

Hard Times in Paradise

September 16, 1970.

Someone speaks to me as if from deep in my dreams. "You mustn't pull these. You have to leave them alone." My vision is bloody. I see a dark shape moving against dim light.

"What? Leave alone what?"

"The I.V. needles. You've pulled them out. Don't touch them anymore. No, don't try to sit up. Don't move your legs. Lie still."

How can I lie still if I don't know I'm moving, if I don't know anything, but suddenly I'm here? I don't even know where here is. I try to think. I try not to move. I try to understand what is happening.

I rode a motorcycle across the Oregon desert in sunshine. Sage brush and sparse grass grew both sides of the highway. Wind that smelled like brackish alkali in water, like sagebrush, like dry sand curved over the black faring, the windshield, and around my face and my goggles and helmet.

A coyote loped beside Lake Abert, crossed the twisting, patched, asphalt highway ahead of me and galloped through scattered boulders that long ago fell from rock bluffs above the lake. I slowed the motorcycle, stopped, dropped my left foot to pavement, balanced the machine, watched the grey and white, russet and brown animal scramble up steep slope between large boulders, over the top of the bluff, out of sight into sunshine.

I released the clutch and accelerated. Engine rumble echoed from rock and brush on the ridge rising to my left. I shifted up through the gears, left Lake Abert behind, rode through southeastern Oregon, geared down and rumbled through small towns, accelerated again on the open highway.

On Highway 299, down the Sierras, I slowed for traffic. Three kids looked at me through the rear window of a smoking Chevy station wagon. The tow-headed ten year-old gave me a peace sign. I "v"ed fingers of my left hand in the air for him, dropped my hand back to the grip, and passed the dirty grey car.

"We've put an air cast on your leg. Don't move. We'll come back in the morning and operate." My consciousness began to sort itself into sensible sequence and then abandoned me again.

My mother came into the room and left again. Andrea came into the room with her father. I said, "What you looking at,

George?"

"This air cast they put on your leg."

"You got your camera, George?"

"Out in my rig."

"Take my picture."

"Now? You're a mess. They haven't even cleaned you up."

"Take it anyway. I want to see it later, when I'm back on my feet. You got color film?"

"Sure." He walked out and got his camera.

I spoke to Andrea, "Let's get married." I had planned to ride into the yard, put the motorcycle on its stand, walk to the cabin by the lake, where Andrea waited for me, radiantly beautiful in autumn sunshine. I would say, "Let's get married."

Andrea looked frightened. The doctors didn't know if I'd live.

I looked up at her, clean brown hair around her face, around her shoulders. I said, "I meant that as a joke. It's enormously funny how little our plans and intentions mean. I'm sorry. I shouldn't make jokes like that. That's the same kind of humor as that cartoon, two guys standing on the world, atomic bombs going off all around them, so the end of everything is seconds away, and one turns to the other and says, 'This remind me of a joke I'm sure you haven't heard.'"

I slammed into the car the man turned in front of me, smashed my leg between the motorcycle and the front bumper, flew over the car, shattered my helmet, fractured my skull, tore my insides, and skidded on my face on asphalt.

I screamed in pain and fury. I cursed the fool who drank and drove, who didn't see me until after he smashed his car into me. I cursed pain and injury. I cursed blind chance that destroyed my hopes and plans. I passed in and out of consciousness. Hot sunshine soaked into bloody, hot asphalt. I dropped into unconscious blankness.

Flashing emergency lights on the ambulance reflected from mountain stone. Siren echoed from steep bluffs and assaulted the river flowing toward the valley as we navigated down the curving highway toward Redding.

Deep in my greyness, the force of life found me and connected me to joy of existence and gratitude for life. I started a long journey back from darkness. Life flowed strongly. Pain surged through me, but color returned. Anger dissolved, irrelevant, producing nothing good.

Doctors waited for my mother to sign papers so they could amputate my leg at the knee. When she got there, she said, "You're not cutting his leg off."

"His leg will get infected, and we'll have to amputate it to

save his life.”

“Is it infected now?” she asked.

“No. There hasn’t been time for infection to set in.”

“Then wait.” The orthopedic surgeon started to say more, and she said, “Stop standing here talking about it. Go in there and save his leg. You’re wasting time and energy.”

I had grown long hair and a full beard. Asphalt abraded my face. Maybe they thought I was younger. Maybe they don’t take signatures from people who don’t know what’s going on. I would have signed whatever they asked me to, without knowing what I signed.

I lived in the hospital for thirty-one days.

Andrea took me back to the cabin by the lake. The cabin inhabits a schizophrenic landscape. Beautiful water in the lake supports myriad forms of life, but it is a man-dammed creek. The reservoir supplies water to the town of Paradise, California.

The surface of the water falls lower between ridges through summer. Barren clay emerges, short-cut stumps, and drowned brush. Around the reservoir, second-growth timber grows toward mountain sky, logged fifty years ago. Workers thinned new trees five years ago. The marks of logging still lie heavily on the land; logging roads, stumps. Slash from thinning jumbles ways of walking. Exposed soil smells like clay in sunshine. Stumps are all that’s left of old, large trees.

Before the wreck, Andrea drove down the mountain to college classes in the Sacramento Valley. I stayed at the cabin by the reservoir. Sometimes, the split in the area bothered me, natural in the sense of supporting wildlife, but every inch overlain by man’s interference. Behind the east ridge, sometimes I felt trapped in the late-starting day, in dense timber and brush.

I hiked up a mile of dirt road to the highway. I hitched a ride into sunshine, into companionship, found Andrea at the college or found other friends in the valley. I hitched a ride back up the mountain, split wood, carried water from a small spring on the ridge above the lake, walked the mountain, took care of two dogs and Simon, my siamese tom cat.

Divorce, three years earlier, precipitated new perspectives. I was no longer willing to approach my life without deep consideration of how I affected the world, of how I affected my future. I was working out definitions, trying to find words for changes that came to me, beginning to understand words never define all of existence.

What is deep consideration? What do I know about humankind, about the earth, about myself, about all of life that can guide me into balanced existence? I learned a broader

definition of love, slowly. I began to overcome my resistance to learning anything radically different from what I had known.

I traded work for rent on the cabin by the reservoir. I cleaned up the effects of vandalism, put in windows and doors, put in a wood-burning cookstove, and fixed the roof. I worked for people who lived along the ridge east of the reservoir, mowed lawns, pulled weeds, put in new windows, carpentered, plumbed. I could work some jobs without damaging the world.

I rode Andrea's motorcycle to northeastern Oregon. I found a job and a place to live and started back, with visions of marriage dancing like sugar plums in my head.

I returned to the cabin in a cast from my hip to the toes of my left foot. Andrea carried water, cooked, and took care of me and the cabin. When she drove down the mountain for classes, she left me food and water. She arranged the cabin so I could take care of my own needs. I practiced getting around on crutches. Mountain leaves turned a hundred colors, tore loose in autumn wind, fell to the ground and began to become soil.

Sun rises late on the cabin, west of the ridge, sheltered in pine trees, oak trees, madrone, dogwood, manzanita brush, fir trees. Smell of pine trees, of life, permeates the air. Fall rains soak the earth. Between rain storms, sun shines into warm days, holding winter away, this week, next week, another week after that.

I sit on the back deck, my casted leg propped on a chair. I play my guitar, sing, and whistle. Six ducks paddle across the lake and dabble for food thirty feet down the slope from me in close water. They discuss their food and my music. Sun shines between conifers and bathes me in light and warmth.

My dogs barked. I heard a vehicle and crutched through the cabin and down the front steps. Dad drove into the parking area in front of the cabin in his new blue van, rigged for easy riding and easy living. I hadn't seen him for more than two years. I swung up beside the van on my crutches as he got out. I held one crutch under my upper arm and reached, and we shook hands.

He looked the place over, trees, brush dense in second and third growth timber, grass, and wildflowers. Water has fallen low in the reservoir and shows muddy shore below the cabin. He said, "Nice place."

"Yeah, it is." I didn't say I was looking for a place with a few conveniences.

He said, "Everybody's getting together for a picnic down Butte Creek Canyon in a couple of hours. They told me to come and get you."

We stopped at the store, and Dad bought potato chips, beer,

and soda pop. We didn't say much. Dad drove down the highway, turned right, and drove down the dusty dirt and rock road to Butte Creek. Sun shone hot. Butte Creek ran clean and cold and full. Big trees, madrone, live oak, black oak, fir trees, pine trees, cast shade for anyone who wanted shade.

Mom brought a basket of tomatoes from her garden. She lived out on Nimsheew Ridge by herself, except sometimes my youngest sister moved back in for a while, between adventures, when she's figuring out what's next, or some of the older ones of us landed there for a while, between jobs, between houses, between marriages.

People throw a purple and silver frisbee past trees of green leaves and dark trunks, sunlight to shadow to sunlight. I can't do much with the frisbee from a sitting position. I find a firmer-than-most tomato in the basket, and I toss that to Gerrit, and he tosses it around the circle. David changes it from Let's see how long the tomato can last to Let's see what happens if we throw it really hard, and it doesn't last long but splatters to juice and flying pulp and seeds.

David walks through bright sunshine, through dense oak shadow, to the picnic table where Mom and I sit and watch the game and clean water running past the game. I grab the basket and say, "She didn't raise these for destructive games. They're to eat."

He says, "You're the guy who started it."

"I started a game of catch. I didn't start this destroy-the-tomatoes game you've turned it into." I hang onto the basket and face his wild, pasted-on grin.

One time, Cheryl said, "David is the white sheep of the family." Everyone else in this family harbors something disreputable, something out of the mainstream. Gerrit paints disturbing, surreal images and doesn't sell many paintings because he won't invest much time and energy in selling. I write, and I don't sell much of what I write. Cheryl drives trucks, cuts firewood, works in mills. We hate jobs and would drop out of the economic system if we could.

David, a parole officer, tries by vicious criticism to push us into the roles he knows we should fill, bankers, lawyers, investment brokers, real estate salesmen, responsible members of the culture. He divorced twice and married a woman who takes his constant criticism with a faint smile, perhaps of fear.

I want to smear a ripe tomato across this guy's face for sticking his face right into my face with his crazy grin, but my severely injured leg, susceptible to further injury, is no guarantee against violence, could add to the temptation for him to launch into violence, since it is the first time he would be

assured of victory, so I just hold onto the basket, hands over the top, until he decides the prize isn't worth a contest and turns back to the flying frisbee, tomato-stained and laughing.

Everyone swims; almost everyone swims. I don't. The cast would soften and dissolve. Mom doesn't swim. She never did learn how to swim. We sit on the bench, and she asks me, "How you doing, son?"

"Fine."

We could talk about many things, but we don't start. We talked it over when I was a teenager, living at home. The old man left over and over again. Their marriage was mostly one long break-up, punctuated by enough close moments to generate new children. Mom needed someone to talk to about the chaos her life felt like.

I knew I didn't have enough experience to be an effective counselor, but she talked to me, and I tried to commiserate until she found some kind of stability, moments free of emotional pain, hope for a more rewarding future. I felt frustrated by my lack of power to bring about change in her life, our lives.

I never did call him "my old man." I called him "Dad," and Mom referred to him as "your father" or "your dad," or "that goddamned, dirty son of a bitch" when she found out that, while he said he'd left to take a better job, another woman's bed was again one benefit of being away from home.

Mom asks me, "You tired, son?"

"Yeah. I guess I am."

She calls the old man over and says, "He's tired. You'd better take him home."

He drove the van over, and I climbed in. We rode up the rough road, up the highway on the ridge, off on the long dirt driveway. A coyote, sleek and grey, with white and brown in its bushy coat, trotted out of the brush, onto the dirt road, stopped, and watched us approach.

The old man accelerated and tried to run over the animal with his new, blue van. The coyote disappeared into the brush beside the road. The old man said, "Damn. The one time I don't have a rifle with me, I get a shot like that."

When I got out of the van, back at the cabin, he asked me, "Do you need help getting up those stairs?"

"I've been doing it for a while by myself. I'll manage."

We have a custom, from way back, as soon as each of us left home. We wouldn't see the old man for many months, maybe more than a year, and he'd show up for a visit. When he was ready to leave, he'd reach for his wallet, and he'd give a twenty-dollar bill to whomever of his children he was visiting. This time, when he reached for his wallet, I thought, I could

break tradition and tell him I don't want it; put it back in your wallet. It was a brief idea, because I was down to no money. When it cleared his wallet, it was a hundred-dollar bill. He held it out to me. I took it and said, "Thanks Dad. The way things are right now, I can use that."

He climbed into his van and started on his way. I just said, "Next time," and he drove up the red clay road, out of sight. Then I didn't hear the motor anymore.

Quiet down along the edge of the lake, just blue sky, tall trees, birds, and autumn sun. Across the lake, several ducks, dabbled for their food and gossiped happily.

Late the next afternoon, Chip brought a new, single-shot .22 rifle to me in sunshine on the deck behind the cabin. Chip, 19, ex-Jersey City boy, up toward the wilds now, had been my sister's boyfriend, so I knew him before Andrea and I got the use of the cabin by the reservoir. He handed me the rifle and said, "Teach me how to shoot this thing, and I'll kill a deer so we can have some meat."

"Today? Do all that today?"

"Yeah, sure. If you want to."

I decided not to give him basic instruction in reality. Let him learn from trying. "Okay. You got bullets?"

"Sure. Wouldn't do much good to have a rifle without bullets, would it?"

I pulled my crutches to me and stood. "We need some paper and stuff from in here. You can carry all this stuff."

We crossed the flat area in front of the cabin into pine trees, fir trees, low brush. "First thing to learn is, never aim the rifle at anything unless you want to kill what you're aiming at. Not even if it's unloaded. You got that?"

"Yup. I got it. We gonna kill these pieces of paper?"

"Yes. We are. Draw a black spot about this big in the center of one and tack it to that log. The log stops the bullets. If we shoot high, the cut bank'll stop the bullets. Always shoot like that. If you miss what you're aiming at, the bullet goes somewhere. Don't leave it flying wild."

I shot three times and adjusted the sights three times. I put the fourth shot into the center of the black spot. I showed Chip how to line the sights up and how to bring the trigger back smoothly. The last three shots of six, he hit the center spot.

"Okay. Now you can hit what you're aiming at. Don't do anything stupid. Once you pull the trigger, you can't take it back, so be sure before you pull the trigger. Now what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to go kill a deer."

"Before dark?"

“Sure.”

He had an hour and a half before dark. A .22 is a small, low velocity bullet. Fifty feet or less is the right range to kill a deer with a .22. Few people can get within fifty feet of a deer if they have a month to work on it. Chip had a lot to learn and a lifetime to learn it, so I crutched back to the cabin and picked up my book. Chip hiked up the ridge into the forest.

About an hour later, he ran up the stairs onto the deck. “I got one. Come on. You got to show me what to do.”

I grabbed my crutches and got up onto them. “Where?”

“Up by the road.”

“By the highway?”

“Yeah. Just this side of the highway.”

“Did you bleed it?”

“No. I don’t know what to do. That’s why I came back to get you. I don’t know what to do with it.”

We went through the cabin. I picked up my knife, and we went out the front door and up the road. The red-clay dirt road curved up the ridge from the cabin by the lake, then lay level along the shoulder of the ridge through trees and dense manzanita brush. I got a rhythm going on my crutches. I didn’t know I could move that fast on crutches.

Chip trotted beside me. Fifty yards short of the highway, Chip said, “Down here.”

A doe lay dead under the limbs of a manzanita bush. I set my crutches aside, sat down in clumps of grass growing from red clay soil, slipped my knife from its case, and cut her throat. “Pull her hindquarters up into the bush, so she slopes down.”

She bled. Her blood steamed into the day and spread its smell into sunshine and low brush. When her blood stopped, I pulled her down onto the ground. Her udder was full. I didn’t say anything about it. Her fawns would be mature enough by now, maybe they’d make it.

“Watch. Slit the hide all the way up. Then pull it aside, like this. Then cut this. Keep the knife shallow. If you cut too deep, you’ll cut the intestine, and things will get messy. Here. Cut the rest of the way up. Put your fingers under and lift up, like this, with the blade between your fingers.”

I stood up, leaned on my crutches, and watched Chip work. He asked, “How far up do I cut?”

“Keep going.”

“There’s bone here.”

“Slide the knife above the bone. Cut the hide all the way up the neck.”

“Now what?”

“Tip her this way. Reach in behind the intestines and pull

'em out."

I sat down again, placed my casted leg awkwardly across the dusty ground, and worked with him. "Pull this out. This is the liver. Strip all this stuff out, but don't pull too hard. Don't tear it. Follow this down with your fingers and get between that and the bone. The bone will cut through, right here." Smells of partially-digested grass rose into the day.

"Now what?"

"Figure it out. Look at it. We don't want all this. We do want this. Separate them."

"Cut around here?"

"Must be."

"Okay. That works. Do we take the liver?"

"And the heart. Show me your knowledge of anatomy. That's right. That's it. Cut the veins going in. Tuck the heart and liver in here. Cut here. Both hind legs. Now push the front feet through. Onto your shoulders, and hang onto the legs in front of you. You're going to have blood running down your back."

"No way to help it, is there?"

"I never did figure out any way, other than hanging the carcass overnight and letting everything drain and dry, but we're too close to the road for that."

"Can you carry anything?"

"I can carry the knife and my crutches. If anybody turns down this road, dive for the brush. I'll keep going and act innocent. If anybody asks me about blood all over me, I'll tell them I never did get cleaned up after the wreck."

"You could tell them you murdered somebody. 'No, no, I wouldn't poach a deer, just murdered a friend or two. Don't try to pin anything on me.'"

It never took so long to cut up a deer. By ten o'clock, I was exhausted. "You're going to have to finish it, Chip. Just cut cross-grain on the muscles. We're going to have to get most of this into a freezer."

"Paul said I could use his if I got a deer. I'll give him some of the meat. Where do we get money to buy freezer paper?"

I handed him the hundred dollar bill.

"Jesus, man, don't you have anything smaller?"

"That's all I have, period."

Chip hiked out. Paul picked him up at the payphone and took him to town to buy freezer paper, then brought him back. Paul helped wrap the meat. By then, I had some energy back, and I helped wrap. They loaded the meat and took it to Paul's freezer.

I have change from a hundred dollar bill and a major part of my food for a while.

I lie in bed in the dark cabin. Coyotes sing. They're cleaning up what we left of the deer. They might be thanking us. I sleep.

Andrea rented a small, modern house just off the Skyway, in the highest part of Paradise. I wouldn't have lived there in a million years, before, but I was grateful to have it, the way things were.

The guy who hit me had no insurance, no property, no job, no money. The uninsured motorist's policy Andrea had on the motorcycle paid \$15,000. Medical bills ate \$5,000. I offered Andrea \$4,000 to stay and help me until I could take care of myself. She drove to classes down in the Valley. She stayed with me some nights. She wanted to go to Europe.

Rain poured from the winter sky and hammered the metal roof. I liked the muted drumming sound that filled the house and kept most of the world at a distance, beyond hearing. I crutched around and around and around the living room. I exercised all I could in the house, in the cast. I wasn't going to get any weaker from forced inaction than I could help.

I played my guitar and sang and whistled and wrote songs and wrote essays and poems and short stories. Andrea was there part of the time and took some of the loneliness out of winter. I got close to saying, "I love you. I need you. Stay with me." I only said, "I love you." I still didn't know enough about love.

Sun shone on the western foothills of the Sierras. I swung on my crutches out to the highway and put my thumb in the air. Two young men in a blue Dodge four-door sedan sitting high in back, with rumbling dual exhausts, pulled over close to me. I climbed in the back seat, pulled my casted leg and crutches in, then couldn't reach the door to shut it. Tousle-haired, brown-haired young man on the passenger's side in front reached back and shut the door.

Below town, the speedometer climbed, 60, 65, 70, 75. "Hey man," I said, "Sorry to cause you a problem, but you got to let me out. I was just in a wreck, and I can't handle going this fast."

The driver came off the gas pedal. Dual exhausts popped and roared under compression. "No problem," he said. He let the car slow until the speedometer said 40. He held it steady there. "How's this? You okay now?"

"Yeah. I am. I'm just fine. Thank you."

"No problem, friend. We aren't in any hurry."

A slow ride down the mountain. Quiet conversation, separated by long silences. They let me out downtown Chico, and I crutched from there and saw several people I wanted to see.

I tired easily. I started back up the mountain early afternoon, caught a ride in a 55 pink and white Cadillac, Sam

Alfaro, still freshly ex Los Angeles Latino, rare in all-white Paradise, and his wife, Linda, who became my friends.

We stopped at Daybreak and walked by recycling bins in the graveled parking area. I said, "There has to be another solution. Recycling is a direction to go, but they also make weapons from some of this metal. This is still part of the industrial culture."

Sam said, "Hey man, what these people are doing here is good."

"Maybe you're right, Sam. Maybe I've drifted too far outside and expect too much from the world all at once."

We walked inside, sat down, and drank tea. Daybreak had been a restaurant, but now served only tea, coffee and pastry, run by people trying to form a group to work on environmental problems.

I got around okay. I was handy on the crutches. I built strength and stamina. I bought a tight-fitting pair of leather gloves to help me with my crutches, then a case of gloves when the first pair wore out. I was restless to be back on my own feet. I kept moving.

The doctor cut the last cast from my leg. "I'd feel better if you'd wear a brace for a few months. Your leg is susceptible to further injury."

"I'll trust myself."

"It's up to you, sport, but very little weight on that leg for the next eight weeks."

"Okay. Thanks Doc."

I hitched a ride down Skyway to Daybreak and sat inside. Andrea spent more of her time in the valley. I watched rain fall from the dark sky and soak into the earth. I watched traffic on the Skyway. I watched people.

Young people spent part of their days at Daybreak. Besides the official, ecological organization, Daybreak became a place for part of the local counter-culture. Some of the people smoked marijuana out behind the building. People fell in love and out of love. People tried to work out the directions of their existence by talking to each other, by talking to me. I came to evening meetings and listened to all sorts of people, counter culture, business people, young people and older people talk about the environment, about attempts to get recycling going, about efforts to help our local environment.

The people meeting at Daybreak couldn't focus their discussions. The amorphous, groping lack of direction frustrated me. I couldn't stand to listen to it. I interrupted. "What are we talking about? Where is our discussion leading us, or where are we leading it? Can we do something

constructive with the people, the force we've gathered together here? Exactly what? Define what you're talking about, and define where we want to go, and then go there." I forced focus on the people. They recognized the power structure and focus gave us, and they accepted my guidance during meetings.

Because I had assumed the position of leader and mediator of the group, the people elected me president of Daybreak. Chip voted against. I said, "Yay, Chip. The only one on my side."

Most of the people had little sense of what needed to be done. Mike wanted to drive a two-ton truck 20 miles to the dump and sort out five dollars worth of aluminum. Bob wanted to run smoking cars off the road and force the drivers to fix them or abandon them. Rick took a big tractor in and plowed our community garden area, dug a trench for compost with a backhoe.

I talked about wheel-blindedness.

"We put everything in terms of what machine should we use to do this job? We need to clear our vision and ask first, is the job even essential? Do we bring about improvements in the human condition by doing the job? If the job is essential, then what is a sensible way to achieve the goal we want to achieve? without machinery if possible. Machinery doesn't necessarily save us work. It might cause extra work. We might work to support machinery rather than to support human needs.

"Limit use of mechanical energy, because mechanical energy uses non-replaceable fuels and creates pollution. Make doing the job without machinery part of the job, part of the goal. Subjugate everything to that goal. Educate the culture to use that goal as the first frame of reference."

Most of the people will take a long time to understand. Maybe there isn't that much time. Maybe it doesn't matter how time there is.

On my way home from Oregon on Andrea's motorcycle, to talk to Andrea, I had started back into the culture. I would say, "I have a good job lined up. Let's get married." After the wreck, I had nothing to offer her. I read in her eyes that my being smashed up drove her away from me and closed possibilities. A long time later, I wondered, did I read that in her eyes or did I take it from what became my perspective?

Mike borrowed his mother's new Cadillac, picked me up at the house, and took me to meetings. Before the meetings, we drove out into the country on gravel roads, going nowhere, just getting away from town for a while. Mike was a serious alcoholic, but when he drove me around, he stayed sober. "Part of the job," he said, "and I can manage that for part of the day."

"I'll die in a car wreck," Mike said, "drunk." Eventually,

Mike went back into the navy, because in the navy, he said, "You can be a serious alcoholic and survive." Eventually, Mike died in a car wreck, drunk.

Mike drove up Skyway. I pushed the button. The window slid down. Air poured in. Chip stood in the Daybreak parking lot with a few people, soaking up late winter sun. Chip raised a clenched fist in greeting. I gave him the clenched fist, then the peace sign, then the clenched fist, peace sign again, then quit. I wanted to say power. White power, black power, yellow power, red power, brown, any color it comes, power to the people, but I wanted to say power by peaceful means.

Chip, Daybreak, people fell away behind the dark brown and white Cadillac rumbling up the highway through Paradise.

Catkins burst out on willow bushes, and the earliest flowers bloomed.

Money from the insurance company dwindled. I was going to be broke long before I was able to work to make money. I hitched a ride up Skyway to Alex's place and bought two pounds of marijuana from him. I stuffed it into my backpack and hitched back to the house.

Late that afternoon, Chip came by. I asked him. "You want to go partners, help me sell this?"

He reached into the sack and selected a stem with dried leaves and dried flowers. I gave him papers. He crumbled the leaves and flowers onto my open notebook, where I had written most of a poem about the loneliness of late winter on the mountain. He scooped crumbled marijuana into a gummed paper, rolled it, licked the glued part, lit a match and dried the wet seam of the joint, then lit the joint. We sat across my desk from each other and passed the joint back and forth. The penetrating smell of marijuana smoke filled the small house.

Dusk settled on the mountain. Chip became a dark outline in the darkness of the room. His voice echoed to me from deep hollowness. "Yeah, I can sell some of that."

I remembered where we were. I said, "Don't sell to anyone you're not absolutely sure of. We don't need a lot of money out of this, just enough to live on. We do need to stay out of jail."

He sold more than half of what we bagged up by taking it out and around. I sold the rest to people who came by.

The illegality of dealing didn't bother us. The nation went to war illegally and immorally, against the laws of our constitution against the morality of life, and killed thousands of Vietnamese, killed thousands of our own people, wounded thousands more, spent billions on war, but had nothing to help a man injured in a wreck and without resources, little for men disabled in the war. We helped ourselves as we could and drifted further from the

mainstream culture.

It was popular to say, "If we could get everyone to turn on, the world would come to peace."

I said, "Do you know where the word 'assassin' comes from?" The people around me stared at me, waiting. I didn't want to become another dream killer in a long line of dream killers. I let what I had been going to say die out of the conversation, and we drifted to other subjects.

Deputy sheriffs came around to Daybreak, looking to bust dope smokers, trying to understand who we were and what we were doing.

I went to the sheriff's office and talked to the sheriff. "Some of the teenage girls say Bernie pulls them over and feels their breasts."

The sheriff called Bernie into his office. He said, "Now you look at Bernie. Does he look like the kind of man who would do something like that?"

Dusk of the next day, I waited until Bernie got out of his four-wheel-drive rig in the gravel Daybreak parking lot. I stopped him. I said, "Anything more out of line from you around any of the girls, around any of us, and you die a violent death. If I suffer any consequences for telling you this, you die a violent death right away. You can do your job according to the law. Nothing else. No feels, no harassment. If you think you've got the only guns, think again. We have plenty, and we own them legally."

Alex, Chip, and two Pauls stood at the edge of the parking lot, under winter-bare trees. Bernie saw them watching. We wanted peace, but if necessary, we were ready for war. Bernie understood that. If we went to war, the sheriff's department would get endless reinforcements. The forces of law would win the war, but by the time all of us who stood together were locked up or killed, Bernie would be dead, buried deep, with the last memorial services long past. Bernie understood that.

Chip and I bought two or three or four pounds of marijuana at a time, split it into small bags, and sold it. Our volume never climbed very high. Neither did our needs. I added back to what was left of the insurance money. I wanted enough money to buy a piece of land, to have a place to support me.

Winter rain eased. The sun climbed from low in the southern sky toward spring.

I told Chip, "Dealing's gone out of balance. Too many people I don't know knock on my door, looking to buy some weed. Tuesday morning at three a.m., two guys I've never seen before hammered on the door until I got up and opened it. They wanted to buy some smoke, and they got pushed out of shape

when I wouldn't sell them anything. I wouldn't live very long in prison."

Spring sunshine warmed the foothills of the Sierras. I suggested the people at Daybreak elect Ron president and leave me free to follow my own dreams, and they did. Maybe they'd hold onto enough adherence to achieve goals the people in the group wanted to achieve.

Chip and I borrowed a car and drove north, looking for land. I thought the American dream, independence, self sufficiency, rugged individualism, land, and a good and creative existence for all was dying then, in 1971, strangled by greed and lack of human compassion.

Chip and I looked at forty acres of forest, meadows, steep north slope, granite bluffs, in mountain forest high above the John Day Valley in eastern Oregon. We woke to heavy frost on our sleeping bags. I slipped out of my sleeping bag, pulled my socks, boots, and jacket on, wrapped a scarf around my neck, and built a fire. Flame ate into wood and danced hot in cold air. Chip joined me by the fire. He held his hands close to the flames. "Cold, man. Seeped clear into my sleeping bag."

Fire warmed our hands. The sun rose above the mountains and sent bright light and warmth dancing through frost on the ground and through the forest around us. Chip said, "Coming north, we seen spring start twice. If we stay up in this north slope, we'll see it again."

Multiple springs. Multiple dreams. We hiked the forty acres. A few places, I let Chip hike the roughest way and found an easier way for a man still swinging between crutches.

Chip asked me, "How do you get water from the spring up to the saddle without electricity or a gas engine?"

"There are ways. Wind. A pump that uses the power of falling water to pump part of the water uphill. There are ways. It would take some research. And some thinking."

"Probably cost money."

"Probably. A guy could pack water up the hill on his back."

We stood on the south-facing saddle. I said, "I'll build a house here. This saddle rises far enough above north slope to catch winter sun. This boulder, just like it is, becomes most of the east wall, fill in there and there with smaller stone, a window here, maybe a small window up here. We're standing in the house, main room, natural floor, this dirt and rock we're standing on, probably not even rearranged except by traffic, and that boulder becomes a couch. That boulder, part of the south wall right where it is. A door at the top corner, so I can walk out onto the boulder, stand in morning sun, or in winter, stand six feet above the surface of snow drifted six feet deep. I'll build a

greenhouse there, north and west walls, those boulders. Planters of stone all the way up here, against the stone wall. Might get some greens even in deep winter.”

I told the real estate agent I wanted to buy the forty acres. I took Chip back to California, and I shaped my material possessions toward camping on the mountain until I was ready to build.

Andrea helped me move to the mountain. I took my dogs and my cat in the car, and she brought her dad's pickup with what I couldn't haul.

On the mountain, we unloaded my gear. We slid under the fence between national forest and private property and climbed the bluff that truncated the south-facing saddle and looked down on miles of Eastern Oregon landscape.

Andrea walked down the slope through pine trees, climbed into the white pickup, and drove down the mountain toward Europe. I let the dogs out of the car. Simon stayed under the front seat. The dogs and I walked to the top of the bluff.

I stood on grey and black stone thrusting up from the mountain, and watched the white pickup far below me raise dust to the paved road, where it left dust behind and disappeared behind trees along the highway.

I looked over the forest at the John Day Valley for a long time. I tried to float above the sudden emptiness of Andrea's departure. I studied miles of northeastern Oregon's forest and meadows and mountains and tried to find order and peace. Before dusk, I walked down from the bluff and prepared for the night.

In the morning, I carried everything up to the saddle, a pack load at a time.

Rock surrounded me, and thickets of mountain mahogany, widely-spaced juniper trees, and pine trees. Dry smell of Oregon desert's life and dust blew pleasantly into my nostrils. West, the black stone of the Strawberry Mountains rose high above the valley. North, dry-grass hills rose from the valley floor. I explored the mountain close to camp.

Cool air of dusk carried the smell of pine trees and juniper trees and granite and the damp smell of willow bush from the swale below camp. I sat on the bluff. Night enveloped the world. Coyotes sang down the mountain. The waning moon rose. I walked down to camp and crawled into my sleeping bag and watched stars and the moon and the black sky, and then I slept.

Every day, I hiked up the mountain above camp. The first time I hiked without cane or crutches, I walked too far. Pain penetrated the bones in my leg. I held my leg and rocked back

and forth in sunshine. I crawled back to camp, laughing at what a ridiculous figure I was, crying in pain and frustration.

Coyotes sang. I woke. Brilliant stars shone in the cold sky. I nearly screamed from pain when I moved my leg. I wanted medication for pain. I wanted to give up the stupid idea of learning to walk again.

But I made it through that night of pain, and I stayed on the mountain. I had to use crutches again, but I put all the weight I could bear on my left leg.

Three days later, I left the crutches leaning against a pine tree.

Two days after that, I walked up the mountain a ways without the cane.

Hard rain blew down the mountain, and I slept under the tarp I stretched over a rope tied between two trees. My dogs crowded in and curled up both sides of my legs. When I woke, my cat slept curled up close to my face. The sun rose above the mountain, into the cool, clean morning.

I crossed the fence below the saddle into Forest Service rangeland and filled burlap sacks with dry cow manure, tied the sacks onto my pack frame, packed them up to the saddle, and dug the manure into the soil.

I dug the spring out and fenced out cattle. I filled two six-gallon plastic jugs from the spring every morning and packed them on my back, one at a time, up to the garden and left them sitting in sunshine. Late afternoon, I bathed in warm water and let run off water the garden.

Radishes, lettuce, kohlrabi, spinach, and carrots sprouted. The big siamese tom carried a ground-squirrel down over the rocks into camp and ate most of it near the lower end of the tent.

Friends came to visit. In Engles Creek in the canyon west of camp, we lifted rocks from the streambed and built a dam. The water rose, and we swam. Gerrit stood in the shade of a big pine tree, with nothing on but a wide-brimmed cowboy hat, smoking a big cigar.

Visitors left.

I sat on the bluff above camp at dusk. Night hawks flew, dove and swerved above the mountain, swooped into hollow, booming sounds of wings against air, and ate insects as they flew.

In the morning, I walked below the bluff and found a nest with eggs, just a scraped-out spot in gravel. The night hawk's speckled eggs blended so well with the ground around them, I couldn't find them again.

I dreamed Andrea walked up the trail toward me, smiling

her broad, radiant smile. She drove into camp and called my name. She stepped down from the pickup and ran toward me.

I woke as sunlight touched black stone of the Strawberry Mountains. Frost covered my sleeping bag. I got up and dressed and hiked into open sun and kept moving until warmth soaked into me, and I could slow down.

I wrote letters of plans and dreams and passion to Andrea. She sent detailed descriptions of her journeys and adventures and didn't respond to what I had said about love in my letters.

Jennie and Carl hitched up from California and walked up from Mount Vernon. We cruised the mountain in the '55 Cadillac I had borrowed for the summer. High up on the shoulder of the mountain, we left the car and walked the edge of a meadow where beaver dams spread the stream and held deep green in summer grasses. Twenty different kinds of flowers bloomed and spread their odors through mountain air. Ravens, steller's jays, iridescent hummingbirds, myriad birds of many species lived and flew all around us. We found wild onions and garlic, ate some, and took some with us.

When we got back to the blue and white Cadillac, Carl said, "Now where?"

I said, "We'd better go into Mount Vernon and get some gas and something to drink. You drive. I'll sit in back and look at the mountain." I played my guitar as Carl drove down through hot sunshine. Logging-road dust thickened the air behind us. A coyote galloped away from the road through tall, yellowing grass, down into the trees and brush along Laycock Creek.

In Mount Vernon, Carl drove into a gas station. A man about 50, dark hair, red face, walked to the car, staggering a little in drunkenness. A younger man followed, watching over him. The older man leaned against the car and looked in at me. I said, "What's up?"

"I play one of them."

I handed my guitar to him. "Let's hear you play it."

He strummed a few chords, "Too drunk." He handed it back. He touched my beard. "I had me a beard. Till three days ago."

"Why'd you shave it off?"

"Didn't. Burned off. Wouldn't shave it."

"What happened?"

"Damn Jack, up there at the trailer, he tried to kill himself. Turned on the gas. I walked up, opened the door, had a cigarette, Boom. Knocked me flat, burned my hair and my beard. Burned my beard clear off. Blew half the side out of my trailer."

"Did it kill Jack?"

“No. Hell no. Didn’t even hurt him.”

“Did he learn anything?”

“No. Hell no. He come up and got my twenty-two, shot hisself in the head.”

“Did it kill him?”

“No. Bullet went in right like this, went clear around the inside of his skull like this and came out by his jaw, right here. Didn’t even really hurt him.”

“Now you’re kidding me.”

The younger man standing behind him shook his head. “No. It’s the truth.”

“This’s my son.”

“Well, did he learn anything from it? Did he change his mind?”

“No. Hell no. He decided to drink hisself to death last night, but he threw up all over the back seat of my car and then passed out. I didn’t know he was there until I found him this morning. When he wakes up and gets going, he’ll try it again, try something, I don’t know what next. If he’s going to kill hisself, I just wish he’d do it and get it done. It’s rougher on me than him, and I don’t even want to die.”

Carl started the motor. The man punched me lightly on the shoulder and stepped back from the car.

Rolling up the graveled mountain road, I strummed the guitar lightly. I sang part of a song, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the song, to save a wretch like me ...” I didn’t know the rest of the words, but one day, I would find the song and learn all the words. Soft tones from steel strings drowned in the sound of the car rolling over the rough gravel road.

Carl and Jennie left.

Summer storms marched down the mountain. I climbed the highest rock above the bluff. Sun lighted mist under clouds soft orange, then pink, then pastel blue. Up the mountain, lightning struck. Lightning and thunder shook the mountain under my feet. Heavy rain poured into hard wind and soaked me. Lightning brightened everything. Thunder nearly deafened me. I danced and sang and laughed with the primitive power, with my freedom in the storm.

Lightning and thunder blew north. I walked down to camp, undressed and dried off and slept in my supply tent, cat near my shoulder, a dog on either side of my legs.

Coyotes serenaded the mountain every night.

A great horned owl soared down the mountain at dusk. Silent on its wings, it looked down at me where I sat, leaning against a rock. I said, “Hey owl, how you doing? Stop and visit.” The owl flew a wide circle around camp, landed in the

juniper tree at the top of the bluff, and settled its wings. It looked toward me, then down the slope falling away from camp. The full moon rose from the mountain, and the tree and the owl stood silhouetted against the moon. The owl flew from the tree and hunted down the mountain, quiet as bright moonlight.

Problems with the estate kept the title to the land from clearing, and the place wasn't for sale after all. It didn't matter. People who said they would invest in the place with me changed their minds, and I wouldn't have money to build, money for payments on the place. I had the use of the mountain for free, like the owl, like the coyotes, like the deer and elk, like the summer thunder storm.

I wanted my mail and needed some supplies. The Cadillac wouldn't start, so I hiked four miles down the mountain to Mount Vernon.

I left my cane tied across my pack all the way to town. When I started back, I needed it. Even using the cane, by the time I got to Engles Creek, my leg hurt. I lay down on the ground by the pool we built. I rested a while, then stripped and slid into the water. Kicking my legs gently in the water relaxed my muscles and eased the pain somewhat.

The sun dropped toward the mountains. I dried in sunshine and dressed and shouldered my pack. I leaned into the steep slope rising toward camp and traveled on my hands and one leg, carrying the other leg like an injured four-legged. I didn't have to bend very far. I laughed at my new way of traveling and scrambled up rough slope.

By then, I knew intense pain could shoot through my knee and lower leg, but it didn't mean anything was coming apart. The pain would ease, with rest. I could scream if I needed to.

And I did scream because of pain, but I screamed words, "I walked four miles today without my cane. Four miles. It was absolutely worth it. I can run on three legs like an injured four-legged, and there's no stopping the healing power of the life force." I laughed and rolled in the dirt. My dogs came up close and sniffed me to see if I smelled any different when I acted this strange way, and the cat came down from some hideout up in the rocks.

I sat up and looked at the animals. "Okay, you guys. End of the show for today. You'd be surprised how fast laughing like that eases the pain."

Autumn touched the nights. I wrote Chip, "Come on if you're coming. I'll be leaving here before it turns real cold."

Chip hitched a ride and hiked up from Mount Vernon in September. We ate the last of the carrots and onions, spinach

and lettuce from the garden. We hiked down to the apple orchard gone wild on the abandoned homestead below the road, brought back all the apples we could carry, dried them in the sun, and packed them to take along. Chip asked, "What's with Andrea? Is that over with?"

"Looks like it."

"She isn't coming back?"

"Slice apples, Chip."

"Sure. Slice apples. That's what I'm doing, see?"

We hiked down to Engles Creek, but it was too cold to swim. Cold fall winds caressed the mountain. Chip built a fire and stood as close as he could get to it. "I ain't been warm in two days and nights. Must be about time to go."

"I guess so. It's hard for me to get started. I don't know what I'm going to do when I get there. I don't have anywhere to go but temporary places, staying with friends. I don't know any kind of a job I can do, yet. But staying here means starving and freezing to death and getting buried under ten feet of snow. Let's see if the car will start."

It wouldn't.

"Needs a new battery."

We hiked down the steep slope north from camp. The black dog went along. We slid down the cutbank onto the gravel road, and I looked back up the hill.

"That black dog's interested in something up there. Dances like he's trying to get another dog to play with him."

We climbed back up to the brush above the road. A mature coyote had her rear foot caught in a trap. She had dragged a limb attached to the trap with a long chain until the limb tangled in brush and stopped her. She lay on her side and looked at us. Calm, deep yellow eyes. Clean, grey fur with a touch of brown along her flank, yellow hair among the grey along her back.

I said, "I'm going to get her out." I stepped forward and stepped down on the double-spring trap. It didn't open far enough. "Here. Step on the other spring." Chip didn't move. I looked up at him and realized he wasn't going to; remnants of city culture wouldn't let him that close to a sharp-toothed wild animal.

I put down my cane and straddled the trap, with my face inches from the coyote's face. I stepped down on both springs, and the trap opened. I lifted her leg clear. Half of her foot stayed with the trap, but the trap had pinched the wound closed, and she didn't bleed.

The coyote and I looked at each other. Quiet on the north slope of Coalpit Mountain. I said, "You'd better go."

She leaped up, spun in the air and loped up the ridge, carrying her injured foot clear of the ground. When she went out of sight over the ridge, I bent down and picked up my cane. I said, "A three-and-a-half-footed coyote might make a living. Some do."

The man who owned the service station gave us a ride back up to camp and installed the battery, no charge for the service, partly because he wanted to see the camp and know what was happening on the mountain above Mount Vernon, but also because he was glad to help.

I boiled water on my gas stove and made tea. We sat in afternoon sunshine and talked and drank tea. Then the man headed back for town. Chip and I packed.

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

While I looked for Simon, I toured the area for the last time. I had brought a camera to the mountain, but I never unpacked it. The mountain would not exist in photographs I showed to friends, but here, as it is, and in images in my mind, in strength in my legs.

I dropped my jacket on the cat and wrapped him tightly, with just his nose out. "He'll fight to keep from getting in the car, but once we roll, he'll settle down. You drive. I'll get the animals settled."

We rolled, a cloud of grey dust, down the gravel road and onto the paved highway, south. We drove through meadows, pasture, and hay ground, yellow in fall sunshine. Up out of the valley into dusty forest. The sun set. Dark of a cool evening settled, and we put the windows up. I thought about where we had been and where we were going.

We had seen multiple springs and dreamed multiple dreams. I dreamed of land and of love.

If dreams of ownership worked out for me, maybe I would become too bound to this material life. Maybe I would stop dreaming. Dreamers are essential. Dreamers remind us of what humankind could do if everyone directed their energy toward good. Dreamers remind us that merely material goals and ambitions are brief and become ashes. Dreamers dream beyond the possibilities of this material world, beyond this material life into art, into spiritual existence.

The big V-8 engine rumbled us steadily south. Bright, twelve volt headlights lighted the curving asphalt highway and

led us steadily south.