look again at the wild birds and at my daughters. There may be no guarantee that everything will always be in balance, but they go on with their daily living. They don't hesitate to invest their entire energy in the good that is the life force.

I think they provide a good example for me, and I get on with living. ...

Nine years before we moved to Whitney Valley, several years before I met Laura, I rode a motorcycle down the Sierra mountains, toward the Sacramento Valley. A man in a Rambler Rebel turned directly in front of me. I slammed five hundred and fifty pounds of motorcycle into his car, crushed my lower left leg between the machines, flew over his car, shattered my helmet on the asphalt, fractured my skull, and ripped muscles, tendons, and intestines.

I gained and lost consciousness several times on the asphalt parking lot and then on the way down the mountain in an ambulance. Red lights flashed against rock bluffs. Wailing siren echoed from canyon walls. Furious anger consumed me, at sudden, massive injury, at a man so stupid he drank alcohol and drove his car, fury at the smashing of my hopes and plans. I used up anger, burned it out of me. Fear replaced anger, fear of death, fear of a future unpredictably altered by injury. I used up fear, surrendered to whatever would come to me, and passed deeply into unconsciousness again. ...

Love of life and gratitude for life ebbed in difficult times, but I always clung to enough to knit together my existence, as rhythm knits together a complex piece of music. ...

Cold fall wind blew across north slope. I hiked down to an abandoned apple orchard below the logging road and filled my pack, hiked back up, sliced apples, and spread them in sunshine to dry. I harvested the rest of my garden. I hiked every place I'd ever

been and looked at it again. All summer, I never touched the camera I brought to the mountain. I couldn't have anything between me and what I saw. I couldn't have anything between me and what I did. This place on Coalpit Mountain won't exist in pictures I show anyone.

It exists in me, in images in my mind, in strong legs and a strong body. I walk five miles without limping, without pain. I run. I scramble up slopes like a four-legged. Healing continues. Determination to build strength continues. Faith in the powerful positive force of life continues.

I couldn't find my cat. I circled the camp, called and looked. My black dog came to me and looked intently up the hill. He pointed one ear toward where he looked, then the other. I followed his point and found my cat up the swale, secluded behind upthrust roots of a blown-over pine, purring and treading the soft moss around the roots.

I dropped my jacket on the long-haired Siamese tom and wrapped him tightly, with just his nose out, carried him to the car and stuffed him in. When he worked his way free of the jacket, he crawled under the front seat and stayed there.

We rolled, a cloud of grey dust, down the gravel road, onto the highway. ...

Cattle bawled. Dust rose above the corrals. People roped calves from horses, threw the calves to the ground, branded and castrated them. I climbed onto the corral rail. Smells of cow manure, dust, and hot branding irons hung in the air. A tall, heavy man in his sixties left his branding iron in the bucket that held the propane torch and walked over to me.

I said, "I'm looking for John or Mike Rouse."

He said, "I'm Mike Rouse."

"I'm Jon Remmerde. I talked to Tex (the ranch caretaker) up at Whitney. He's packing up his trailer and leaving. He asked me to tell you he wanted to get down here and talk to you, but he has to get over to Prairie City to start his new job. He got slowed down by having to change the axle in his trailer."

"I thought he might cut and run. Ain't nothin' for an old bachelor to do up there but work and maybe go fishing, and Tex don't fish much."

"Maybe a man with a family would stay longer. That's why I came to talk to you. I can irrigate and fix fence and whatever else you need to have

done up there. I've looked the place over. Tex told me about the ditches and fences. I have a wife and two daughters, four and two years old. We could fix the house up. I could start a garden close to the house."

"Sounds pretty good to me." ...

I thought I probably had the job, but I needed to know for sure, so I asked John, "What do you think about me going to work?"

"Well, that sounds fine to me. We pay six hundred a month. You can get moved in and then start work. How long will it take you to move?"

"We can be moved in by Wednesday."

"You might as well start work the fifteenth, then. We'll come up as soon after the fifteenth as we can and show you anything you haven't figured out by then." ...

About twenty pairs of geese congregate between me and the river. I think these geese nest close, along the river in the willows and along the sloughs the other side of the river, between the river and the old mill, but I've never seen their nests. I like to see birds and other wild animals, but I bother them as little as I can, and I'm sure searching for their nests would bother them. I ride above the top edge of their congregating area. The closest ones walk away from me. A few take to wing, fly up the meadow close to the river and drop to the ground again. ...

A coyote enjoying the open meadow sees me and flees for the timber. I stop and watch. The coyote lifts its feet high as it runs. Water runs across the ground the coyote crosses, and if it keeps its feet low, water will trip it or slow it down. Even when they're not running through water, coyotes don't run much like dogs. Dogs focus their attention on a goal and run full speed toward it without paying much attention to what else goes on around them.

The effort to wipe out coyotes hasn't abated since ex Europeans first arrived on this continent. To survive, coyotes have to be able to observe everything around them as they run, and they have to be able to change their plans immediately. A coyote can observe the trail behind it without breaking from a full-speed-to-save-my-life

gallop. A coyote can change from predator after its prey to fleeing prey in mid stride. ...

Juniper and Amanda fit into Whitney Valley as naturally as ducks on the river. The valley and the way we lived perfectly supported their physical, spiritual, and mental growth.

Wild animals and wild plants live abundantly in and around the valley. Our daughters explored as far as their interests and readiness to explore new ground led them. Laura was always available for them.

My work started from our home and stayed on the ranch. I chose my hours of work to fit the family's needs, so I was available to our daughters much of the time. Since I didn't do ranch work during the winter, I lived at home and helped with Amanda's and Juniper's education. ...

Nights turned cold. Then most days turned cold. Late in November, snow drifted down and covered the ground six inches deep. Cows bunched up by the barn and bellowed. The snow made it hard for them to get at grass, and they wanted hay. I walked down to the phone house and called John.

Rob drove the big green tractor up the river road, loaded hay onto the wagon, and we fed cattle. John showed up when we finished and took Rob back down to Unity.

The next day, Laura, Juniper, Amanda, and I ate breakfast before daylight. Laura said, "I don't think we'll attempt any school this early in the morning."

Juniper said, "No. We don't have time for classes. We have to go feed cattle."

Amanda said, "We're still learning, about cows and feeding and hay and snow, and then we read books, but it won't work to try to have classes again until they take the cattle down to Unity." She cleared dishes from the table and put them on the drainboard by the pump, wiped the table, and moved some of her papers to the table, planning to squeeze some drawing between breakfast and feeding cattle.

Laura said, "You might not have time to draw. You have to get all your warm clothing on."

"If I don't have time, I'll just get everything ready for when we finish." ...

(problems with the tractor delayed our work until I could get parts.)

Amanda stripped off her boots and snow pants, and Juniper moved her drawing from the bean bag to the table. Laura said, "Well, I guess we could have classes."

Amanda said, "It works better if we plan ahead for classes, and we didn't plan for classes this morning. I want to work on my magazine. If I don't work on my magazine, my time to work on it is gone for today, because we have to go feed whenever the tractor starts."

Juniper said, "I want to work on this illustration, and I want to write on my novel. If it gets interrupted too long, I might forget what I have in mind for the next part. I think we should just wait until we're through feeding for this year before we start classes again."

Laura said, "Okay, but once we're through feeding, we really have to hit classes hard and catch up all this time off." ...

We got some idea of how it looked from the other side one June when two young men celebrated their graduation from high school at their grandfather's cabin near our house in Whitney Valley. They came to visit us several times, and their question each time was, how do you exist up here with no t.v.? They had trouble finding enough to do.

Laura said, "Walk. You can walk on the county road or out across the meadow. I walk out there a lot. Every time I walk across the meadow, I see wildflowers I've never seen before. So many wildflowers bloom in this valley, you can't believe it unless you begin to see them yourself. You could get a book and start learning their names. Look at the wild animals. You could write. Write a letter or a story. Write an essay or a poem."

Amanda said, "Draw. Paint. You don't have to be good at it to have fun doing it. You always discover something new if you draw

or paint. Pieces of driftwood look like animals sometimes. We carved a piece of driftwood from the river just a little bit, and it really looked like a horse.”

Juniper said, “You could walk down to the river and go swimming. One day, I sat on a sandbank by the river, and a mink came up from the water and walked across the sand and looked at me up close. I sat very still. It went back to the river and disappeared underwater. Then it came out again and walked across the sand and looked at me again. It did that four times. I got to see an animal I’ve never seen before and be really close to it. We’ve seen herons and cranes, different kinds of ducks, geese and snakes and fish at the river.”

Amanda said, “Is there a difference between a fiddle and a violin? We were wondering about that yesterday. We haven’t found out the answer yet. You could find out the answer. You could learn to play a musical instrument. You could sing. You could sing together. That’s fun.”

Juniper said, “We go outside at night and watch the stars and the moon. At night, we listen to the coyotes singing. Elk whistle. Lots of times, just before it gets dark, elk come down onto the meadow, and they run and jump and play and whistle like crazy. Daddy usually calls them wapiti. Wapiti is the Indian name. You could watch them and listen to them. They’re intelligent. They have a lot of fun, and it’s fun to watch them. They have concerts in Baker sometimes. You could drive down to Baker and go to a concert.”

I said, “Use real life all around you and your own imagination to build the visions that power you through your life. Accept no substitutes. Television has no power you can take into your lives to guide you through living.”

The two young men found what we said interesting, like a view of an alien culture. Amanda and Juniper said more about what people can do in the world without television than Laura or I said, and I think that amazed the two young men, that Juniper, ten then and boyish looking, stocky, square-shouldered, brown-haired, and Amanda, eight, slim, feminine, with long golden red hair, could be so articulate, outspoken, and educated about what the world offers us. More than once, the graduates said they didn’t quite believe

what they were seeing or understand what they were hearing about a world without television. What they could see, hear, and experience in the flesh meant little to them compared to what they could receive from television. They went home earlier than they had planned, to see some of their favorite programs. ...

I worked my way up the big ditch that ran down through the edge of the timber. I dropped dead trees, cut them into firewood lengths, and piled the tops and limbs for later burning. On the high bank of the ditch, I aimed a big lodgepole straight across the ditch. I walked away as it tipped, then stopped and watched.

The brittle hinge broke too soon, and the tree turned from the path I had planned for it. It hit another dead lodgepole on the opposite bank. That tree broke at the base, fell directly away from the first tree, hit and slid down a third dead tree, which broke at the base. I watched the escalating action with a sense of wonder and walked rapidly down the ditch bank so I stood in the clear when the top of the third tree shattered violently on the ground where I had been standing.

Hoo, ha. I put my saw down, flexed my arms, did a little dance above the ditch, bowed this way and that, to the trees and whatever other wildlife might be interested. I was a man of power, falling three trees with one cut. I thought of sewing it into my suspenders, as the brave little tailor had sewn his multiple victory into his belt, "Three at one cut." Indeed, indeed. That brightened my day. Also made me aware of how careful I needed to be to stay in good shape through this dead-timber-clearing project.

I picked up my saw, walked up the ditch bank, and started reducing my trophies of the day to mundane lengths of firewood. ...

Jim said, "Bet there's a bunch of elk down there by dark tonight. Them geese down there by the creek like it real well too. They don't get bothered much back in here."

We swam again and dried off in sunshine again. Jim said, "We should have brought something to eat. My stomach's rubbin on my backbone."

"If we head out of here about now, we'd probably get some dinner at home."

We dressed and hiked up the steep, rocky trail to the pickup. We drove up the ridge to the highway just as Laura, Juniper, and Amanda drove down the highway on their way home. We followed them into the driveway. Jim carried groceries into the house while I started a hot fire in the cookstove. Laura cooked bacon for bacon, tomato, and lettuce sandwiches.

Jim, Juniper, Amanda, and I walked out the back door and picked lettuce for the sandwiches. We picked edible-pod peas and ate them. I pulled several green onions and munched them. Jim watched me and laughed. "You eat them things just like a goat."

"Sure. I've had lessons from Jewel. She's the best."

Amanda said, "Let me see what you were doing. I wasn't watching."

I picked parsley. "You just munch your way down the plant, no hands, like a goat. That's what lips are for."

We all ate vegetables like a goat and laughed in late afternoon sunshine until Laura opened the door and said, "What happened to my lettuce pickers? Everything's ready but the lettuce."

Jim said, "We been playing goats, but I think sandwiches sound like even more fun. Let's take this stuff in, quick."

Laura added cheese, popcorn, and apples, and we all feasted together. It heated up hotter than a military pistol in the house, with the cookstove going full fire, but we laughed about it, because we were hungry, eating a delicious meal, and a cool evening galloped toward us down the mountain.

...

We cut hay, but it felt good to know we'd be working for ourselves, doing something we liked a lot better than cutting hay, soon. Cutting hay on the lower end of the ranch, on the west side of the river, went smoothly. We looked back a lot, to see how far behind us the crew raked and baled hay. We didn't really want to try to be heroes and put in twelve and fourteen hours a day for twenty-five dollars a day, but we didn't want to hold back a crew of about six workers and all the machinery, and we wanted the job finished, so we put in some long days.

A long, steel shaft turns the reel that sweeps hay into the header. That steel shaft in Jim's machine ruined its support bearing, and the shaft and bearing had to come out. Jim dug into wrenches, bolts, nuts, grease, and dirt, and he worked and sweat in the hot sun. He never had decided to quit swearing, so he was handier for a lot of the mechanical work. He practiced the philosophy we were speaking and mostly putting into practice. Don't fight it. Find the fun in it.

Later, he said while he was putting the repaired shaft back into his swather, with me off in the distance cutting hay, he saw the sandhill cranes with four tall fledglings. I never have seen the young before they were fully fledged and flying around the valley.

We drove back to the house for lunch most days. Inside, the house stayed cooler. Laura put together a better lunch for us there than we could carry with us. We caught up on Amanda's and Juniper's and Laura's latest adventures and shared ours with them.

We needed to sharpen sickle bars the morning we cut the west end of the ranch this side of the river. It was my turn, so I sharpened sickle bars on the wagon in front of the barn, and Jim took the motorcycle and rode on up the meadow to the swathers and started cutting hay. When I finished sharpening, I hooked the tractor to the wagon and drove up the meadow. I put a sharp sickle bar in my machine and cut hay. When we headed home late afternoon, Jim started down with the tractor and wagon. I finished the piece I was cutting, transferred to the motorcycle, and caught up with him just as he drove into the area of longer grass among trees.

I rode up beside the wagon and saw my dog run ahead of the tractor, turn at full speed and knock down a red-tailed hawk that had just taken to wing. I yelled just before he hit the bird, and that was enough to make him pull his punch and veer away as the hawk hit the ground.

Jim and I got to the hawk at the same moment, and the dog stayed at a distance. It was a juvenile red-tailed. It spread its wings and opened its beak in threat. It tipped onto its back and extended its talons. I said, "Looks like it can't keep its balance."

"No, I think he does that to show us all his weapons at once."

"Might be hurt."

"I don't know. He won't try to fly while we're here. Taking off is when he's most vulnerable, and he knows that. You got a handkerchief? I gave him my handkerchief, and he dropped it over the hawk's head and picked the bird up. The hawk stood up straight, with a firm grip on Jim's leather-gloved hand. Jim said, "His balance is okay. I don't think he's hurt."

Jim ran his fingers lightly over the bird's wings, back, and legs. Then he removed the handkerchief and handed it back to me. The

hawk and Jim looked into each other's eyes. Jim moved the hand the hawk stood on. The hawk flexed its neck so its head stayed in the same place. Jim moved his hand in the other direction, and the hawk let its body move with Jim's hand but kept its head in as close to the same place as possible. Jim moved his hand up and down and side to side and around in circles, and always the hawk flexed so its head stayed in the same place. All through the strange-looking, dance-like motions, Jim and the hawk locked on each other's eyes.

Jim stopped all motion. He and the hawk looked at each other. Jim extended his arm full length. The hawk flew up, curved gracefully around two lodgepole trees, up the meadow and across the river, out of sight.

When we got home, we told Laura and Amanda and Juniper about the hawk. Jim told about the pet red-tailed hawk he had when he was younger. Amanda and Juniper listened to Jim intently, but they didn't express an interest in owning a hawk. ...

I watered the garden and showered in the garden with water I'd left in canners to heat in the sunshine all day. I milked the goat just before dark.

Laura usually milks, but she's behind schedule, so I fill in. This goat I milk, Jewel, is a jewel. When the guy we bought her from brought her to us, she reared and struck at him with her hooves. He pulled her down and fought her out of the truck. He didn't maintain the upper hand by much. He panted and puffed and said, "This goat doesn't like men."

That seemed true for a while after we got her. She got along well with Laura, but she reared at me and ducked her head as if she would butt me. She had no horns, but a hornless goat can deliver a powerful blow, so I stepped easy around her. I cut the twine from a bale of hay, stuffed a sheaf of hay into her feeder, and shut the feed-room door. I brought water, and I raked manure and spilled hay out of the stall where she stood to eat. She reared at me and struck with her front hooves, but she ended the striking motions almost two feet from me. I know little about goats, but enough

about beings in general to be sure that, if she intended to hit me, she wouldn't be striking air far short of me.

"Come on, Jewel. Cut it out. You know you want this good alfalfa hay and clean water, and you like things not to get too messy, so quit trying to run me out of here."

She did quit, after a few days, though it took a few weeks before we were friendly enough that I'd have to say, "Come on, Jewel. Quit leaning on me. Give me room to work to get this place cleaned up. If you don't give me some room, I'll have to put you on the chain until I'm through."

Her dislike of men, which continued even though she and I understood each other and got along well, probably came from some man's misunderstanding of how to handle an animal. Jewel was intelligent and cooperative, but she would not tolerate physical force. If we showed her what we wanted her to do, and if it was a goatly sensible thing to do, she did it. But, if anyone tried to force her to do something, tried to bend her will to theirs, they'd have about a hundred and fifty pounds of fighting mad goat on their hands, with sharp hooves and a powerful head for butting.

I never even thought of trying to overpower her. I worked with her and respected her, and that was easier on both of us. The exception came when her hooves grew too long. I reassured her all I could, and then I reached under her, caught her far legs, pulled them toward me, and pushed her down with my shoulder, while everyone else in the family eased her descent to the ground. Laura and Juniper and Amanda held her down, pet her, talked, and sang to her while I cut overgrown material from her hooves. We finished and let her up, and she reared at me every time I got close for the rest of the day. I talked gently to her and apologized that we used force with her. "If we didn't trim your hooves when they need it you wouldn't like the way it'd eventually throw you off balance and make it more and more uncomfortable when you walk. When you learn to hand me your foot and wait patiently while I trim each hoof. I'll stop forcing you to the ground. Now, if you'll let me pass, I'll get you a sheaf of really good alfalfa hay, and we'll be friends again." I didn't push her territory or try to win anything, so she settled down.

...

Late fall, Scott came down and asked if we knew where he could get thirty straight logs to finish building his house. I said, "I know where we can get some. They're scattered through live timber, though. We'd have to yard them out."

Jim said, "I got a horse can pull those logs out for us." I didn't say anything. It wouldn't be part of our wood-cutting operation. The trees were on the lower ranch, not in my contract area, so I figured Jim could make his own decision about it, and I'd work with Jim and Scott, however they decided to do it. The red tractor sat by the barn, and John would say, sure, go ahead and use it if we called and asked, but none of us mentioned it.

I carried my saw into the timber and selected straight, dead lodgepoles standing among dead and live trees, dropped them, limbed them, and cut them to length. Jim rode Terry across the meadow, brought him into the timber, and backed him into position. I hooked the choker to the singletree. Terry took the slack and put the log into motion. I had all the logs ready, so I followed them out so I could see how it went. Jim pulled the reins for a little left, and Terry went a little left. Jim said, "Hup. Make a little speed to clear that rise," and Terry humped and made a little speed. Jim said, "Slow down now easy," and put just a little tension on the reins, and Terry slowed down easy.

Whatever Jim said to do, Terry did exactly, no questions, no arguments. They snaked their way around trees, stumps, and slash piles. They brought the logs down onto the road alongside the fence, stopped, unhooked the chokers, left the logs there, and dragged chains and chokers back into the timber. I went along and choked more logs, and they did the whole thing over again. It was one of the best shows I ever did see, partly because I knew everything that led up to it, and partly because it was a beautiful process, beautiful horse and beautiful man working very well together.

Scott loaded the logs onto the trailer with the backhoe. When Terry pulled the last of the logs down onto the road, Jim and I helped Scott load them onto the trailer, and Scott pulled the trailer across the meadow behind his pickup.

The sun slipped down behind Greenhorn. Jim leaned against Terry. He said, "This is one smart horse. He wanted to gallop, but he saw all the trees and stumps and brush piles, so he figured he'd better depend on me to keep him from getting everything tangled up."

"I saw that happen. He thought his way into obedience." ...

We picked up Laura, Juniper, and Amanda one afternoon and drove up to Pogue Point lookout. No one watches the forests from that tower rising above evergreen forest on a mountaintop anymore. That method of watching for fires mostly gave way to spotter planes. We walked the catwalk around the building on the tower and looked down on Northeastern Oregon forest, sagebrush, and meadows. Sunlight went out of the air above the mountain as the sun sank beneath the farthest mountain. Cool wind blew past us on the tower. Nuthatches landed on the cables guying the tower to lichen-covered stone, with dense green moss in the most-shaded areas. Oregon juncos flew close to see what we were doing.

Juniper looked down on the world from the high tower. She said, "I don't want to go back down. I want to stay up here forever."

Amanda sat on the steps about halfway up. I sat down beside her. I said, "Are you afraid to go higher?"

"Well, I'm not afraid to go this high, but I think I would be afraid to go higher."

"I'll hold your hand and walk up with you if you want me to."

"I think I can see just about everything from here that I could see if I went all the way up."

"Yes. I think you're right about that."

We drove to Earmuff Spring one afternoon. Half an hour down a steep, rough dirt road in Jim's pickup, Laura said, "My goodness. Are we going to tip over?"

Jim said, "I never have before. But maybe we'd all better lean uphill." We did. Amanda and Juniper were small then, but five of us in the cab was tight. We didn't mind.

At the foot of the hill, forest gave way to open meadow and to sage brush. We left the pickup parked on the sagebrush flat at the end of the road and scattered out. Juniper and Amanda formed a

self-sufficient team, played games or performed a play one of them had written, or they made up and performed plays on the spot. They sought adventures far enough from adults to feel independent, but close enough to move in quickly if the adults found anything interesting.

We all gathered together again and walked through meadows and sage brush. Laura said, "In just this short distance from the pickup, I've seen six kinds of wildflowers still in bloom, this late in the year. Look at these tiny white flowers right down against the ground." Amanda and Juniper got down on their hands and knees, looked at the flowers up close, and smelled them. Jim got down on his hands and knees by Juniper and Amanda and studied the flowers. I thought, six months ago, he might have refused to do that. Even now, he probably wouldn't do that for anyone but Laura or Juniper or Amanda. ...

Last year, we drove over the mountain to Sumpter for Thanksgiving dinner, only thirteen miles, but such possible weather between. Huge flakes fell densely. At times, I almost couldn't see the edge of the road. A particularly heavy fall of large snowflakes almost completely obscured my vision, and I stopped. I said, "I think we're going to have to turn around and go back home."

Amanda said, "Huh uh. We can't do that."

Juniper said, "Everybody's going to be there. We want to see everybody."

Amanda said, "All the food, too. We don't have anything for Thanksgiving dinner at home."

Laura said, "Why would it be easier to go home than to go the rest of the way to Sumpter? We're halfway there. If we get stranded, we might as well get stranded between here and your mother's place as between here and home."

That made sense. I couldn't easily back out. I always insisted we carry survival sacks containing extra clothes, sleeping bags, food, and wood for a fire. If a blizzard stranded us, we had what we needed. I stopped, climbed out into the storm, chained the drive wheels, climbed back in, and drove on. One chain broke and

slapped against the fender. I climbed out into falling snow and repaired it.

Even insulated gloves didn't keep my hands warm enough, but I squeezed the last cross link into place, got back in, passed the pliers over for putting away in the glove box, or in this case, the pliers box, and we drove on to Sumpter. We celebrated a good Thanksgiving at Mom's place, with loud and happy family all around us.

On the way home, I became engrossed in explaining a mathematical problem to my daughters and it snowed so hard, I missed our turnoff. I said, "That railing on our left has to be the railing about three miles beyond our turn off. It's where the road slopes down to the river."

Juniper said, "Maybe you shouldn't teach math while you're driving in a snowstorm."

"Acute. You've immediately put your finger on the crux of the problem. If I can turn around and stay on the road, I'll hold silence until we're home." ...

Juniper, Amanda and I work on math. I read *Wind in the Willows* to them again, over many days. It's the third time I've read it to them, and I hope we read it together another dozen times. They've read the book themselves, but we've never given up reading aloud, and we probably won't until they're grown up and on their own.

Some days, I cross the river and ski up the meadow. I want to see how some of the other creatures in the valley are doing. Most of the birds left before the heavy snows came and the coldest weather started. Ravens stay. They eat whatever they find, carrion, voles, I don't know what all. They don't answer questions. They just fly over on their way somewhere. Sometimes I see several of them together on the snow out on the meadow. Some days, I hear their croaking comments from up in the timber.

Owls and hawks stay. This morning, a red-tailed hawk stands on a post of an old hay yard and surveys the snow covered meadow. I ski past the hay yard and halfway to the timber, and I find a small hole in the snow, tiny paw prints around it. Five feet from the hole, wing marks in the snow. End of the trail. ...

April 18. Whitney Valley has been very good for us. According to the numbers I read, our monetary income is still well below the poverty level. We don't own much. We have the pickup I bought from Guy, which is now in good shape. Laura's mother gave Laura a '73 sedan, with air conditioning and a tape deck, which has given her freedom she needed to go where she wants or needs to go even when I'm using the pickup for work. Laura, Juniper, and Amanda go to church in Baker much more than they did before they had the car. I go with them sometimes. We attend more concerts in Baker than we did before we had dependable transportation.

Monetary poverty means little. I think of Jim touching his forehead and saying, "My treasure's in here." Yes. And I would touch my chest and add, "and in here." We have had rich experience with the earth, with wildlife, with a closely-knit, deeply-supportive family. Infinite material wealth can't buy the wealth of meaning and the sense of positive fulfillment that comes from our experiences.

Amanda's and Juniper's education has gone well. They know far more than I did at their age. They know far more than most people I know did at their age. The desire to keep learning consumes them. They're happy, with a cohesive, sensible view of the world. They're both very creative. I admire their ability to apply critical thought to everything they encounter, their ability to think through their relationship to the world around them and make sense of it. ...

When I found out we were staying, I asked John if it would be worth a raise if I stayed. He said, "Sure, but I can't give you very much. How much would you need?"

"Fifty dollars a month."

"That would be fine."

"I use my pickup quite a bit for ranch work. Fifty dollars a month rent on that."

"That would be fine, too."

I did it wrong; I saw that the instant it was too late to matter. But that is what I said, and that is what he said.

I should have said, "Two hundred a month raise in salary and a hundred and fifty a month for the truck." Then, if he wanted to talk

me down, he could work at that, and I wouldn't have had to wonder what he would have come through with if I'd really pushed. He knew I was a valuable part of his cattle business, and I shouldn't have been so easy about pricing myself. But I had other things in mind. Like, when the time was right, saying, "I want to add a room. The materials won't cost much, but I want you to pay for them." I wanted him to feel like there was still some slack to take up.

I told John, "When we cut hay, I can't put in ten and twelve hour days anymore. We'll have to get a relief driver up here so I can have three or four hours off through the middle of the day, and then I'll drive late."

He said, "That'd be fine."

I knew I'd have to remind him when we started cutting hay. He wouldn't push a man to work more hours than he'd agreed to work, but if a relief driver didn't show up and a man drove long hours because he wanted to keep from slowing down the baling crew, he wouldn't object to that.

That winter was a very good winter for us in Whitney Valley. Every winter had been a good winter, but realization of what existence might be like in busier, more commercial, more densely-populated areas had heightened our appreciation of where and how we lived.

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