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## **After Drought**

Amanda and I  
drove a thousand miles  
to Oregon's Blue Mountains  
where our family  
gathered  
after Mom died.

We scattered Mom's ashes  
across her favorite huckleberry patch  
on the mountain above Sumpter,  
settled all the details,  
divided  
or sold her few possessions,  
almost three hundred dollars  
in money,  
three hundred and fifty  
in possessions,  
eighty-one years of memories.

Snow,  
deep over sage brush and grass,  
melted in spring rain.  
Grasses and brush  
grow lush now  
from melted snow,  
from spring rain.

Amanda and I drove thirteen miles  
over the mountain from Sumpter  
for this afternoon of memories.

Amanda reviews her childhood  
in Whitney Valley,  
tracks down infinite memories.  
Old places are smaller now,  
full of rich experience.  
Amanda walks through  
high meadow grass,  
flowers tall as her knees.  
Our Whitney years

live in my mind.  
I irrigated wild meadows,  
repaired fences, cut hay.  
We played music,  
wrote, laughed and loved  
in our ramshackle house,  
unused now,  
like the other old buildings,  
the big house across the road from us  
fallen down under weight of snow,  
weakened by 81 years of scavengers  
taking 2x4s, 2x6s for other needs.

I walk toward Amanda  
through sage brush.  
She stands  
by the transporting machine  
where she and Juniper rhymed themselves  
to Middle Earth  
and other centuries.

I decide,  
no adult interruptions  
as my 16-year-old daughter  
sorts through her childhood.  
I tell her where I'll be,  
lie down on the earth.  
Sage brush shades my face  
from late afternoon sun,  
highway 200 yards beyond my feet,  
gravel road 200 feet  
beyond my head,  
log trucks and tourists  
busy with their day.

Two blackbirds on the metal roof  
of an abandoned shed to my left  
discuss their plan to fly nestward  
to feed their young.

I thought I had little grief .  
She lived 81 years,  
some of them good,  
full of rich experience.  
She went quickly,  
with little pain,

but grief catches me at moments  
there in the sage.  
Grief sorts existence,  
cleanses me of death.

Days last long.  
Nights go quickly.  
Brothers and sisters gather.  
Memories are deep.

I drift into sleep.  
Logging truck sounds  
car tires on gravel.  
Tourists look.  
Whitney's remnants  
deteriorate,  
abandoned for modern ways.  
My daughter looks.  
Memories form her life.  
Blackbirds build  
future of blackbirds.

I remember; I dream  
of family since Kansas,  
since Illinois,  
since Freisland,  
since chipped stone tools,  
since the first contained fires.  
Her physical body burned.  
Ashes and bone chips  
scatter  
huckleberry bushes  
drop blossom petals  
grow tiny green berries.  
Oh! Her pies were so good  
flaky crust, rich huckleberries.  
Dreams of my daughter  
delicately forming toward tomorrow  
settling, sorting, building  
rich memories  
of a future carried confidently  
against a background of thousands of years.

I wake  
The world gives me a gift,  
a long moment of quiet.

Memories, thoughts, and dreams  
resolve to  
blue sky.  
Blue sky  
enfolds me.

Soft wind rises from sage  
stirs loose metal on an unused roof  
scrapes the sounds of years we lived here.  
Amanda  
light in meadow grasses,  
slowly returns.  
World returns to its busy sounds.  
We connect and walk toward each other.

The sun drops toward memories and dreams.  
We walk toward the car,  
at ease.  
We walk into all our next memories.