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# Witch Hazel Advent, The Story of an Ozark Poet

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WITCH HAZEL ADVENT  
THE STORY OF AN OZARK POET

WITCH HAZEL ADVENT,  
THE STORY OF AN OZARK POET

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism

By

Sarah Moore Chyrchel  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, 1996

December 2012  
University of Arkansas

## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this Master's thesis project was to document the life of my maternal step-grandfather, John Ross Rule, in a visually compelling manner. Using equipment provided by the Lemke Department of Journalism at the University of Arkansas, I shot and edited a half hour long documentary film comprised of interviews and footage of John at his home near Winslow, Arkansas. John is a talented poet, and segments of his poetry are woven throughout the film.

The inspiration for this project is deeply rooted in place: the remote farmstead in the Boston Mountains of northwestern Arkansas that my grandparents called home, Frog Bayou. I spent many summers and holidays there as a child and I developed a deep love for the land and for my grandparents' rugged way of life. Tied to this love of place is my love for John. John and I have always had a special bond. Likely it started out as a mutual love for the land when I was a child and later blossomed as I came to see John as both a philosophical and creative mentor in my adulthood.

I have wanted to tell this story for a long time. In fact, this may very well be the reason I got into the field of documentary filmmaking in the first place. It has taken me over a decade to get to the point where I felt that my skill and talent as a filmmaker were equal to the beauty of Frog Bayou and the talent and intellect of John Rule. It is my hope that by showcasing John's poetry in the film, it will be introduced to a wider audience and will receive the kind of attention it so justly deserves.

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

Thesis Director:

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**Prof. Larry Foley**

Thesis Committee:

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**Prof. Dale Carpenter**

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**Prof. Robert Cochran**

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**Agreed** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Sarah Moore Chyrchel**

**Refused** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Sarah Moore Chyrchel**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my thesis advisors, Larry Foley, Dale Carpenter, and Robert Cochran, for being so patient with me during the long process of completing this project, and for providing valuable feedback and support as well.

Thank you to my husband, Ryan Chyrchel, for supporting me on this project from the beginning, and especially for babysitting while I was away on shoots.

And a special thank you to John R. Rule for indulging me on this project and for being willing to be followed around with a camera.



## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Margaret LaHay Wynngate Rule, my maternal grandmother, whose academic achievements served to shape my own academic aspirations.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*“The chance of life and the chance of actually being a seeing intelligence is one of the greatest gifts of existence.”*

*John R. Rule*

In the summer of 1963, John and Margaret Rule found their first real home, a piece of land where they could “look at the universe and really enjoy life” (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011). Like Thoreau during his stint on Walden Pond, and many others who have come before and since, they chose to “live deliberately” in the woods (43). They found this particular piece of land by looking at county maps and identifying areas that had “little or nothing in the way of human habitation” (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011). They chose a way of life free of the trappings (and conveniences) of modern life.

Frog Bayou was, and remains to this day, the place I feel most connected to the earth. When one speaks of land and home and a ‘feeling in one’s bones’ that they are in the right place, this tiny valley near the headwaters of Frog Bayou creek is what comes to my mind. When I was young, spending summers or Christmas vacations with my grandparents on the farm, I tagged along with John as he did his daily chores: milking, gathering firewood, pumping water, or just walking through the woods. He taught me the names of the plants and trees growing in their valley; he taught me how to milk a cow; he fashioned my first knife from an old saw blade and taught me how to spot pieces of flint in the creek bed on arrowhead hunting expeditions.

My cousins and I grew up listening to John read stories aloud to us from his chair next to the fireplace. If we were lucky he would read one of the funny poems he had written

about the antics of the various animals on the farm. It was my grandmother, however, who was known as The Writer of the family. With a PhD in comparative literature under her belt, she was in the process of writing a historical novel about her grandfather's family set in the early days of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. It wasn't until I was an adult that I discovered that John had amassed quite a collection of poems written over the course of several decades.

In the spring of 2004, my grandmother had to be moved from Frog Bayou to a nursing home in Fayetteville, Arkansas. John rented a room from a friend in town so he could be closer to her. When he wasn't unfailingly attending to Margaret, John worked on his writing. He began to chronicle his childhood growing up during the years of The Great Depression. He turned the painful emotions he experienced while watching his wife and best friend of over forty years succumb to the brutal memory loss of Alzheimer's into powerful poems. For the first time in his life, John shared his poetry with people outside of his family by reading at various open mics in town.

My grandmother was still living when I started the master's program in Journalism in 2007. I had been helping John retrieve old family photos and slides from the dilapidated cabin at Frog Bayou where they had been stored for decades, and thus had become the family archivist. As I poured over boxes of musty, time worn images, I thought about how I would tell the story of Frog Bayou. Since completing an undergraduate degree in Anthropology ten years previous, I had dreamed of making a documentary film about my childhood wonderland. It was a natural subject choice for my thesis film project. However, I questioned whether I would be able to captivate an audience based solely on my love of

this particular place. Was I too close to the subject? Would anyone outside of my family find it compelling? Was the subject matter strong enough to drive the narrative of the film?

The more I contemplated these questions, the more I felt that I should use John as the vehicle to convey my feelings about Frog Bayou. Naturally, I am biased, but I felt confident that other people, even complete strangers, would find John and his story interesting. It was John's poetry, however, that I felt would lend a truly compelling element to the film's narrative. Largely inspired and informed by the beauty of his surroundings at Frog Bayou, John's poetry embodies many of my deep feelings for this special place. In addition, I've always felt that John's poetry and talent needed to be recognized by more people, so showcasing it in my film would also be a way of promoting it to a wider audience.

My goal in producing *Witch Hazel Advent, The Story of an Ozark Poet*, is twofold: 1.) To convey to the viewer the beauty of a place in nature I hold sacred, and 2.) To introduce viewers to John Rule and his poetry. To date, John has not published his poetry professionally. By exposing his writing to a larger audience, I hope to secure a publication in the near future.

## II. RESEARCH

I grew up hearing bits and pieces of family history, of course, so I had a general idea of how my grandparents met, how they came to make their home at Frog Bayou and what their early days on the farm were like. I was more familiar with my grandmother's family, however, because she was in the process of writing a book about her maternal grandparents who were prominent members of the newly established Cherokee Nation in The Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. In addition, she tended to dominate the conversations in my family, both literally and figuratively. Consequently, I didn't know much about John's family history.

Between April of 2004, when my grandmother went into the nursing home, and August of 2009, when she passed away, John and I became much closer. During those first few months, John stayed with me at my house in Fayetteville, Arkansas so he could be nearby the nursing home. I set John up with an old computer and taught him, with much difficulty, how to operate it. In addition to poetry, John began to work on a memoir. Eventually John found a room to rent from an old friend and colleague from his days in the English Department at the University of Arkansas, Dick Bennett. Dick was retired and had started a non-profit group dedicated to the concepts of peace, justice and ecology called OMNI. John became an active supporter of OMNI and attended various events hosted by the group, including poetry open mics. Gradually he started attending other open mics and poetry readings in town, often times reading his own work. John was emerging from his creative cocoon.

My family had long since lost interest in making the long and arduous trip into Frog Bayou, so I was the one who made a concerted effort to help John clean the place up during

his years staying mostly in town. Understandably, John didn't have much time for upkeep around the farm, so things were in an advanced state of disrepair. Of particular concern were the items stored in the ramshackle "cabin" that my grandparents had lived in during their early years at Frog Bayou: my grandmother's diaries, years of correspondences carefully bundled together by year, all of the family photo albums, boxes of slides and negatives, family heirlooms. All exposed to the extremes of heat and cold and ravaged by generations of pack rat families living in their midst. I ended up with the most important of these items stored at my house.

I took the role of family archivist very seriously, and I've reverently catalogued and preserved the majority of it. Having all of this at my fingertips was helpful, of course, for identifying archival materials for use in the film. It also helped me to establish a broader context for my understanding of what my grandparents' lives were like before and after they met, and who they were as individuals. Tucked in among the photos from my grandmother's family were a few of John's: baby pictures, a couple from his early childhood, one or two of his father. I knew very little about John's childhood at that point, except for the few anecdotal stories I'd heard him tell over the years. As he progressed on his memoir, he would read a chapter or two out loud to me, and I would gain a little more insight into his upbringing and the factors that contributed to shaping his personality and worldview. Later, when I started work on the film and began to conduct interviews, I developed a more complete picture of John Rule, apart from the beloved family figure I had known all my life.

## A. CHILDHOOD

John Ross Rule was born on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1930 on his paternal grandparent's farm in southeastern Kansas. His father, a nomadic jack-of-all-trades, had married a local farmer's daughter who wasn't prepared for the vagaries of such a lifestyle. They ended up in the Ozark Mountains of Southwest Missouri for a while, living in several different primitive abodes, before returning to Kansas. When John was four, his mother left his father for another man, leaving him with his grandmother on the family farm. John's father was away much of the time searching for jobs. John quickly fell into the daily routines of life on the farm, and he developed a deep love for his grandmother. She was an intelligent, capable woman who had taken over the farm when her husband passed away some years earlier. She was known locally to be a talented healer, and John credits her with saving his life on at least two occasions. Once, when she was making homemade soap, John took a bite of a piece of lye because he thought it smelled like hominy. It was his grandmother's quick wits that saved him when she splashed vinegar in his mouth to stop the burning.

In 1936, John's father remarried and, along with his new wife, took John away from the farm in Kansas and relocated to the oil fields of Southeast Texas. For several years they moved from place to place, following the jobs. John's father once bragged that John had been "in and out of twenty schools in a year and a half" (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011). Consequently, John developed a distinct dislike for schools and their associated smells.

I actually developed a fear, a sort of phobia, of schools because it was an era of continual change for me. I can't even remember the name of a single teacher I had in all those years. I remember some experiences: being ganged up on in the schoolyard, being the new boy. But anything else, I can't really remember as enjoyable. (Rule, 12 April 2010)



John and his family were living nearby the site of the New London School natural gas explosion in 1937. Though he didn't know any of the 295 teachers and children killed personally, this tragic event left a deep impression on John.

After their stint in the East Texas oil fields, John's father moved the family to Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1940. He had found work painting the barracks at Camp Shelby during the buildup to WWII. Less than a year later, they moved on to Mobile, Alabama, where he painted aircraft hangers at the newly established Brookley Army Air Field. Now with a few additional members, John's family lived in a canvas tent pitched just outside the base on a bluff overlooking the bay. War was declared in December of 1941, and when the job was finished, John's father moved the family back to the farm in Kansas where they stayed for about six months before moving on to Harrison, Arkansas. John attended schools in three different states during his fifth grade year.

It was in Harrison that John developed a real love for literature.

We moved into a house that had belonged to a teacher and it had a small library. There I read *Far From the Maddening Crowd* by Thomas Hardy. I also read some stuff I'm sure my parents wouldn't have approved of: *Sapho* by Alphonse Daudet. I even read the biography of Benjamin Disraeli, a British Prime Minister. Things that a child of eleven didn't normally read in a small town in those days. That actually did broaden my whole aspect and gave me something of a real taste for education, reading, writing. I was always fascinated by this stuff. The idea of touching another human mind through the ages, to me, was just really wonderful. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

It was also in Harrison that John developed a love for the Ozarks region. John would later write in his memoir essay, *Iris*: "After the slushpits, stinking flares, and thumping oilwell pumps of East Texas, our stays in the deep South and on the Alabama coast had been lots better. . . . But spring in those areas seemed to last only two weeks. Spring really began for me only here, when I was opening up . . ." (20). John loved being outdoors and

had been taught to hunt and fish by his resourceful father. His father bought him a bamboo fly-rod and his father's employer in Harrison gave him a few lures. John would spend hours by himself fishing on the nearby stream, and this activity became his "chief joy and solace in all our wanderings" (Rule 4).

In January of 1943, John's father moved the family once again, this time to the construction site of the Norfork Dam in North Central Arkansas where he had found work. They would stay here for three years. John later described the events from this period of his life as instrumental in shaping his self-identity, and his memoir essay, *Iris*, focuses on this time. John's family situation was relatively stable while his father was working on the dam, but as that project was completed, his father had to find work elsewhere. He was away from home much of the time, leaving John, nearly fifteen now, to look after things in his absence.

John was responsible for milking a newly acquired cow and training a pair of jenny mules his father had traded for the Winchester shotgun he had given to John for his birthday; both tasks he had never done before and had to learn on his own. In the fall of 1945, John spent a cold, rainy day splitting a pile of white oak logs his father had left for him to split into posts to fence in a recently ploughed garden spot. Soon after, John became ill. His stepmother was busy caring for four young children, with another one on the way, and she didn't have time to properly care for John. His condition worsened to the point that John's father asked his mother to leave the farm in Kansas to come nurse John back to health. She took John to Mountain Home, where she rented a hotel room across the street from the doctor's office. (There was no hospital.) Every two hours she walked John over to the doctor's office for a dose of penicillin until he was sufficiently recovered. John was out

of school for sixty days due to his illness. John writes in *Iris*, "I'm convinced that Grandmother Iris and penicillin saved me. . . . I sensed that hers had been the only true mothering I was likely to have in this life" (12).

Conditions in John's family worsened over the following winter and spring months. John's father was gone for increasingly longer stints in search of work. John's stepmother began showing signs of mental instability, possibly associated with postpartum depression after a miscarriage. She took out her anger and frustration on John. At fifteen years old, John had no idea how to handle the situation. He stayed away from the house as much as possible and found solace in the woods and water nearby. He and two close friends explored the area around the newly completed dam. These times with his friends were idyllic and carefree, a safe harbor in the swirl of chaos that was his family life. John's father had finally found steady work a hundred miles away in Stuttgart, Arkansas, but this meant that he was away from the family longer than he had ever been before.

Eventually the situation deteriorated to such a point that John was compelled to write a letter to his father demanding that he come home to take care of things at once. His father showed up a few days later, made arrangements for John's grandmother to take care of the children, put John's stepmother into the state mental hospital, and rented a small house for the family in Stuttgart. After a few weeks in the mental hospital, John's stepmother had recovered enough to move into the new place with the rest of the family.

John's three years of high school in Stuttgart were miserable ones. He missed the natural beauty of his former home and he never got used to the flat fields of soybeans and rice. He was a loner in high school and spent much of his time in the library reading.

"Eventually, I did encounter a certain teacher that seemed to think that I had some

possibility or promise and encouraged me a little bit. And I think that really, probably, started my tendency toward writing” (Rule, 12 April 2010). John’s stepmother insisted that he enroll in a typing course, and she made a five-dollar down payment on a typewriter for him. He took a journalism course his senior year, and unbeknownst to him, the teacher saved some of his feature stories and editorials and entered them into a scholarship competition at the College of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Arkansas. He won the scholarship, and after graduating with honors in 1949, he left his family to start college.

## **B. COLLEGE YEARS**

Although he’d gotten a scholarship, many of John’s expenses at college were not covered and he struggled financially. He was hungry much of his freshman year and he lost a considerable amount of weight. Many of John’s college acquaintances joined the National Guard because they, too, needed the money, but John was reluctant to do so. When the Korean War started the summer following their freshman year, the young men were shipped out immediately. A scandal in the Journalism Department at the College of the Ozarks shut down the program, so John transferred to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville for his sophomore year. He had to maintain full time status in order to avoid being drafted, but he also had to work to pay for all his expenses. He worked late nights in the student union cafeteria and struggled to keep up with his classes during the day.

### **Army**

The summer after his sophomore year, John found work at a bomber plant in Wichita, Kansas, and he enrolled in classes at a nearby college. After leaving the night shift at his job early one morning, John fell asleep and drove into a field on his way to class. Although John detested the thought of serving in the war- “I hated the idea of killing

humans on any basis but self-defense, and disliked regimentation anyway” (Rule, 38)- he knew he could no longer attend school full time to avoid the draft. He was also aware of the G.I. Bill, which he hoped would pay for the rest of his undergraduate degree if he made it out of the service.

Entering the service in January 1953, I managed to be assigned Permanent Party at the training post by scoring high on my proficiency exams and by agreeing to the training company officer’s request to help the rest of the trainees cheat, thus furthering his career. And through my typing ability, I mustn’t forget. The rest of the company shipped out to Far East.

I went on to finish my two years of service successfully, my one most dangerous scrape being almost shot in basic training. After clerk school, I managed to be regularly promoted, to evade the sadists who thrive in control systems, to weather a hurtful love affair with a college girl, and to leave the service with a nice used auto, bought partly with savings from managing the Post theater. (Rule, 38-39)

### **Return to College**

After his release from duty in January of 1955, John returned to the University of Arkansas, where he resumed his studies in the Journalism Department. He soon grew bored, however, with the journalistic writing style required of him there, so he changed his major to English. John was attracted to the confessional prose of writers such as Thomas Wolfe, and he aspired to being a writer. “I had thought I wanted simply to write; to think about life, to experience life, to write about life. And I was inclined to prose” (Rule, 12 April 2010). He wrote a short story about hunting set in the Arkansas Post area, which won him the English Department’s Baucum-Fulkerson Award for Fiction. However, “I think that everything that I tried to write was naïve, even gauche, and stayed that way until I had lived long enough, distilled enough experience of my own that I felt that I really began to get a little more insight into myself and others. It takes quite a while” (Rule, 12 April 2010).

It wasn't until he took a seminar in poetry that he began to appreciate the value of this particular form of writing.

I somewhat disdained poetry, until I took a course from a professor who actually got me into staying with him and learning to unravel a poem and its meaning. And once I had done that, I learned a great deal and it was quite valuable to me. I began to see that certain crises in my life, and in human life in general, demanded the compression and the distillation that poetry imposes upon word symbols. And I've always considered it an immense advantage to me, something of extreme personal value. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

### **Meeting Margaret**

Shortly after returning from the army in 1955, John met Margaret Wynngate Daniel. Margaret had recently separated from her husband and moved to Fayetteville from Monticello, Arkansas with her four children to study English at the University of Arkansas. John was introduced to her through Margaret's sister, who was living next door to him at the time. John got to know Margaret better when they were in an English literature seminar together. He recalls, "She attracted the attention of everyone because she had such an incisive, penetrating mind and was such a vibrant personality that she communicated beautifully" (Rule 17-18 Dec. 2011). Dr. Ben Drew Kimpel, the head of the English Department at the time, once described Margaret as having "one of the best minds in the English Department" (Rule, 12 April 2010).

John was quickly drawn into Margaret's life. He was recovering from a painful love affair and considered himself "unfit for human companionship" (Rule, 12 April 2010). In addition, the years of moving from place to place as a child had left John bereft of any continuity in his life. Margaret's ability to create a pleasant and fun home environment for her family on limited means was a comfort to John, who was soon invited to join in family activities.

I was invited to eat meals with them. All of us would go on picnics on one of the small streams around here and it was a really nice time. It was just a friendship situation, really, and remained so for about five years. I was a single guy. I was dating and looking around. I definitely wasn't interested in getting married, but I did want to find someone I really cared for. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

### **Graduate School**

John completed his bachelor's degree in 1957 and immediately entered the English Department's master's program, despite having become disillusioned by the petty squabbles and turf wars so common in academic departments.

I had sort of a naïve attitude toward higher education. I assumed that working with the products of the mind over the ages would ennoble those of us who were interested in it and who worked with it and who taught with it, and this was quite an emotional setback for me. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

John hadn't been interested in teaching until the head of the department asked him to teach a summer course.

I was hooked, because I picked up a great faith in the ability of the human mind, through curiosity, to educate itself. And I found this to be true later, and it was seconded by the one professor whom I admired the most, Dr. Ben Drew Kimpel, who convinced me that even an uneducated mind- not formerly educated- can work out some of the tremendous knotty problems that face us as humans. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

Dr. Kimpel was also the professor who cured John of his disillusionment with the world of academia. "He was a mental democrat and he restored my faith in this academy of the mind, which is the only true free society of human experience that I know of. He actually renewed my faith that this does exist, that this is the way it should be" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011).

### **Marriage**

John received his master's degree in 1959. Margaret had already completed her master's degree in English and begun studies towards a doctorate, switching from English

to German and Comparative Literature. During those few years, Margaret and John had become best friends.

Margaret was so much more vital, in my opinion, than so many persons I had known. She managed to make even the most common activities exciting. She was just really a lot of fun. She always seemed to want to do the same things and she was always very good at them. And we had so much in common: teaching, our love of literature, nature, sharing life experiences. We were in the same courses together, and we would take our books and go out on a nearby creek to read and study. I would catch some fish after a while and we'd make an impromptu meal right there on the bank. Just something so simple. There was no money to be had, so we just made a game of daily life. It was really a wonderful change in my own existence. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

They hadn't considered becoming romantically involved due to the sixteen-year age difference. "Then, in the fifth year, our feelings just exploded. I remember we went for a walk on a moonlit night, and somehow everything just, as I say, exploded" (Rule, 12 April 2010).

However, as much as John loved spending time with Margaret, he had his doubts about the relationship as well, primarily due to the age difference: "I wasn't really certain that this would work, so I had to go off to teach and survey the possibilities elsewhere" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). John was offered a teaching job at Idaho State College and he moved to Pocatello, Idaho for the Fall 1959 semester. Despite his earlier reservations, he and Margaret exchanged letters and talked on the phone throughout his first semester away. "Finally, I just said, 'Come on out and we'll get married at midterm'" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). They were married in January of 1960, and Margaret and the family joined John in Pocatello at the end of his first year teaching at Idaho State. Margaret found work teaching in the local school system, and John taught one more year at the college before they returned to Arkansas.



## **C. FROG BAYOU**

When they returned to the University of Arkansas from Idaho in 1961, John started a doctoral degree in English and Margaret continued working towards hers. Both Margaret and John were eager to find a more permanent living situation, so while they were teaching and going to school, they began to look for land. Despite the fact that they made very little money as graduate assistants, Margaret managed to save some money for this purpose. They searched county maps for the most remote areas in the region and then spent their summer vacations camping and exploring those areas, asking the locals about land for sale. In the summer of 1963, they found out about forty acres for sale in the northeastern corner of Crawford County.

We'd been told that this place was up here and that no one had lived here for twenty years. So we hiked off the point of Henderson Mountain first and came down one weekend and looked the place over. We decided to buy the place and came back. This was August of '63 and there was no road in here. That is, there was what had been an old wagon trail that crisscrossed the creek four or five times. We started in, coming up the creek with our station wagon. It took us from about four or five in the afternoon till about nine or nine thirty in the evening to get up here. There was nothing here but a whole bunch of cattle. The fields and everything looked like the Mojave Desert, except for thorn trees and bitterweeds. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

Margaret and John bought the forty acres for \$3-\$4/acre. They were able to purchase the remainder of the 151 acres later, for a total cost of \$2200.

### **History**

The first known settler on the land purchased by Margaret and John was a man named John Schrader. He was a cavalryman and preacher who came to the area to cut timber. He built a small house on the property and inscribed the date 'Jen 2<sup>nd</sup> 1874' on one of the larger rocks in the rock chimney. (It's assumed that 'Jen' was a misspelling of January.) By the early 1900's, a dozen or so families were living in the valley, all drawn to

the area for the timber. Over the years, John has found numerous artifacts dating to this time period: pieces of iron from the portable saw mills that were set up every 400-500 yards along the length of the valley and mule and ox shoes from the animals used to haul the rough sawn boards out of the valley. The community had its own schoolhouse and cemetery, and in 1905, a crank-telephone system was erected to connect the families living in the valley.

In 1920, the Shepherd family moved into the home built by John Schrader. By this time, the valley had been mostly cleared of trees and the families living there were planting corn on every available surface.

They grew corn all summer in order to use it to pull logs off the mountain with the mules in the winter. I was shown a place up on the side of Henderson Mountain here where a man told me he had grown corn. I looked around- it was hard for me to understand- and he got red in the face and said, 'Well, I did!'. I said, 'I believe you, it just takes a moment or two for me to take it in,' because there were trees growing there that were fourteen inches in diameter and the whole area was practically pure rock. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

It was a hard life, and by the 1940's, most families had moved out of the valley. In 1943, the Shepherd family moved out as well, leaving the valley uninhabited for the next twenty years.

### **Early Days at Frog Bayou**

Margaret and John spent the rest of their summer break in 1963 working on their newly acquired piece of land. The remains of the old house were still partially standing, so John salvaged some of the logs and rough-hewn lumber and put up a small structure for them to camp out in until they got something more permanent built. They did their cooking outdoors on an old truck rim balanced on two rocks. "My wife was a very good sport about cooking and camping out. She was an Oklahoma girl and really got a big thrill out of that

sort of thing” (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012). Over the years, they modified this arrangement until they had a fully functioning outdoor kitchen.

We bought a cast-iron cook range down at Jenny Lind for \$40 and brought it up here and set it out under the trees and put a couple of sheets of sheet metal over the top of it so we’d have a little bit of a roof. Well, that grew and grew until eventually we had a large enough place to feed a dozen people if we had to. And then, eventually, we got screen wire around it and that sort of thing. But we were never able to keep all of the wildlife out and I’ve had trouble with flying squirrels and pack rats, a little bit of everything in there. It was certainly a semi-primitive situation, but a lot of fun for us despite that. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

Since John and Margaret were still in school and teaching, they could only come to Frog Bayou during their breaks or on weekends. “We tried, over the years, to get there and enjoy it and work like the dickens and then climb back into our vehicle and go back to our teaching jobs, which, in some cases, were four hundred miles away” (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011). At that time, there was still no real road into their property, and they had to ford the creek in four different places.

Sometimes we’d arrive in the middle of the night, and we had various adventures coming in. Once, my truck camper was hooked by a large grapevine that I couldn’t see above my head. We simply swung back and forth, panicked, until I managed to climb out and look around and see what had happened.

One year, at Christmas time, Margaret and I had arrived at ten o’clock at night and were sitting with our V8 Ford truck drowned out in one of the major channels of the stream with the headlights under the water shining upstream. And I said, ‘Margaret, we’ve got to get a road in here. This has taken ten years off my life.’” (Rule, 29 Aug. 2010)

One of the first improvements John and Margaret made to their land was to fence it to keep the cattle out. Local farmers had been letting their cattle graze up and down the valley for years, and the cattle had overgrazed much of it. Wildlife had also stayed away from the area, but after several years, John and Margaret began to see more deer and other animals.

One night, about two a.m., Margaret looked out- it was on a weekend, we had come from our teaching jobs and I was trying to make fence in the middle of the night- and she saw the gasoline lantern glowing out there with me standing beside it, stock still. When I came back, she said, 'What in the world were you doing out there?' and I said, 'I was listening to the coyotes sing.' She thought that was pretty funny! (Rule, 12 April 2010)

A favorite pastime was watching a nearby fox family beg for scraps of food while they ate their meals at a folding card table near their cooking area.

We'd see these little ears come up behind the rock, watching us as we ate. If we looked up that way, they'd suddenly disappear and then slowly come back up, one at a time, again. That was very charming. And the vixen got used to us and we would put out scraps for her. And she would have quite a time carrying away different parts of it up to her puppies. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

Margaret and John always tried to plant a garden during their summers at Frog Bayou, and they experimented with harvesting edible wild foods growing on their land as well.

We were always interested in trying to live a little bit off the land, and I had read the Euell Gibbons book [*Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, 1962], so I decided to try several things. We began to try some smilax tips in vinaigrette- that is, cat briar tips- in the spring. And we tried spring beauty bulbs and various other things. The flowers we grew, we ate some of the daylily buds and that sort of thing. Of course, any type of wild fruit that was in season... And I did quite a bit of fly-fishing on the stream... We didn't do very much with hunting. I think in all of the years we lived here, we only killed two deer, which we ate completely. So we really had a nice subsistence living. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

In the summer of 1970, John began construction on what was intended to be a garden shed but ended up being their permanent home. With a pick and a shovel, John was able to get the foundation dug. In the summer of 1973, his father joined him and they built the walls using a double layer of rocks with a foot-wide airspace in between.

Of course, we didn't know what we were doing. *I* didn't. I think dad knew quite a bit because he had built farm buildings before. I used the wrong kind of mortar- Portland instead of regular masonry. . . . I don't think I'd do the same thing again. I don't believe I would build a corner fireplace again

without doing more planning. My father was here laying up the walls while I was off teaching, and he was supposed to leave a big open space for me to build in the corner fireplace. But he went ahead and made it solid, so I had to do everything inside. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

Over the next couple of summers, John and his father completed the framing and put on a tin roof.

The roof and the framing of the house were discarded beams from an old rice mill in Stuttgart. . . . They're virgin pine and four inches thick and twelve inches wide and fourteen feet long. So most of those were cut with a chainsaw into the framing for all the openings in the house as well as the roof. (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011)

The house wasn't fully completed until the winter of 1976-77, when John put in the fireplace.

I had to build the fireplace by thawing out the rocks after I brought them inside, because simply pouring water on them to get them to take mortar resulted in them being cased in ice. It was a pretty cold winter- I noticed it was at least four below in the doorway of this little house. (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011)

#### **D. TEACHING CAREER**

Margaret and John were still teaching and working on their doctorates at the University of Arkansas when Margaret had the opportunity to study at Christian-Albrechts University in Kiel, Germany in 1965. She was writing her dissertation on the plays of Edward Albee and their reception in Germany, and she wanted to conduct further research on this subject. John accompanied her and they spent sixteen months there. Margaret took classes and participated in the English Seminar and John taught a class at the university and at a local teacher's college. During their two-month break in the spring, they were able to travel through thirteen different countries.

In March, we set off with the German equivalent of a Eurail Pass and packs on our backs, and on about a dollar or two a day, we rambled through these thirteen or so countries, all the way to Lebanon and back. People were

always good to us. They could never believe that we were Americans because we looked too poor. (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011)

Upon returning to the states, Margaret and John secured teaching positions at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. They were eager to get closer to their piece of land in the Ozarks, however, so when they heard about positions open at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, they applied. They taught in the English Department there from 1967-1970 while simultaneously working on their doctorates at the University of Arkansas. John had been reluctant to go back to graduate school. "I didn't want to literally dry myself out emotionally as I felt some of the candidates in the graduate school had done. And I thought I'd give it half my effort and try to hold on to what I considered my basic life values at the same time" (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011). John made it through all the Prelims but one, which was administered by a professor he had gotten crossways with: "I never could satisfy him, and I wouldn't go the actual limit to be sure to do so. I felt, actually, that being turned down helped validate the system; systems are validated by the number of persons that they turn down, to some degree" (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011). Margaret received her PhD in Comparative Literature in January of 1971.

Margaret and John's teaching contracts came up for renewal at the end of their third year at Arkansas Tech.

We received a message from the chairman asking for suggestions for a better program in the department, because there were only, I think, four English majors in the English Department. . . . And everyone who made suggestions for a better program got fired except for the two persons who had tenure, and of course one of them was the wife of the football coach, so that would never do to fire her. (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011)

After that, Margaret and John got temporary teaching jobs at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and at Philander Smith College. The dean at Philander Smith recommended

Margaret and John for full time positions at Mississippi Valley State College in Itta Bena, Mississippi (now Mississippi Valley State University), and they began teaching there in 1971.

I felt very sympathetic to my students there at the black school, but it was an emotionally draining type of job. There were so many frustrations in actually attempting to teach. In our twenty years of teaching, most of our difficulties in efficient and effective instruction came through the administrations, almost never from the students. (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011)

While Margaret and John taught at Mississippi Valley State, they continued to make visits to Frog Bayou during summers and holidays. John was trying to finish up construction of their house during these visits, and after the Fall 1976 semester, he decided not to return to teaching.

I had gotten so used to working here, I said to my wife, 'I just hate to go back again'. She said, 'Then don't!' and threw her hands up. And I said, 'Well what do you mean?' She said, 'You stay here and I'll go back and teach one more semester and then we'll move back here permanently'. So that's what we did. (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011)

## **E. RETIREMENT**

John spent the winter alone at Frog Bayou, finishing up work on the chimney in their house, while Margaret finished up her last semester of teaching in Itta Bena. At the end of the Spring 1977 term, he helped Margaret move all of their belongings from Mississippi to Frog Bayou.

We crammed everything in, all the books and household goods that we had, and made the four hundred mile trip back here and managed to unload everything. We hung things in buckets under the four-foot eaves. We tried to put the books into some kind of order on top of the eight-foot walls and put labels on the wooden plates underneath them so that we'd know what we had. The interstices where we stored the books are two feet deep and there are some books that I haven't seen for years. (Rule, 17 Dec. 2011)

For the first time in their lives together, Margaret and John had a place they could call home, and the leisure time to do some of the activities they enjoyed. One of their favorite pastimes was sitting next to the fireplace in the evenings, either reading or just watching the fire.

It's been our television set all these years. That and our books, which we never had time to read while we were teaching because we were always grading papers until midnight or later. But as soon as we got here, for the first time in our lives, we could afford to read as much as we wanted to. So I read to Margaret every night. And when we were snowed in, as we once were for nearly a month, we would simply put our feet up against the warm chimney pile and read, and that was our entertainment. Usually, when I came in cold and wet from milking and so forth, Margaret would have supper for me on the hob and we would set up a card table in front of the fire, and once in a while she would fix a hot toddy to comfort my bones. We had some very pleasant times. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

The little rock house served them well over the years and has required very little maintenance. In 1985, John added sod to the roof, and that increased the natural insulation already provided by the thick walls.

It's eight to ten degrees difference between inside and outside all the time. . . . It's been a really nice investment, and the only thing I've done to add to it is to get some of the slope of the mountain dozed away from right behind it to make a level place, and then I put a rock retaining wall there. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

John and Margaret were concerned at first about whether or not they could make it living at Frog Bayou full time after their decision to quit teaching.

We were scared to try anything before we came here because we thought we would need more money. But it turned out that, basically, we just needed to be willing to do it. It doesn't take much for two little old people. And I've often felt that if we'd come five years sooner, we'd be ten years younger.

### **Homesteading**

Living at Frog Bayou full time allowed Margaret and John to pursue more experiments in subsistence farming and local food acquisition. John read Helen and Scott



Nearing's book about making maple syrup (*The Maple Sugar Book*, 1950), and in 1977 he tried it for the first time.

There's really nothing much to it. You basically get the sap out and boil it down, and inevitably, you'll end up with something good. The weather is a big determinant. It should be a cold night followed by a sunny morning. As the temperature rises above freezing, the tree will begin to pump the sap. (Rule, 29 Aug. 2010)

John spent the next fifteen or so winters tapping the sugar maples up and down both sides of the creek and boiling down the sap at a site near the creek.

It's necessary to have at least one person on your cooking fire at all times, and preferably the oldest one, or the one with the most judgment. One time I was four hundred yards downstream and I smelled my cooking pans and started running. And when I got inside, it was just about to go up, because nothing burns like oxygen, hydrogen and carbon put together. (Rule, 29 Aug. 2010)

Margaret made jams and jellies from blackberries, elderberries, strawberries, fox grapes, plums and quince, and John made wine and liqueurs from some of these fruits as well. They kept beehives and harvested the honey. They successfully grew small plots of wheat and rye. "We threshed it out by hand with a piece of bamboo or a stick and winnowed it ourselves over a piece of canvas, and ground it on a Victoria hand mill. Two grindings without sifting seemed to make a very acceptable cereal, and Margaret made bread from it too" (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012). They kept a few chickens for eggs, and once raised and slaughtered a York pig:

I don't know how much he weighed, but it took us a week to work him up. We did hams and bacon and all the standard stuff. We canned sausage in the old fashioned method, with precooked patties sealed in lard. We ended up with strings of sausages that we'd hang up in the fireplace to go with our evening meal. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

In 1980, John bought a Jersey cow and began milking.

I had disliked milking intensely when I was a teenager in Baxter County in the 1940's, and I had to learn again. And the cow had to learn with me. . . . One morning when it was four below zero, I thought, 'I wonder if any other English teachers are doing something like this in the general area right now', and I decided probably not. They probably had better sense. . . . But we made it, and I milked for ten years. (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012)

Margaret used the milk to make butter, yogurt and cheese. "We were really happy with some of her experiments. She made five different kinds of cheese using USDA bulletins and sending off for what she needed, like rennet and that sort of thing. . . . She was always willing to try something like that" (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012).

### **Visitors to Frog Bayou**

Although they eventually had a road put in to their property so that they didn't have to ford the creek so many times, Margaret and John remained fairly isolated. Aside from the occasional neighbor or hunter showing up on their land from time to time, they had few visitors. There were some notable exceptions, however.

We took Ben Kimpel in one time during the summer. He had just come back from Africa from a photo safari. He was a beautiful spirit in a rather chunky body, and as I was chattering along and bouncing over all these rocks and boulders on the way in, I glanced over and saw he was holding his stomach with an expression of extreme distress on his face. I said, 'Ben, I'm sorry!' and immediately slowed the vehicle and said, 'I don't know why I didn't think about taking it easy. I knew you'd just gotten back from safari,' and he said, 'Well, safaris aren't very rough!'

We once had James Herlihy, the author of *All Fall Down* and *Midnight Cowboy*, when he was teaching a summer session here at the university as a guest professor. That was really quite interesting. He was a really interesting person and he kept sending us a box of chocolates every fall from his personal chocolatier in Los Angeles. (Rule, 29 Aug 2010)

Thanksgiving and Christmas were the other exceptions to Margaret and John's solitary existence at Frog Bayou. During these holidays, family members would make the long journey from civilization to the woods.

We'd have an influx of all these young lives and have a wonderful time together- go walking in the snow to cut our Christmas tree and so forth. Sometimes we would have as many as fourteen or fifteen guests bedded down everywhere. One Christmas Margaret and I ended up sleeping on the table in the kitchen. I had to maintain five fires: two in our little rock house, two in the kitchen and one in the cabin. I still remember tiptoeing around, trying not to step on anyone, to get to the fireplace at two in the morning to stoke the fire. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

Margaret loved cooking for the holidays. "She'd start preparing for Christmas early in the fall and would put down fruitcake in rum for gifts and made all sorts of Scottish shortbread and oatmeal cake and all kinds of goodies- candied grapefruit peel and things like this" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). "Margaret was such a wonderful cook and provider that we did a wonderful amount of entertaining for not having any utilities at all" (Rule, 7 Jan. 2012).

### **Alone at Frog Bayou**

After the holidays were over and everyone had gone home, Margaret and John would have to readjust to their solitary existence.

And then, of course, it would all come to an end and they would all drive off back to civilization and I would say, 'The glory has departed.' Meaning the sharing of the really good and basic life experiences with other loved members of your own species. I always thought that every farm, every home-place, should be well stocked with people. On the other hand, I do enjoy the quiet. And I've had more animal experiences by myself than I ever would've had if other persons had been around. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

Living so remotely allowed Margaret and John to experience the natural world around them in ways that most of us living in town never get to. "I feel that I can look into the heart of the universe here in a way that I never can in urban life" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011).

But it's not a place where you see things all of the time. Nature does not reveal itself to you when you want it to. You have to be alert and always ready for something to happen- very small stuff, as I've pointed out in a poem or two: waking up with a bird standing on my chest, having a squirrel jump out of the top of the bamboo and land on my front, having a mouse run up my

hand and off my ear while I was scooping feed for the evening milking, having a pilot black snake drop around my shoulders in the shed one time- I almost went through the roof! These little things certainly open one's pores and they're a part of living a lot of humans miss now. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

John and Margaret lived together at Frog Bayou for twenty-seven years after their retirement from teaching.

I've been extremely happy here. I had grandiose plans when we first came. I had some idea of a sort of 19<sup>th</sup> century farm in mind. But, of course, everywhere I look I can see things that did not go as I'd wished. On the other hand, most of the wonderful things that have happened have been emotional. They've been developmental in me and in Margaret. And this is where we were happiest and where we had resolved to stay as long as we possibly could. And this, of course, is what happened with her. Until she got deeply into the Alzheimer's and put herself at risk, we were able to stay. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

#### **F. Margaret's Alzheimer's**

Despite being sixteen years older than John, Margaret remained in good health for the first fifteen years of their retirement at Frog Bayou. "It didn't matter at first, because she had such a youthful personality anyway, and a very vital and vibrant personality. In many ways, she was much younger than I was" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). In 1992, however, Margaret was hospitalized for a heart condition and had to have a stent put in one of the major arteries. Then, in the mid '90's, she had to have both the lenses in her eyes replaced.

After that, she took to her bed, even though she was only supposed to stay in bed for two weeks. She just stayed in bed for much of the day. She would get up and dress and do a little gardening or something like that. And she said that she just didn't want to go back to the mess hall and cook again. I said, "There's no reason you should have to. You cooked for forty years or more and kept a whole bunch of people happy and healthy, so I think that'll be fine'. So I took over. (Rule, 31 May 2010)

Because of Margaret's heart condition, John had to learn to cook with little to no fat, salt or sugar. "That was a real education for me. I was never a great cook anyway, although she

seemed to think the food was wonderful and said I should've been a chef. I said, 'No, I certainly shouldn't have!'" (Rule, 31 May 2010).

Gradually John began to notice changes in Margaret's behavior. He didn't identify these changes as symptoms of Alzheimer's disease at the time.

At first I noticed that she seemed to collect things and maybe hide or lose things more. Some things just disappeared. Basically she began to lose her categories. That is to say, she couldn't keep her pairs of socks together, things like that. And then she developed an extreme fascination for the pebbles and rocks she picked up at the creek. I've always liked doing that myself, but she seemed to pick up rocks that had no distinction whatever to me. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

At first, John was able to leave Margaret in their home when he had to make short trips into town. He would write a note on the small chalkboard hanging on the door explaining where he'd gone to remind her where he was. But Margaret grew increasingly afraid when she was left alone, and she began to wander away from their house if John had to leave her for even a short amount of time.

I would see her slip out of the house and start, usually, towards the west- she always went towards civilization. I would try to slip around and meet her, as if by accident, and say 'Oh, I'm so glad to see you're exercising, just like the doctor told you to.' And then she would say, 'Oh, I'm so glad I found *you!*' It didn't happen this way every time. Eventually she got to the point where she would slip away from the house and then hide, even though I was calling her name. One time, I was running distractedly around the area west of here, and suddenly I looked up and there she was, sitting on the hillside looking at me. She had been watching me the whole time. I was calling her name and she was afraid to respond. I realized then that I could never leave her again. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

At this point it became clear to John that Margaret was slipping into dementia, but one incident in particular made it painfully obvious:

One evening when we were getting ready for bed, Margaret suddenly said, 'I think it would be all right for you to stay here tonight, and I don't care if the neighbors say anything about it.' This went all over me. I said, 'Well dear, we're married.' She said, 'Oh, I see!' And she went right along, happily, with

her bed preparations. I realized that things would never be the same again.  
(Rule, 12 April 2010)

John continued to care for Margaret in their home at Frog Bayou despite her increasing dementia. She continued to spend most of her time in bed, although physically, she was still fairly healthy.

We really did the best that we possibly could do considering the situation, and she seemed to be happy here until she got so deeply into the Alzheimer's. We had a sort of routine and it worked pretty well until I discovered that she really could no longer function, to do simple tasks of taking care of herself. When that became obvious, then it became really clear, that even though we had vowed to stay here as long as we could, it was obvious that this couldn't go on. (Rule, 12 April 2010)

In the spring of 2004, Margaret became extremely ill and had to be hospitalized. She was near death when she had surgery to repair a blockage in her intestines, and the doctors didn't think there was much hope of a recovery. After several weeks in the hospital, however, Margaret did recover. "After that, of course, there was no question of her ever coming back to Frog Bayou and to our existence here" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). John was forced to put Margaret into a nursing home. "I stayed in town to take care of her and only came down here to our place once a week just to check on things. I learned a lot about nursing homes during that time, both good and bad. It was an education for me and I'm grateful for that" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011).

### **G. Life in Town**

During the years that John spent in Fayetteville while Margaret was in the nursing home, he began to focus on his writing. While he spent much of his days with Margaret, his evenings were free to write. He documented many of his experiences with Margaret in the nursing home and wrote several poems addressing the emotionally complex issues of Alzheimer's disease. He began to chronicle his childhood growing up during the years of

The Great Depression and eventually completed his memoir essay, *Iris*, during this time. He collected all of the poems he'd written over the years, retyped them, and provided copies to family members. He even began to read some of his poems at various open mics in town.

During these years, John rented a room from a former colleague at the University of Arkansas, Dr. Dick Bennett. Dick had started a non-profit organization in Fayetteville dedicated to peace, justice and ecology called OMNI, and John became active with them. "It enriched my life a lot. There was a great deal of discussion of literature and different movements in society towards these three different areas, and this has meant a great deal to me" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). John volunteered his time on Saturday mornings at the Fayetteville Farmer's Market to hand out leaflets educating the public on the organization and promoting peace.

I don't identify as a peace activist in the usual sense. I do this mostly because of my feelings from being in the service and from following international events over the years. And particularly because I went to school in the 1940's with a very special young man who volunteered right away for the Korean War, went off and was killed immediately. (Rule, 31 May 2010)

The death of this friend figures prominently in John's memoir, *Iris*. The young man killed was one of the schoolmates John spent time with during his years living near the Norfolk Dam. John didn't find out about his death until he went back to the area for a visit after leaving the army in 1955. Although he hadn't given much thought to his friend over the years, this news devastated John. "It just seemed like such an immense waste. And of course, he's just a symbol- if you multiply this by thousands and thousands- I see this all as an immense waste, and I feel like it's really important for me to speak up" (Rule, 31 May 2010).

## **H. Margaret's Death**

After several years of living mostly in town, John began to spend more of his time at Frog Bayou again.

It used to be that I would feel guilty leaving town because of my wife in the nursing home. But after about three years of helping her to feed, helping her to move and walk, dance and this sort of thing, as long as we could, until her mind no long trusted anything, didn't even trust my help, really, I finally began to resume some of my life down here. It was quite an emotional thing for me to resume more of each week here in the woods after several years of being away. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

Margaret's health remained stable until the final week of her life, when her bodily functions began shutting down. She passed away on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009, surrounded by family. She was ninety-six years old.

I found out that she had affected a great number of people during the years that she was in the nursing home. And we had to have three memorials: one for the neighbors here, one for the persons whose lives she touched while she was in the nursing home, and, of course, our own family ceremony. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

Margaret was buried in a small cemetery located less than a mile from their home. John carved a headstone for her grave from a flagstone salvaged from the wreckage of the old house on their land.

I put a small inscription under her name and dates that says 'a vibrant loving life', and I put a small frog figure up in the corner of the stone, which didn't mean anything more than Frog Bayou. It's only a mile and a third down the trail, so I get to stop most of the times I get by, although it's getting now so that I don't stop every time. I simply murmur something to her memory and come on. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

## **I. Life Without Margaret**

Life at Frog Bayou without Margaret was challenging for John. For more than a decade, his days had been structured around being her caretaker.



After a person loses a beloved life partner who gave a lot of structure to one's life, and you're suddenly faced with the challenge of a single life without any need for the same compromises and the same agreements and the same wonderful shared experiences that you had before, it really is a problem. And since I'd grown used to all this richness in my life- sort of a double mirror, a special sharing that you achieve, ideally, with another human which makes all of your life experiences twice as rich and rewarding- I've really had to change a lot. It's a totally different existence. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

This lack of structure can be daunting. "There is a tendency to simply let everything go. I've had to actually divide my days consciously, something I never really did before" (Rule, 12 April 2010). John starts his day by getting the fire going and fixing himself a hot drink while listening to the news on the radio. Then he does the household chores: filling the kerosene lamps, chopping firewood, pumping water. If the weather permits, John will work for a while in his small vegetable garden.

The main part of John's day is focused on his writing. He uses the daylight hours to revise and type up what he composes in the evenings.

I usually end up doing my composing at night, writing it out by hand. Since I don't have a very good lighting system, I do my typing during the day. I lost my Royal portable that I had had since 1948, the one my stepmother put \$5 down on and I eventually paid out. It was a dandy. Unfortunately a deer mouse made a nest in the keys and that rusted out the 'm', which kind of messed me up. So while I was going back and forth into town when Margaret was in the nursing home, I met a student who wanted to get a hold of any kind of used books he could, so I gave him two or three hundred pounds of used books, and in return, he gave me this little pink Olympia portable typewriter, which is what I use right now. (Rule, 31 May 2010)

John has spent the past few years fleshing out his memoir. "I've been working on a piece about the ten years in which my family was dragged from Kansas to the Gulf and back again. I'm still trying to shape that prose up, with the hope of eventually publishing it" (Rule, 31 May 2010).

In the years since Margaret's death, John has maintained a balance between his life at Frog Bayou and his need for social interactions in town. He spends the majority of the week at Frog Bayou and his weekends in Fayetteville, where he stays at a friend's house.

I have a sort of double love for both this rustic situation and life in town. And this is the sort of double life I'm leading now- I'm getting two stimulations during the week. I always did miss the life of the mind. I miss that exchange here, but then, of course, I get compensated for that in town. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

John regularly attends poetry readings and frequently reads his own work as well. In 2010, he was approached by an amateur printing press in Fayetteville about publishing a chapbook of his selected poems. John agreed, and in the summer of 2010, *Bird. Moon. Star.* was published by Limber Twig Press. John gave a book release reading at a bookstore in Fayetteville, Night Bird Books, which also sells copies of the chapbook. John has also remained active in the OMNI Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology, where he regularly attends film screenings, open mics and other events.

As much as John enjoys the social interactions and intellectual stimulation that being in town provides, he's always relieved to get back to his life at Frog Bayou.

It's like taking a shower-bath to come back into the woods after all the complication and frustrations I hear about from people who live there, in town. One of the dull parts of going to town is the very small variety of life forms that town allows. I always say it's a selective desert. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

In addition to his writing, John derives much pleasure from the natural world around him. "I'm constantly renewed by all the small lives that I see here everyday. I get a great deal of sustenance out of just watching things, nature and so forth; just the daily phenomena" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). After spending an afternoon inside working on his writing, John likes to get out for a walk around his property. "I try to take a sort-of nature stroll around, an

observation thing. I get to see things that I don't ordinarily see that way, and certainly wouldn't if I stayed cooped up in the house" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011).

John ends his days at Frog Bayou composing and contemplating by the fireplace. For the most part, he has become comfortable with his solitary existence there. However, Margaret's absence from his life has made John realize how much of an impact she had on him over their years together. "I'd not realized it, but Margaret civilized me and got me accustomed to happy family life. And of course, without that, it's quite difficult" (Rule, 31 May 2010). Spending hours alone with no one to talk to, particularly at night, inevitably leads to thoughts of mortality. "As you get older- I'm eighty-one now- and wake up at 4:48 in the morning and think about all the really nice persons that you knew who are now gone, why this is always a rather sobering time" (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011). But this time alone to contemplate life has given John solace and has honed his philosophical outlook.

It's certainly something that I think one *should* worry about. I mean, you should think about life, you should think about becoming stronger as your body becomes weaker, getting the ultimate value that you can out of life with you mind. And, if possible, sharing this with a few good friends. If you have your memory, you have relative health and you have a few good friends, when you're beached on the sands of time, I think that's more than a great many of us could hope for.

The chance of life and the chance of actually being a seeing intelligence is one of the greatest gifts of existence. . . . And I really believe that if there's an ultimate religion, it's an ultimate loyalty to life and to the striving of life forms for full existence. (Rule, 18 Dec. 2011)

### **III. PRODUCTION NARRATIVE**

Ever self-effacing, John would say, “I’m just a human being,” when I’d discuss plans for the film with him. He was convinced that no one would find his story interesting, and initially insisted that the film be more of a self-exploratory exercise on my part rather than a documentary focusing on him. (It turned out to be both, of course.) He continued to remind me throughout the film’s production that this was solely my creative endeavor and his only requests were that I not make him out to be “a mountain man” and that we be as authentic as possible in our storytelling.

#### **A. Take One**

Since my grandmother was still alive and much of John’s life was consumed with her and her condition, I initially thought I would focus on how he was coping with the Alzheimer’s and learning to live his life without his wife. I even had a title, *The Sorrow of the Long Goodbye*, based on a quote I heard on a National Public Radio story about living with Alzheimer’s disease. John had written several poems dealing with these subject matters and I began to formulate a structure for the film around those poems.

#### **Pre Production**

One poem in particular came to mind as a launching point for the film: “Bird. Moon. Star.” (Appendix A). He had written it after making a concerted effort to resume some of his old life at Frog Bayou. One of the activities that he had had to abandon during the decade of caretaking my grandmother was making maple syrup. In January of 2008, John spent several solitary days and nights alone in the woods, collecting and boiling down maple sap. “Bird. Moon. Star.” is comprised of visual elements collected from this experience combined with his ruminations on Margaret’s descent into Alzheimer’s. The result is a powerful and

poignant piece that cuts to the heart of John's predicament, and I wanted to use its imagery in the opening sequence of the film.

Another poem, "Witch Hazel Advent" (Appendix B), seemed to embody what I felt would be the central themes of the film. John wrote it about an experience he had the first year he made maple syrup. He had been walking along the creek bank, collecting sap, when he came across some small trees that were in full bloom. He was astonished by the sight of flowers blooming in the dead of winter and was entranced by their spicy, distinctive smell. He describes all this in the poem, touching upon the themes of death and rebirth. I felt that this poem was particularly analogous to John's current situation: facing the death of the love of his life and nearing the end of his own, yet continuing to find hope and joy in the rhythms unfolding in the natural world around him.

### **Production**

I shot the first footage for the film in January of 2009 when John was again making syrup. I wanted to capture imagery referenced in the two poems mentioned above. I used my personal standard definition video camera to shoot footage of the various stages of maple syrup production and recorded a bit of John explaining the process. The witch hazel was in bloom, so I got footage of that as well. I also shot some film footage using my own Super 8 camera. I had envisioned the sections of the film that contained poetry being shot on black and white Super 8mm film to give those sections a more abstract, and, of course, poetic feel. I hadn't shot any footage on my Super 8 camera in some time, so I wanted to test it out.

Shooting with film is expensive and inconvenient. After you've shot the footage, there's a lag time during which the film has to be sent away for processing before you can

view the results. In addition, once you've obtained your processed film, you have to decide how you're going to get it into a digital format for editing. In spite of all these difficulties, I was determined to incorporate this element in my film. Several of my earlier short films were shot in this medium, and I felt that it was a signature style that set my work apart. My earlier films tended to be more abstract and experimental, so I felt that by incorporating these poetic film segments in the documentary, I would be staying true to my stylistic nature.

Not surprisingly, this entire process ended up being problematic. Once I had gotten the initial footage back from processing, I discovered that my Super 8mm projector wasn't functioning properly. In the past, I had always transferred my film footage to video by projecting the image at a very close range onto a white sheet of paper and recording it with the video camera. Not an ideal way to do a film transfer, but it's less expensive than the alternative and I've managed to get some decent looking transfers using this method. Without a functioning Super 8 projector, I was stuck. I did, however, have a functioning 16mm projector. (Or so I thought.) After asking around, I discovered that one of my thesis advisors had a 16mm camera that he was willing to loan to me. He didn't know if it still worked, but I decided to give it a shot anyway.

I ordered some 16mm film, which is more expensive than Super 8. It's also more difficult to work with, considering that it's packaged in something called a daylight spool rather than the light-tight cartridge used for Super 8. It had been years since I had shot in this format, so it was with considerable trepidation that I set about trying to create a light-tight environment in which to load the film into the camera. It's a tricky business, comprised of the following steps painstakingly executed without the ability to see what

one's doing: 1.) Insert the daylight spool containing the unexposed film into the body of the camera; 2.) Clip the tail of the film using the film knife; 3.) Engage the loop formers; 4.) Attempt to thread the film along the film path until it engages with the take-up reel; 5.) Repeat step four as many times as it takes to actually succeed. Somehow I managed to do all that without, I hoped, exposing any of the film to light during the process.

I set off for Frog Bayou not knowing if I would get a decent image. Or any image at all, for that matter. I had John reenact certain actions described in the two poems: "dodging splayed branches" ("Witch Hazel Advent" 5) with his head, standing on the rocky bar "studying a jackstraw pattern of peeled sticks" ("Bird. Moon. Star." 23), etc. I soon realized that the task of attempting to capture a literal, visual translation of the poetry was tedious and awkward. John and I both felt less than authentic attempting to recreate such intensely private and profound moments for film's sake. However, I finished off the roll of film, returned home and sent it off for processing. When I got the film back and attempted to view it on my 16mm projector, I discovered that this projector wasn't working properly either. I was again stuck with film footage that I had no way of transferring to video. I was slightly heartened by the fact that I could see images on the small frames when I held a portion of the film up to the light. At least the camera appeared to have worked.

In retrospect, I realize that being so attached to the idea of shooting on film was impractical and that sticking with it in spite of numerous roadblocks was a bit insane, perhaps. I do believe there's some value in suffering for one's art, however. By seeking out techniques that are difficult and labor intensive and by taking the time to execute them well, you're often rewarded with unexpected and, often times, beautiful imagery. I had a very specific look in mind for these film segments. I know there are ways of manipulating

video footage to make it look like film, but I can always tell when those effects have been applied and, in my opinion, they come across as affected and rather silly.

Stymied by these roadblocks, I didn't shoot anything else for the film until my grandmother passed away in August of 2009. I shot some footage of the ceremony at the little cemetery near their home using one of the new consumer HD camcorders available for checkout through the university's Student Technology Center. Now I was thinking that perhaps I would start John's story with Margaret's death. That was the last footage I shot for another eight months.

I had gotten bogged down in the dilemma of having shot footage, at this point, in four different formats: standard definition video, Super 8mm and 16mm film, and AVCHD, which is a form of high definition video. The death of my grandmother was also forcing me to rethink the focus of the film. I still wanted her Alzheimer's to be a component, but it made sense to focus more on John's return to Frog Bayou and his transition to a solitary existence there. I decided to change the title of the film to *Witch Hazel Advent, The Story of an Ozark Poet*, referencing the poem that I felt embodied the themes of the film so eloquently.

Despite the fact that I had always envisioned the film shot in winter, I resumed shooting in April of 2010. I had wanted to get started earlier in the year, but I was in the first trimester of pregnancy with my first child and I didn't have the mental or physical energy to tackle shooting at that point. I was feeling pressure to complete the film before my November 4<sup>th</sup> due date. Since I had shot in so many formats previously, I wanted to start over using a single, high quality format. I chose to use the Journalism Department's



only HD camera available to students at the time, which did not, in fact, shoot in full HD format.

A note to female filmmakers who are considering shooting a film while pregnant: don't. Or at least make sure you've got an assistant who isn't. In addition to the usual physical maladies (morning sickness, heartburn, fatigue), pregnancy does strange things to the mind. There is an as yet scientifically undocumented condition experienced by many women during pregnancy called Pregnancy Brain, also known as The Pregnancy Stupids. I've never been a forgetful person, and I'm fastidious about preparing for a film shoot, particularly one that involves an hour and a half drive into the wilderness where I know I won't have access to any modern conveniences.

When I set up my first shot at an overlook in Winslow and hit the record button, I was momentarily confused by the blinking red image of a tape with a line through it on the monitor. I had left the tapes for the camera at home! I had to drive all the way back to Fayetteville (an hour's drive, round trip) while John waited patiently for me in the Blue Bird Café parking lot. This was just the start of a string of technical difficulties; some a result of operator error, some caused by faulty equipment. I was exhausted and nauseated most of the time. Of the several interviews and substantial b-roll footage shot over the course of the next couple of months, only a small portion was useable.

By June it was too hot and I was too uncomfortable to make the long, rough drive into Frog Bayou to obtain more footage. I had John come to the U of A campus on two different occasions in an attempt to get better quality interview audio using the Journalism Department's whisper booth, but even those attempts resulted in technical difficulties and poor quality audio. By this time I felt like I couldn't ask John to repeat the interview process

yet again. I was discouraged but determined to complete the film before I had the baby, so I decided to just use what I had.

### **Post Production**

I went into the editing process without any roadmap apart from the minimally constructed outline submitted to my thesis advisors earlier. I don't recommend this approach by any means, but it tends to be my default work mode. I didn't transcribe any of the interviews. Rather, I pulled clips containing relevant material into Final Cut Pro timelines organized by subject matter. I was forced to cull much of the interview footage due to poor audio, so I cobbled together the remaining footage and managed to edit a few sequences that I was fairly happy with. I quickly discovered that there were entire chunks missing from the developing narrative. I knew that I would have to get additional footage.

I spent the rest of my time that summer and early fall working on the poem sequences and scanning old family photos and slides. I was able to locate a working Super 8 and 16mm projector with the help of professor Frank Scheid in the Communications Department. I used the same video camera I had used to shoot the interviews and b-roll footage to transfer the film footage so that all of my footage would be in the same format. I was fairly pleased with the resulting imagery.

I laid down the corresponding black and white film images in each poem's timeline and began the process of matching up the imagery described in the poem with the footage I had. I discovered that I hadn't shot quite enough footage to completely cover the length of the poems, so I slowed down the footage of certain scenes as much as I could to compensate. I also needed additional imagery, so I searched through the photos and slides I had been scanning to find images that might work with the poems.

As part of my master's program, I took a couple of classes in the Art Department focusing on animation and motion design. I was eager to use techniques learned in those classes in the poem sequences. A recurring image in "Bird. Moon. Star." is the bird and its movement through the thickets. I wasn't able to get footage of this, so I had to recreate it using animation techniques. I found several images of birds online, edited them in Adobe Photoshop, and layered them over the film footage and still images in Final Cut Pro to simulate the bird's movement through the trees and in front of the moon. In the same poem, John describes the star Sirius flashing "red, white and blue" (20) as it clears the mountaintop and rises higher in the night sky. I used effects in Final Cut Pro to create and animate the star and its movement.

The biggest problem I encountered during this process was finding the right balance between literal and figurative representations of the imagery in the poems. Poetry itself is a delicate balance between the literal and figurative, so attempting to create a visual version of it can be tricky. You don't want to be too literal with the visual interpretation because you run the risk of overstating the imagery and detracting from the flow of the poetry. In addition, I felt that my animation attempts were clunky, which only compounded the issue. This was confirmed by my thesis advisors, who recommended that I redo the animation and motion effects using Adobe After Effects rather than Final Cut Pro.

As I struggled with these issues, summer drew to a close and I realized that I wasn't going to be able to complete the film before I had the baby. Since my son was born in November, I had a newborn on my hands during the winter months and I knew I was going to have to wait awhile before resuming production on the film. I felt partly guilty and partly relieved to have such a good excuse for the hiatus. Also, there's nothing like learning how to

care for another human being to put things into perspective. Now the thought of completing my film was much less daunting than the prospect of successfully raising a healthy and happy child to adulthood!

## **B. Take Two**

I used that time off to take a critical look at what I had accomplished thus far on the film, and stacked that up against my vision of what I wanted for the finished product. I always had a distinct look and feel in mind. I knew that I wanted it narrated in John's voice. I knew that I wanted the film to be shot in the dead of winter with an ending that suggested the hope of spring's return. I knew that I wanted my film to evoke the emotional honesty I felt was embodied by John and his worldview. I wanted the viewer to be moved by this film. If I didn't succeed in that, then I'd consider the film a failure. With that in mind, I knew I would have to start from scratch and reshoot the film in its entirety.

## **Pre Production**

As winter approached yet again, I began to go through all of the previously shot footage. I transcribed large sections from each of the interviews I had conducted, grouping John's responses by subject matter. From this I carved out a rough outline for the film's narrative. Since John's responses showed remarkable continuity among the various interviews, I felt confident that I would get similar phrasings in his responses when I conducted the final interviews. I revisited John's poetry and discovered a poem I had overlooked that I thought would make a good opening sequence, "First Morning Back" (Appendix C). I also found a stanza in a poem titled "Ritual" (Appendix D) that was particularly compelling and I knew I would want to include it in the film. I had already decided that I didn't want to use the animated segments and was thinking about how I

would now work the poetry into the film. I liked the idea of using a poem or a segment of a poem to serve as a transition and to set the tone.

### **Production**

By mid December of 2011, I had a fleshed out script and a detailed shot list prepared for my first shoot. This time I used the Journalism Department's recently acquired HD cameras, which recorded in full HD format. The night before I planned to depart for Frog Bayou, I set the equipment up in my living room and tested everything out. After so many past technical difficulties, I was determined to have a successful shoot. It's a good thing I did, too. It turned out that the wireless mic that had been checked out with the camera wasn't working properly. Luckily I was able to locate someone to let me into the equipment room on a Saturday morning to switch out mics before I headed out of town.

We were able to work quickly and efficiently, perhaps because we had been through the process so many times before. I had been particularly concerned that my interview footage of John would feel labored and less than authentic, but John gave candid and thoughtful responses to my questions despite having answered the same questions on numerous occasions. John turned 81 during the course of shooting, and I was a bit concerned about his physical stamina during some of our shoots. John did just fine, however, and was always more than willing to do what was needed for a particular shot.

After the initial shoot in December, I returned in early January to get footage of John making maple syrup and to get footage of the witch hazel in bloom. I had John read "Witch Hazel Advent" from the banks of the creek and got footage of him gazing at the blooms. I came back a couple of weeks later to get some shots of the interior of the house and to get some additional interview footage. It was on this particular trip that I experienced my

biggest roadblock, quite literally. On the drive in, I was scouting locations from which I could get good shots of John driving out of Frog Bayou. From the turn off on Highway 71 near Mt. Gayler, it takes a good half hour, the final five miles taking the majority of time due to the rough road conditions. I was about a mile and a half from John's when I veered off the main road to follow a little track that runs along a portion of Frog Bayou creek. This, of course, is where I got my truck hopelessly stuck in the mud. I locked the camera equipment in the truck and walked the rest of the way in. Luckily, when John and I returned in his truck with some chains, we ran into a group of hunters who were able to pull me out. Thankfully, the rest of my shoots went smoothly. I got footage of John coming in and out of Frog Bayou and shot some footage of him reading his poem, "Shooting Flowers" (Appendix H), in Fayetteville at a poetry open mic at The OMNI Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology.

### **Post Production**

By February of 2012, I was ready to start the editing process. This time I had a detailed script to serve as a guide, so I felt like I was much more prepared. Editing went fairly quickly and smoothly. I had a specific length for the film in mind- thirty minutes or so- because I had been given the opportunity to screen it as a work in progress at the 2012 Ozark Foothills Film Festival and I had told the programmers it would be about half an hour. This was also beneficial because it gave me a solid deadline to work towards- the festival screening was at the end of March.

I ran into some of the same issues I'd had previously with the poem sequences. For the opening poem, "First Morning Back", I had shot footage of John acting out some of the actions described in the poem. As I began to edit, I felt like I was detracting from the overall message of the poem by being too heavy handed with the imagery. I resolved this issue by

culling out some of the shots and only using portions of the poem until I found a balance that I was happy with. I talked to John about how he felt about my editing his poetry in that manner, and he agreed that it was necessary for the purposes of the film. I edited all the other poems used in the film in this way except for the final poem, “Witch Hazel Advent”, which I used in its entirety. I relied solely on archival images for the “Ritual” and “Fossil Laughter” (Appendix E) poem sequences and was happy with the way those turned out. For the sequence using portions from two poems combined, “Encounters” (Appendix F) and “Nonce” (Appendix G), I simply showed John walking from his house to the creek, and that seemed to work nicely. The final poem sequence, “Witch Hazel Advent”, started off with footage of John reading the poem on the creek bank and then dissolved into footage I had shot to match the imagery in the poem. Although John and I had both worried that this particular series of shots would come across as affected and disingenuous, I felt that the edited sequence ended up being emotionally honest and powerful.

I was able to get a first cut of the film completed by the March 31<sup>st</sup> festival date. I sent copies to my thesis committee and was surprised and delighted to get so much positive feedback and so little in the way of technical criticisms. The film had a very positive reception at the Ozark Foothills Film Festival in Batesville. Many audience members were eager to get their hands on a book of John’s poetry. Unfortunately, John only had a few copies of his *Bird. Moon. Star.* chapbook, which he sold immediately after the screening. I was excited to talk to an audience member who put me in touch with a small publishing house that might be interested in publishing a collection of John’s poems.

After returning from the festival, I made some minor changes to the film and did some fine-tuning on the audio. I didn’t have time to create motion effects on all the stills

used in the film prior to the screening, so I finished those using Adobe After Effects. Since completing the final version of the film, I have submitted it to several film festivals. In June of 2012, I held a special screening of the film at OMNI for family and friends, and the reception was overwhelmingly positive. Unfortunately, I recently found out that the Hot Springs International Film Festival did not accept the film. This was a real blow to me, because I've always wanted to have a film screen at this particular festival. However, the film did get accepted to the 2012 Offshoot Film Festival in Fayetteville, AR., where it will make its official Fayetteville premiere. I also plan to host a stand-alone screening at the University of Arkansas Student Union Theater.



#### **IV. SUMMARY**

I have learned several valuable lessons during the process of completing this master's thesis film project. I have learned to manage my time effectively through thorough preparation during the pre-production stage, for example. Taking the time on the front end to develop a working script, carefully plan the shoot and properly inspect the equipment leads to a smoother production experience once shooting commences. My many technical failures served to drive this point home for me on a practical level. I've also learned the value of perseverance and reinforced my artistic standards in the process. I could have settled for subpar footage during the earlier stages of production and cobbled together a fairly acceptable film, but I never would have been satisfied with the product. It took me a long time to finally do it right, but I have the satisfaction of knowing that I've produced a quality film that stands up to the original vision I had for the project. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I've learned to tell a story well. There's no good tangible explanation for this, but somewhere during the long process of making this film, I seem to have figured it out. I will credit my thesis advisors, all strong storytellers, for leading by example. However, in the end, I believe that one has to tap into an innate and intuitive ability to recognize the story and then craft it into a form that is pleasing to its audience. It is no easy feat.

## V. FILM SCRIPT

### *Witch Hazel Advent, The Story of an Ozark Poet*

(00:00;00) Scene fades up to sunlight shining through leafless trees in background, fallen log covered in moss in foreground.

Music and nats full.

John, VO (Poem)

(00:05;11) "In the yellow light of the risen sun, floating in the southeast notch,"  
(00:10;13) WS of man (John) walking down path in the woods away from camera. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(00:12;06) "I come walking towards the river over frosted moss and crisping grass."  
(00:20;02) WS John standing on creek bank looking out over the water. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(00:23;03) "I stand to listen closely to the speaking wind's low moan, consider the wisdom of loss. Noting..."

(00:33;02) MS lichen covered rocks with tree trunks in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(00:33;02) "... weather wrinkles in grey wood, cracks in lichen stone."  
(00:38;02) MS John gazing at the water, creek in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(00:39;12) "Pause to taste momentarily the ringed, packed potency in things, to sense the arc of willful chance. Turn to the new sun's glare..."

(00:51;12) CU sunlight reflecting off water at the creek's edge. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(00:51;18) "...off the ice-framed, moving mirror of the river, and just for the this brief, contracted space,"  
(00:58;10) CU John gazing at the water, creek in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(00:58;10) "Hearing a feeling the cold wind zinging past, I'm alone. And not alone."  
(01:06;16) WS John standing on creek bank looking out over the water. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(01:07;00) "Enveloped once and all. In peace, at peace, and of a piece once more with everything."

(01:16;02) Dissolve to XWS of creek, looking upstream with bare trees and mountain in background.

(01:18;20) Music swells.

(01:19;14) Fade in super: *Witch Hazel Advent, The Story of an Ozark Poet*

(01:34;01) Fade to black. Music continues.

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(01:37;04) Fade up to WS of John's house.  
(01:42;11) WS house interior: window, fireplace and rocking chair.  
(01:47;06) MS top of dresser next to John's bed, framed picture of John and his wife hanging above it. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(01:49;15) "My name is John Rule."  
(01:51;21) CU framed picture of John and his wife. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(01:52;13) "My wife, Margaret, and I bought this place in 1963."  
(01:58;03) CU stack of dictionaries next to John's rocking chair. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(01:59;02) "We were scholar gypsies and we wanted a permanent home base."  
(02:02;21) WS of John's front yard, bare trees and mountain in background. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(02:04;01) "A piece of land where we could look at the universe and really enjoy life."  
(02:09;10) MS gardening tools leaning against rock wall of house exterior. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(02:10;10) "We were actually afraid at first whether we could make a living here."  
(02:14;15) CU house interior: aloe plant in window sill next to fireplace. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(02:15;11) "But we did manage it, and we loved it."  
(02:18;07) MS fireplace, fire burning. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(02:19;04) "We were here together for forty years before I had to put Margaret into a nursing home."  
(02:24;09) XCU of placard on fireplace mantle with Margaret's name, age and date of birth and death. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(02:25;02) "She passed away in August of 2009."  
(02:30;15) Dissolve into WS of mountains. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(02:34;03) "We looked around for the cheapest places we could find in the northern tier of Arkansas counties because we loved this area, this part of the state and the nation."  
(02:44;17) CU black and white map showing counties and a circled area. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(02:45;09) "We got county maps and drew circles around every place where there seemed to be little or nothing in the way of human habitation."  
(02:53;01) MS zoom out on black and white postcard showing the view from Mt. Gayler on highway 71. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(02:53;14) "Then we went to those places, camped out, and asked if there was any land for sale."

(02:59;01) CU zoom in on topography map showing the location of John's land. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(02:59;03) "That's how we found these 151 acres in the upper Frog Bayou drainage, which we could afford because it was so cheap."

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(03:09;20) Dissolve to MS of front of John's house. Music fades out. John comes out the door holding an ax, picks up a chainsaw. Camera follows him as he walks away from house.

(Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(03:22;21) "At first we bought this part, where the house sits- this quarter of a quarter, forty acres- for about \$3 or \$4 an acre.

(03:35;05) WS of John in the distance, walking towards camera carrying a log on his shoulder. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(03:38;20) "It cost us quite a bit more to get the other half, but eventually we did get the other half, and the total cost was \$2,200.

(03:48;13) MS John starting chainsaw and preparing to cut log that lying on the ground. Nats full.

(03:56;23) CU chainsaw blade cutting into log.

(04:02;02) WS John cutting log, moves to different section of log and resumes cutting.

(04:09;06) MS John cutting through log, moves to different section and cuts through log again, shuts off chainsaw.

(04:19;18) WS John's house, John walks up to house pulling handcart full of wood. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(04:23;01) "It has a little bit of everything one would wish: heavy timber, a nice clear-running stream, three mountains, about 20 acres of bottomland."

(04:34;12) MS John pushing cart up to wood pile against wall of house, begins unloading wood from cart. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(04:36;09) "I had all kinds of plans for it. I had some idea of a sort of 19<sup>th</sup> century farm..."

(04:43;14) CU woodpile as John throws log onto it. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(04:43;14) "...in mind."

(04:49;17) MS John unloading last wood from cart, pulls cart out of frame. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(04:54;02) "Everywhere I look I can see things that did not go as I'd wished.

(05:01;18) "But, on the other hand, most of the wonderful things that have happened have been emotional. They've been developmental in me and in Margaret.

(05:12;02) MS front of John's house, John enters frame with an armload of wood and enters house. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(05:14;06) "This is where we were happiest and where we had resolved to stay as long as we possibly could."

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(05:26;20) Dissolve to zoom out of photo of John and Margaret studying in their office. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(05:28;18) "We had never had any really permanent situation in the years that we had been teaching, almost 20 years in total."

(05:36;22) MS photo of Margaret sitting next to fire pit. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(05:37;21) "Margaret and I would come work on it whenever we had vacations..."

(05:42;00) MS John standing in doorway of their cabin. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(05:42;00) "...or whenever we could get free on holidays."

(05:46;19) MS zoom in to photo of Margaret wrapped up in sleeping bag. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(05:47;21) "We'd arrive here in the night, maybe from 400 miles away, and get busy on everything."

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(05:54;18) WS photo of road with trees and mountains in the distance. Music starts.

(05:58;13) Dissolve to MS photo of Margaret sitting on rock overlook. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:00;23) "Purify, purify yourself!"

(06:02;20) Dissolve to WS photo of truck with U-Haul trailer. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:04;07) "Crawl over mountains in a blue truck."

(06:06;06) Dissolve to MS photo of Margaret with backpack. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:06;21) "Bark sweet gum trees, lumber through fords..."

(06:09;07) Dissolve to WS photo of John standing on wood pile, mountain in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:09;07) "... scratch out chickadees at dusk from their bittersweet vines."

(06:13;17) Dissolve to WS photo of mountain with moon rising over it. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:14;14) “And breaking a final tangle in weeds and moonlight, lite running, pause to kiss...”

(06:19;06) Dissolve to WS pan up photo of creek with mountain in the background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:19;06) “... the house door. Make for the rock run where water freezes starshine beneath the mountain’s back.”

(06:25;15) Dissolve to MS photo of John lying down the creek. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:27;19) “Lie down and pull the chill clean over you. Tie on and compress the grainy rocks.”

(06:33;00) Dissolve to MS zoom in photo of Margaret swimming in creek. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:34;18) “Take on stone hardness like a grand-daddy crawdad with blue-shot claws.”

(06:40;04) Dissolve to WS zoom in photo of ice covered mountain. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:41;19) “Try and make it to Frog Bayou. The way is hard. Breath comes in shudders. Mounting the cold slope, all is taken. Reaching the top, the great bloom-air burns in the chest. All is given back.”

(06:54;18) Dissolve to WS photo of mountain in fall. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(06:57;03) “Try to make it to Frog Bayou. Each day spins the planet down the track. God alone knows the circle back.”

(07:05;18) Fade to black. Music ends.

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(07:10;03) WS John standing in front of cabin.

John, SOT

(07:10;03) “When we first came in here, we’d been told that this place was up here and that no one had lived here for twenty years.”

(07:21;21) MS pan up photo of John and Margaret next to remains of old house. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(07:23;17) “There was quite a bit of wreckage from the old house, old rough-sawn boards and beams, and I...”

(07:31;11) MS John standing in front of cabin.

John, SOT

(07:31;11) “...managed to put together this...”

(07:33;06) Dissolve to WS photo of cabin. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(07:33;06) “...particular habitation. Which is not much,”

(07:38;09) WS cabin in winter. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(07:38;16) "...but it was certainly a lot of fun for us despite that."  
(07:43;17) WS zoom out photo of cabin in spring. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(07:44;16) "After we got up the little shack that we camped out in for ten years, we..."  
(07:51;05) MS John standing in front of outdoor kitchen structure.  
John, SOT  
(07:51;05) "...had to eat and take care of ourselves in the meantime, so we started cooking on..."  
(07:56;18) Dissolve to MS zoom in photo of outdoor cooking setup. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(07:56;18) "These two big rocks that are left up here in the corner of the old scrap kitchen."  
(08:02;17) Dissolve to MS photo of Margaret cooking outdoors. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(08:03;15) "My wife was a very good sport about cooking and camping out."  
(08:08;08) MS photo of Margaret putting bread into outdoor oven.  
(Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(08:08;20) "And Margaret was always willing to try something like that."  
(08:13;18) CU John in front of outdoor kitchen structure.  
John, SOT  
(08:13;18) "We were scared to try anything before we came here because we thought we would need more money. But it turned out, that basically, we just needed to be willing to do it."  
(08:24;02) MS zoom in photo of harvest display on outdoor table. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(08:25;04) "We did enjoy doing a lot with pseudo living off the land. And we tried a little bit of everything."  
(08:33;19) WS garden and shed with mountain in background. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(08:34;19) "We got around to trying wheat and rye, which did very successfully."  
(08:41;04) CU photo of wild strawberries in boxes and straw hat. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(08:42;00) "Any type of wild fruit and so forth in season, Margaret did quite a lot with that sort of thing."  
(08:49;21) MS photo of John with milk cow. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO  
(08:50;15) "And then of course, eventually we got a cow and I milked for ten years and she made five kinds of cheese."  
(08:57;15) MS zoom out photo of Margaret and John sitting at kitchen table surrounded by family. (Plays under the following VO.)  
John, VO

(08:58;15) “Margaret was such a wonderful cook and provider that we did a wonderful amount of entertaining for not having any utilities at all.”

(09:08;12) WS John’s rock house, smoke coming from chimney. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(09:10;05) “As time wore on, it seemed that we needed some place more permanent to get in to, and so we ended up living in the little house.”

(09:20;03) MS John standing in front of house.

John, SOT

(09:20;03) “I think my father said, when he first saw it, he said, ‘Well, if every rock was gold, son, you’d be a millionaire!’. So apparently I did too good a job, I suppose. But, he came up in 1973 and helped lay up...”

(09:35;13) Dissolve to WS photo of house during construction. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(09:35;13) “...double walls of rock. Some of it river rock and some of it just what we picked up around here.”

(09:43;21) WS zoom in photo John on roof of house during construction. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(09:45;00) “The roof and the framing of the house were discarded beams from an old rice mill in Stuttgart.”

(09:52;06) CU rafters from interior of house. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(09:52;21) “They’re virgin pine and about four inches thick by twelve inches wide and fourteen feet long.”

(09:59;17) CU rafters from interior of house, different angle. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:00;13) “So most of those were cut with a chainsaw into the framing for all the openings in the house as well as the roof.”

(10:09;13) MS zoom in photo of house in summer with grass growing on the sod roof. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:10;12) “It has a sodded roof. It takes a very good support for something like that.”

(10:17;09) CU roof and chimney with smoke coming out. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:18;10) “The sod has helped immensely to defeat the loss of heat from inside.”

(10:24;15) MS John starting fire in fireplace, house interior. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:27;07) “Usually, it runs about- and I’ve kept records- I keep more or less daily records...”

(10:32;06) CU John starting fire in fireplace. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:32;06) “...of weather and all. It’s ten degrees difference- eight to ten degrees difference between inside and outside all the time.”



(10:41;15) MS John sitting in rocking chair, stoking fire. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:45;09) "There is no electricity, of course, except in storms, as I say."

(10:50;14) XCU fire in fireplace, John's puts foot on hearth. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:52;02) "So there are few or no utilities except for lighting, and I hope eventually..."

(10:58;10) MS John sitting in rocking chair, looking at fire. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(10:58;10) "...to solve that with solar panels on the roof or something like that."

(11:03;23) MS John sitting in rocking chair, continued. He picks up container of water and sets it on hearth to heat up, settles back into chair and stares at fire. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(11:13;21) "It's not perfect, but it's the first real home I've had since I was taken away from the home farm in Eastern Kansas in 1936."

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Music starts.

(11:23;04) Dissolve to CU zoom out photo of John as an infant with his mother and father. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(11:28;07) "I was born December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1930, eight miles from Ottawa, KS. One of the first things I remember is when they took me- I was still in my baby shirt- to get a family portrait. The next thing that happened that I can remember was that we came down to the Ozarks in 1932 or so."

(11:50;13) XCU portrait of John as a young child with his mother. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(11:52;00) "The next thing that happened was that I and my mother were going back to Kansas."

(11:58;13) MS photo of young John sitting on porch petting a dog. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(11:59;17) "She said that I was to be a good boy and she got in the car and drove off."

(12:06;18) MS zoom in photo of young John sitting on porch with his grandmother and another young child. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(12:08;10) "I asked my grandmother what reason my mother gave her for leaving me with her and leaving dad, and the ostensible reason that she gave was that it would kill my father if she took me with her. The actual reason, I believe, was that she was in love with another man. Of course, I loved grandmother, I loved the farm."

(12:36;19) MS photo of John's father holding a fishing rod and displaying a mess of fish next to an old pickup truck. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(12:37;15) "But in 1936, my dad came back from his various jobs that he'd had to take with my new mother..."

(12:47;07) XCU of framed photo of John as a young boy. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(12:47;07) "... and picked me up, and we drove all the way back to the East Texas oil fields in her Model T."

(12:55;22) Dissolve to XCU of typewriter as John is typing. Music fades. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(12:57;21) (John reads what he's typing.) "Suddenly they were poorer than ever. His dad was looking for a job to supplement the newspaper bundle delivery route. He met a farmer who..."

(13:06;03) CU John as he's typing. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(13:06;03) "...offered them a place to stay in a tenant house..." (Fades out as John's VO comes in.)

(13:08;08) "What I'm writing about right now is about ten to twelve years of..."

(13:12;09) XCU John's fingers on keys as he types. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(13:12;09) "...nomadic existence going from one place to another."

(13:16;00) XCU John's face as he's typing. He leans forward to look at his notes. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(13:16;00) "My father used to boast that I was in and out of twenty schools in a year and a half."

(13:19;18) CU of clipboard holding John's notes.

(13:20;20) Dissolve to MS photo of John holding a younger sibling, standing with two other young siblings. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(13:23;17) "It wasn't actually until about the fifth grade that I began to be at home in school, in all the different schools that I had attended."

(13:33;11) CU zoom in photo of John from his senior year of high school. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(13:34;07) "And then, after finishing high school in Stuttgart, Arkansas, I got a small journalism scholarship to the College of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Arkansas. And, unfortunately, there was some kind of a scandal in the Journalism Department that year that ended the program, and the next year I came up to the University of Arkansas with \$25."

(13:57;21) WS photo of students walking to class on U of A campus. Music fades up. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(14:00;17) "I had to work in order to go to school, and I decided at that time to go into the Army and get the G.I. Bill."

(14:08;22) MS zoom in photo of John in Army standing with other young men in uniform. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(14:09;16) "I didn't conceive that there could be other very difficult situations arising from Army service. I got through all right and got out in January of '55."

(14:24;20) CU pan up photo of John eating from bowl. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(14:24;20) "I was behind Margaret several years because of my Army service and my financial difficulties."

(14:34;18) CU Margaret's student activity card from U of A. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(14:35;14) "Margaret, meanwhile, was already working on a doctorate in English, but decided to switch into Languages, with a major in German and Comparative Literature."

(14:47;15) CU photo of portrait of Margaret. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(14:48;18) "Margaret happened to be in one of my seminars in English literature, and she attracted the attention of everyone because..."

(14:55;22) Dissolve to CU photo of portrait of Margaret, different pose. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(14:55;22) "...she had such an incisive, penetrating mind and was such a vibrant personality that she communicated beautifully."

(15:05;10) Dissolve to CU photo of portrait of Margaret, different pose. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(15:07;21) "We had so much in common, except for, of course, a sixteen year age difference and the fact that she had four children."

(15:16;03) MS zoom in, pan down photo portrait of Margaret and her children. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(15:17;09) "I was quite struck by their family life. The fact that Margaret could make such a successful family situation- keep them healthy and happy. And I was really impressed by what they were able to do on very little, almost nothing, really."

(15:36;03) MS photo of Margaret holding up book with papers and smiling. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(15:37;21) "I didn't- had never met anyone as vibrant and wonderful to share life with as this person was."

(15:47;04) MS zoom out photo of John fishing in boat. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(15:48;19) "At the same time, I wasn't really certain that this would work, so I had to go off to teach and survey the possibilities elsewhere."

(15:59;01) MS photo of John holding bow in field. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(15:48;19) "And I did that, at Idaho State, for '59 through '61."

(16:05;14) CU photo portrait of Margaret and John in photo booth. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(16:07;10) “Finally, I just said, ‘Come on out and we’ll get married at midterm of the first year, 1960. So that’s what we did.”

(16:17;06) Dissolve to CU photo portrait of Margaret and John in photo booth, different pose. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(16:19;17) “I wasn’t sure that I could live with anyone. But Margaret convinced me that I was wrong about that.”

(16:25;11) Dissolve to CU photo portrait of Margaret and John in photo booth, different pose. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(16:25;18) “And I’ve been eternally grateful that she was such a tremendously affirmative...”

(16:31;06) Dissolve to CU photo portrait of Margaret and John in photo booth, different pose. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(16:31;23) “...human spirit.”

(16:36;13) Music fades out.

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(16:38;05) Fade up MS zoom in, pan left photo of Margaret and John walking along a street in Chicago. Music starts. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(16:45;15) “Memories now, what’s left for me alone to hold, of us together, since hers has ebbed away.”

(16:55;17) Dissolve to MS photo Margaret and John smiling. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(16:59;02) “All those lovely life sounds, that daily dance of laughing games,”

(17:04;14) Dissolve to MS photo of Margaret and John holding up wine glasses. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(17:05;11) “...moving, cooking, loving.”

(17:08;09) Dissolve to WS pan up photo of abstract image of a person walking towards camera. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(17:08;09) “Sucked away long since by sinister cell chemistry.”

(17:15;21) Dissolve to MS zoom in photo of John sitting in creek. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(17:15;21) “And even for me, that golden pod of time shines distant and discrete. A dome of light and lightness.”

(17:25;02) Dissolve to CU photo of Margaret and John walking along a street in Chicago. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(17:25;02) “A glowing water ball shielding fragrant days of silk and glide and taste. Double sensation. A sweet and lightsome sharing,”

(17:36;22) Dissolve to WS photo of abstract sun setting behind trees and rooftop. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(17:36;22) "...now seen far off through smudgy lens, from some dark winter wood."

(17:47;01) Fade to black. Music fades out.

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(17:54;08) Fade up to MS John sitting in chair next to window.

John, SOT

(17:55;04) "There was quite an age difference between Margaret and me. I was thirty when we married and she was forty-six. It didn't matter at first, because she had such a youthful..."

(18:08;12) MS Margaret in dress and sunglasses standing on creek bank. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(18:08;12) "...personality anyway, and a very vital and vibrant personality."

(18:12;21) MS zoom out photo of Margaret standing in river fishing next to boat. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(18:13;07) "And had such a wide a range of interests from dancing and swimming- she was a water safety instructor-"

(18:21;09) MS Margaret holding doctorate diploma with family. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(18:21;12) "...to the life of the mind and everything, and drama- all that sort of thing."

(18:27;01) MS photo of Margaret and John sitting on porch. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(18:27;07) "There was no difference between us. In many ways, she was much younger than I was."

(18:31;20) MS of Margaret and John sitting on rock wall in front of flower garden. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(18:32;09) "But, after the years wore on, after quite a number of years, actually..."

(18:37;10) MS zoom in photo of Margaret and John sitting on porch. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(18:37;12) "...I began to notice certain changes in her. One evening, as we were getting ready for bed, she said to me..."

(18:47;01) MS John sitting in chair next to window.

John, SOT

(18:47;01) "I think it would be quite alright for you to stay tonight. And I don't particularly care what the neighbors think. Well this just went all over me. I just said, 'Why, dear', I said, 'We're married'. And she said, 'Oh, that's good!' and went right ahead with her bed preparations and so forth. And I went outside to be with myself for a moment. I realized that things would never be the same again."

(19:16;20) MS Margaret in hat and dress standing in front of old chimney ruins. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(19:17;16) “As the mind loses control, it loses also its sense of stability and its idea of emotional home.”

(19:27;14) MS John sitting in chair next to window.

John, SOT

(19:27;14) “And eventually I could not rush off to the nearest town to get a few groceries or anything, because she would not, she would panic within a very short time, and I would meet her...”

(19:40;18) MS Margaret walking through flower garden. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(19:40;18) “...on our home trail when I was coming back, even though I was only gone let's say an hour and a half. So I realized then that I could never leave her again.”

(19:50;18) MS zoom in photo of Margaret and John standing in front of bamboo thicket. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(19:50;18) “So we stayed as long as we could, until she put herself at risk and she had to have a life saving operation. And after that, of course, there was no question of her ever coming back to Frog Bayou and to our existence here.”

(20:06;04) CU photo of Margaret with head on hand, looking contemplative and sad. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(20:07;00) “During those years in the nursing home, Margaret at first was quite cognizant of me, but later on, she began to say things that always affect a person...”

(20:17;23) CU photo of Margaret looking into camera smiling with bright eyes. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(20:17;23) “...who is close to an Alzheimer's patient. And she would say things like, 'Where's my husband? Where's John? I haven't seen that rascal in days!'”

(20:29;22) MS John sitting in chair next to window.

John, SOT

(20:29;22) “And, of course, this sort of shocked me at first. I said, 'Why, I'm your husband!' And at that particular instance, she looked at me closely and said, 'That's too bad'. So I've saved a lot of these. But this did affect me at first rather deeply. It isn't personal; it's the effect of the condition itself.”

(20:56;19) CU photo of Margaret and John smiling, John's arm around her. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(20:57;10) “After about three years of helping her...”

(21:03;03) Dissolve to CU photo of Margaret and John kissing, John's arm around her. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(21:03;03) “...to feed, helping her to move and walk, dance and this sort of thing, as long as we could...”

(21:10;13) Dissolve to CU photo of Margaret and John, Margaret's face hidden on John's shoulder. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(21:10;13) "...until her mind no long trusted anything, didn't even trust my help, really..."

(21:17;21) MS zoom out photo of John sitting on creek bank with dog. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(21:17;21) "...I finally began to resume some of my life down here. It was quite an emotional thing for me to resume more..."

(21:27;21) MS John sitting in chair next to window.

John, SOT

(21:27;21) "...of each week here in the woods after several years of being away."

---

(21:37;20) MS John picking greens in his garden. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(21:40;09) "I have a sort of double love for both this rustic situation and life in town."

(21:49;21) WS John walking from garden towards camera, carrying greens. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(21:51;16) "And this is the sort of double life I'm leading now- I'm getting two stimulations during the week. And at the same time, I do feel a certain sense of guilt that I'm not here doing more with raising my food and so forth."

John, SOT

(22:06;13) "A little something."

(22:09;10) WS of John's house, John comes out carrying bags and sets them down on table next to front door.

(22:16;23) MS John locking door, gathering up bags and walking away from house. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(22:19;11) "I usually try to stay here and only come in on weekends. So I try to be here four or five days and in town two or three days."

(22:38;21) WS John getting into his truck, closes door. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(22:42;12) "Well, this weekend, I'll be reading..."

(22:44;01) CU OMNI bumper sticker on John's truck. John starts truck. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(22:44;01) "...some poetry at the OMNI Center, so I'm going into town for that."

(22:48;09) WS John's truck pulling out of driveway away from camera, exits frame.

(22:59;04) MS John opening metal gate, getting back into truck. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:02;09) "After I decided to take up my life again, I became involved in OMNI. This is an NGO which has a triple thrust..."

(23:14;13) WS John driving by in truck on dirt road, trees and mountain in background.  
(Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:14;13) "...of peace, justice in society, and ecology."

(23:22;10) CU John driving. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:23;11) "Of course, I was in favor of all those things myself."

(23:27;00) WS view of road from John's perspective, driving. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:27;04) "Although I had been in the Army during the Korean war..."

(23:30;20) CU John driving. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:30;22) "...I do not believe in killing humans to solve our problems."

(23:35;18) WS John's truck in distance, driving down dirt road away from camera, trees and mountain in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:37;19) "I think it's the wrong way to be at war with our environment as well."

(23:46;09) WS exterior of house.

(23:46;22) Fade in super: OMNI Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology/ Fayetteville, Arkansas

(23:50;06) Fade out super. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:50;17) "I think it's a..."

(23:51;16) CU OMNI Center sign next to mailbox in front of house. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:51;16) "...wonderful clearing house for people who believe..."

(23:54;16) MS John talking to friends inside OMNI house. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(23:55;12) "...in these three aspects of society and improvement in them.

(24:01;12) MS John talking to OMNI director about poetry.

John, SOT

(24:01;12) "You know, Archibald MacLeish says, 'A poem should not *mean* something, but *be* something.'"

(24:07;21) John continues talking to OMNI director about poetry. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(24:07;21) "And this has meant a great deal to me."

(24:10;04) John continues talking to OMNI director about poetry.

John, SOT

(24:10;04) "You shouldn't see any of the mechanics of it."

(24:12;11) MS audience members watching John read his poetry. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(24:13;17) "But today, there is this urban savage, this Winchester barbarian..."



(24:17;12) MS audience members watching John read his poetry. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(24:17;12) "...his cut-out buddies and four-barrel aunts..."

(24:19;22) MS John sitting on stool reading his poetry in front of audience.

John, SOT

(24:19;22) "...acting out Looney Tunes on Route 66: flatten that rabbit! Plough that cat into the runway until just a wistful lithograph remains. Those Orientals have no respect for life like us- they torture our crew-cut millennial flyboys, you know. Looking to the future..."

(24:38;13) MS audience members watching John read his poetry. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(24:38;13) "...all this is more practice for the cosmic range."

(24:42;21) MS John sitting on stool reading his poetry in front of audience.

John, SOT

(24:42;21) "In much the same way, raptly chanting numbers and eyeing a scanner screen, tracking sparkling moths in the petals of a nebula, someone will shoot live planets."

(24:56;03) MS John standing up, zoom out to WS of audience clapping as John returns to his seat.

---

(25:06;00) WS highway 71 at Mt. Gayler, John's truck drives by. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(25:10;13) "It's like taking a shower-bath to come back into the woods after all the complication and frustrations I hear about from people who live there, in town."

(25:19;23) WS John's truck diving down dirt road in Winfrey Valley. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(25:22;08) "It seems to me as though people..."

(25:24;12) XWS John's truck diving down dirt road in Winfrey Valley. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(25:24;12) "...are highly stressed these days."

(25:27;14) WS John's truck in distance, driving away from camera on dirt road, trees and mountain in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(25:28;12) "There's hardly a neighbor who doesn't have some thing about his neighbor next door that he would rather change if he could."

(25:39;01) WS John's truck driving through creek, truck continues to drive towards camera on dirt road, trees and mountain in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(25:40;10) "I don't have that here. I have just the opposite, so that I'm actually many times lonesome for..."

(25:49;06) WS dirt road with cemetery in background, John's truck enters frame and stops near cemetery sign. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(25:49;06) "...someone of my own species who understands and feels in similar ways, so there's no real conflict."

(26:00;10) WS John walking towards cemetery gate, cemetery sign in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(26:03;18) "It's only a mile and a third down the trail, so I get to stop most of the times I get by..."

(26:10;14) WS John standing next to Margaret's grave, truck and cemetery gate in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(26:10;14) "...although it's getting now so that I don't stop every time. I simply murmur something to her memory and come on."

(26:21;07) CU of headstone on Margaret's grave. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(26:21;19) "I put a small inscription under her name and dates that says 'a vibrant loving life', and I put a small frog figure up in the corner of the stone, which didn't mean anything more than Frog Bayou."

---

(26:35;14) Dissolve to CU of 'Rule' sign on tree. John's truck can be heard driving up.

(26:37;22) Music starts, full.

(26:40;19) WS 'Rule' sign and road, John's truck drives by.

(26:51;12) WS John's truck driving through gate into his yard towards camera.

(27:02;02) MS John backing truck into parking spot near kitchen structure.

(27:14;15) WS John's house, John enters frame and walks towards house carrying bags.

(27:27;02) MS John entering house, starts to put bags onto bed.

(27:35;16) WS of John's house.

(27:40;04) CU of smoke coming out of chimney.

(27:44;17) CU John striking match to light lamp.

(27:52;11) Music fades to lower level.

(27:53;14) CU John lighting lamp, puts chimney back on lamp. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(27:55;21) "After a person loses a beloved life partner who gave a lot of..."

(28:02;14) MS John lighting other lamp on fireplace mantel. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(28:02;14) "...structure to one's life, and you're suddenly faced with the challenge of a single life, I've really had to change a lot. It's a totally different existence."

(28:23;19) WS time-lapse of sun setting behind mountain and trees. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(28:27;06) "There are, of course, difficult times. As you get older- I'm eighty-one now- and wake up at 4:48 in the morning and think about all the really nice persons that you knew who are now gone..."

(28:43;01) CU lamp shining through window of house. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(28:44;23) "...why this is always a rather sobering time, and it's certainly..."

(28:44;23) MS John sitting in rocking chair, writing by lamplight. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(28:44;23) "...something that I think one *should* worry about."

(28:52;17) XCU of paper John is writing on. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(28:53;06) "You should think about life, you should think about becoming stronger..."

(28:57;09) MS John sitting in rocking chair, writing by lamplight. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(28:57;09) "...as your body becomes weaker."

(28:59;22) XCU John's face backlit by the lamplight as he writes. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(29:00;16) "Getting the ultimate value that you can out of life with you mind."

(29:06;00) MS John sitting in rocking chair, writing by lamplight. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(29:06;00) "If you have your memory, you have relative health and you have a few good friends, when you're..."

(29:11;05) CU fire burning in fireplace. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(29:11;05) "...beached on the sands of time, I think that's more than a great many of us could hope for."

(29:20;10) WS time-lapse of sunrise, mountain in trees in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(29:28;09) "The chance of life and the chance of actually being a seeing intelligence is one of the greatest gifts of existence."

---

(29:41;10) WS of John's house. John emerges from house, picks up ax and walks out of frame. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(29:55;23) "What do you people find to do here all day?" my urban friend inquired. And picturing the intense, antic, and narrow fabric of his own life, all nestled in the humming, cultured fury of the hive, I only shook my head."

(30:11;15) WS John walking towards camera on path through woods. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(30:12;21) "Mulling the ruby-bright events that spice my hours, make a kaleidoscope of feeling, a calendar of colored life."

(30:21;08) WS John walking away from camera on path through woods, pauses to inspect something on a tree branch. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(30:23;03) "Such rare moments compress my woods hermit days..."

(30:27;09) MS John looking at tree branch, continues walking. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(30:28;02) "...into beads I tell over and over like prayers, a spirit diary."

(30:36;03) WS of creek and gravel bar, trees and mountain in background. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(30:38;03) "Years ago, I was..."

(30:40;04) MS of John walking into witch hazel thicket on creek bank. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(30:40;04) "...going along a rapid about like this, close to the water and through a witch hazel thicket..."

(30:46;19) CU of witch hazel blooms. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(30:46;20) "They grow in this splayed out manner, so I had to..."

(30:50;13) MS of John walking into witch hazel thicket on creek bank. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(30:50;13) "...duck my head, and I ran my face right into..."

(30:53;23) CU of John standing in witch hazel thicket, looking up at the blooms. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(30:53;23) "...a bunch of these little blooms."

(30:56;20) CU of witch hazel blooms. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO

(30:57;02) "And sure enough, it turned out to be flowers blooming this time of year- January- so..."

(31:03;04) MS John sitting on creek bank holding his poetry chapbook.

John, SOT

(31:03;04) "...I wrote this poem: Witch Hazel Advent. Sometime in antique winter as I go, kicking a powder scuff of snow by noisy hard-blue water, dodging splayed branches with my head..."

(31:21;07) Dissolve to CU of witch hazel blooms. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(31:21;16) "...a sudden constellation of spiny yellow stars with blood coronas dances in my gaze."

(31:29;03) MS witch hazel blooms seen through tangle of branches. Focus rolls to blurry, abstract image. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(31:29;03) "A faintest call, an excuse, a beeswax hint of fossil summers tingles round the crystal air."

(31:38;18) Dissolve to XCU of witch hazel blooms, John's face out of focus in background. Focus rolls to John's face. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(31:39;04) "If this faint scent is not a real one, but just that these crinkly spider stars pluck on some cobweb memory from my elastic life..."

(31:50;12) Dissolve to CU of John sitting on creek bank looking at the witch hazel blooms next to him. Music fades in. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(31:51;20) "...at any rate, I know them gladly. My being draws a breath and sees past ancient ice down the..."

(32:01;06) XCU John's face looking at the witch hazel blooms. (Plays under the following VO.)

John, VO (Poem)

(32:01;06) "...shoulder of the year towards on more gratis resurrection."

John, SOT

(32:11;08) "It is truly, in a spiritual way, a very beautiful time of year."

(32:22;18) Dissolve to WS of creek with gravel bar, trees and mountains in background. Music rises to full.

(32:31;06) Dissolve to MS of trees reflected in creek water.

(32:35;08) Fade in super: a film by Sarah Moore Chyrchel

(32:40;20) Fade out super.

(32:44;22) Dissolve to XCU of witch hazel blooms.

(32:46;22) Fade in super: with original music by Dan Dean and Sarah Moore Chyrchel

(32:52;22) Fade out super.

(32:57;15) Fade in super: University of Arkansas/ Faculty Advisors:/ Dale Carpenter/ Robert Cochran/ Larry Foley

(33:03;16) Fade out super.

(33:06;18) Fade in super: Special thanks to my family,

(33:11;00) Fade out super.

(33:13;18) Fade in super: OMNI Center for Peace, Justice/ and Ecology

(33:19;19) Fade out super.

(33:22;22) Fade in super: and to my grandfather,/ John R. Rule

(33:29;02) Fade out super.

(33:30;09) Fade to black. Fade music out.

(33:32;20) Fade in super: This film is a production of/ the University of Arkansas/ Lemke Department of Journalism/ ©2012

(33:36;03) Fade out super.

(33:37;06) Film ends.

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## APPENDIX A

BIRD. MOON. STAR by John R. Rule

Mapling late  
caught by winter dusk  
beside the river thickets  
I'm standing here bemused  
stick-like  
watching the zigzag  
synaptic hops  
of one belated bird  
threading a thick twig maze  
backlit by the moon.

It seems to be food-hunting  
its unhurried way  
up and out-  
maybe as bemused and delayed  
as I am,  
held in this web  
of water sound and witchhazel scent  
drifting from the rocky bar.

The bird launches softly  
from a final twig  
just as Sirius  
flashing red-white-blue  
clears the ridge.

This morning I stood on  
that rocky bar  
studying a jackstraw pattern  
of peeled sticks  
from a beaver breakfast-  
a shimmering crisscross on bedrock bottom-  
seeking clues to riddles even there,  
and even in the massed pebbles  
she thrilled to gather daily  
at summer bathing times.  
Naked and wandering  
scanning for fossils  
we'd air-dry before dressing  
One day a bleating fawn  
ran splashing toward  
our bent brown forms.

That day- that perfect day-  
I can still hold  
but she can never regain.  
Unlike the small bird-  
a kinglet, perhaps-  
that hopped across the moon  
and flew away,  
and may be back with dawn,  
her dancing inner balance  
flew off at once one year  
and lost those days forever.

And now she talks and laughs  
and sings  
with nameless ghosts  
I never met  
in places where  
I cannot follow

While I'm still here  
where we were once together,  
still looking for outer clues  
to inner puzzles,  
defeated by the bland face  
of the moon,  
by the star flashing back  
because! because!  
to all my silent questions.

And yet I linger, tranced  
in hazel spice and darkness,  
by water music.

Seeing again  
that feathered scrap of life  
working its confident way  
like a single searching thought  
rising to break free  
and flit across the moon.

At least I have the setting.  
May it be enough.

## APPENDIX B

### WITCHHAZEL ADVENT (HAMAMELIS) by John Rule

Sometime in antique winter  
as I go  
kicking a powder scuff of snow  
by noisy hard-blue water  
dodging splayed branches  
with my head  
a sudden constellation  
of spiny yellow stars With blood coronas  
dances in my gaze

A faintest call, an excuse  
a beeswax hint of fossil summers  
tingles round the crystal air

If this faint scent is not a real one  
but just that these  
crinkly spider stars  
pluck on some cobweb memory  
from my elastic life  
at any rate I know them gladly-  
My being draws a breath  
and sees past ancient ice  
down the shoulder of the year  
toward one more  
gratis  
resurrection.



## APPENDIX C

### FIRST MORNING BACK by John R. Rule

In the yellow light  
of the risen sun  
floating  
in the southeast notch  
I come walking  
toward the river  
over frosted moss  
and crisping grass  
cheeks already burnt  
by a keen north breeze  
that gusts and shivers  
tall tops of creaking sweetgums  
dancing their dangling  
squadrons  
of long-stemmed beaky  
seedballs  
against a pale blue sky  
strewn with pink  
ice-crystal  
marestails

I stand to listen closely  
to the speaking wind's  
low moan,  
consider the wisdom  
of loss,  
noting  
weather wrinkles  
in gray wood  
cracks in lichen stone  
Picture  
the bullet-fall  
of winged gum seeds  
poised  
high in their spikey  
life-stars  
ready  
for the signal to fire,  
to mimic in micro  
those far star-bursts  
that made us all

Pause to taste momentarily  
the ringed, packed  
potency  
in things,  
to sense  
the arc of willful  
chance

Turn to  
the new sun's glare  
off the ice-framed moving  
mirror of the river

And just for this  
brief  
contracted space-  
hearing and feeling  
the cold wind zinging past-  
I am alone  
and not alone-  
enveloped  
once and all-  
in peace  
at peace  
and of a piece once more  
with everything.

## APPENDIX D

AFTER HAN SHAN (RITUAL) by John R. Rule

So having crossed the seas  
noting graffiti on broken bunkers  
run to work down cobbled streets  
bargained for ounces of smoked flesh  
tried to hide in a forest  
of Sunday strollers  
been smacked each day  
by double-breasted duty in a hard surface  
suit

and returned to the jungles  
of your own society,  
slipping past imploring  
carbon-eyed brats  
bland deans and fuzzy grad assistants

Then PURIFY PURIFY yourself  
in a steam of midnight musings  
crawl over mountains in a blue truck  
bark sweetgum trees  
lumber through fords  
scratch out chickadees at dusk  
from their bittersweet vines  
and breaking a final tangle  
in weeds and moonlight  
light running  
pause to kiss the house door  
make for the rock run  
where water freezes starshine  
beneath the mountain's back

Lie down and pull the chill clean  
over you  
tie on and compress the grainy rocks  
take on stone hardness  
like a granddaddy crawdad with blue-shot  
claws  
switching feelers madly back  
past jewelled eyes  
Bite on maple twigs  
scrub seedballs in your hair  
and naked after midnight

as constellations wheel around  
your chimney rock  
watch mist-men rise from hidden benches.

Try and make it to Frog Bayou  
The way is hard; breath comes in shudders  
Mounting the cold slope all is taken  
Reaching the top, the grape bloom air  
burns in the chest:  
all is given back.

Try to make it to Frog Bayou.  
Each day spins the planet down the track.  
God alone knows the circle  
back .

## APPENDIX E

FOSSIL LAUGHTER by John R. Rule

Memory's now  
what's left for me alone  
to hold  
of us together  
since hers has ebbed away:  
all those lovely life sounds,  
that daily dance of laughing games-  
moving, cooking, loving-  
sucked away long since  
by sinister cell chemistry

And even for me  
that golden pod of time  
shines distant and discrete-  
a dome of life and lightness-  
a glowing waterball shielding  
fragrant days of silken glide and taste,  
doubled sensation,  
a sweet and lightsome sharing

now viewed far off  
through smudgy lens  
from some dark winter wood

while all her own  
poor remnant of recall  
fades like colored newsprint  
burning, crinkling fast  
in a blackened grate-  
the headlines dying last-  
leaving my name alone,  
a final noun in railroad Gothic,  
to signal my mere presence:

a bedside figure  
whom she thanks  
most graciously  
for simple acts of kindness-  
assures me (whoever I am to her.  
I'm no longer sure)  
that it will be all right

if I should wish to linger-  
or even spend the night

Then taking my hand in both of hers  
she gazes into my eyes  
and in that sexy-throaty tone  
that pulled me in her life  
a full half-century ago  
she asks me  
like she *really* wants to know  
How's my own family?  
Aren't they jealous of  
this time I spend with her?

And,  
Where's my wife?

## APPENDIX F

### ENCOUNTERS by John R. Rule

What do you people find  
to do here all day?  
my urban friend inquired.  
And picturing the intense, antic,  
and narrow fabric of his own-  
a round kicked off  
by wake-up clock and music,  
tuned-in voice and image,  
of working valves and buttons  
for power, water, packaged food-  
all nestled in the humming cultured fury  
of the hive

I only shook my head  
mulling  
the ruby-bright events  
that spice my hours,  
make a kaleidoscope  
of feeling, a calendar  
of colored life:

Eight gray deer stalking  
on hind legs  
to browse in autumn mist  
A pulsing round bouquet  
of butterflies  
perched on a caked cow turd  
And piercing the woodland hush  
the measured croaking of a cuckoo,  
the counterpoint music  
of a thrush  
The wavering elegiac tone  
of late cicada drone  
and clear-winged rattle  
of cruising dragonflies  
The flowing liquid motion  
like black dew  
and detailed minute fingers  
of a shrew

And mini-dramas too  
that catch me:

One frozen instant  
in January snow  
facing a bristling  
brush wolf  
Or leaping beyond a copperhead  
in August  
seen too late  
Dodging a hummer  
buzzing in my face  
to sip my red bandanna

I treasure  
that evening time  
with my mate  
watching a bright young mink  
catching its fast-food feast  
of crawfish  
from a spring-fed run  
popping back atop  
the same flat dinner boulder  
then in again  
A furred and graceful fish-form  
adorned in streaming bubbles  
the tail a caudal fin  
until unnoticed at the end  
we came away replete  
with some shared sense  
of one small secret life

Or maybe that special morning  
of mist and fog at five  
crouching alone  
on my bamboo thicket  
toilet throne  
drowsily alive  
when a sibilant rush came down  
and eight small owls  
stood perched around me-  
cooing, gurgling, conversing-  
stretching their downy necks  
to eye my shrinking self  
all hunkered in a ball

but then were mystically  
gone!  
I blinked , exhaled  
said "Damn!"  
too loud, I guess  
'cause here they came again  
went through the whole routine  
then vanished  
and my own began  
enriched with laughter

Only that day dawns for us  
of which we are truly aware  
Thoreau said truly  
and I remember now  
just how my head  
snapped painfully alert  
from sleep one summer dawn  
chilled with snake-fear  
and slowly craned to see  
perched on my chest  
a wren  
that trilled a wake- up greeting  
and buzzed off

Perhaps the same pert wren  
all tweedy brown  
that landed with a thump  
upon the crown  
of my old camo hat  
as I stood playing statues-  
gathering wool

These shocks that country flesh  
is heir to  
come swiftly and unprogrammed  
like the impact on my chest  
of a red squirrel bailing out  
as all unknowing  
I chopped the sprout  
that held its leafy nest

Or how about the mouse  
that galloped up my arm  
and off my ear  
as I bent down too near

and reached to scoop  
the evening feed

And this list  
Could never be complete  
without the case  
of the blacksnake  
in the shed  
fallen in a rubbery wreath  
about my head  
and hissing in my face

Or maybe the splashing race  
up the middle of the creek  
a spotted fawn made  
fooled by my  
croquet-wicket stance  
banking on the chance  
that I might be his mama

Bending over is dangerous  
it seems  
around some mammals:  
our berry-picking friend  
found that out  
Who straightened up to face  
a crouching cougar

But even a bulling cow's bawl  
can be a wake-up call  
when hoofs come sailing  
over your shoulders

Twin fawns with spotted rumps  
bounced up to where I stood  
all humped  
and dug and dumped dark sod  
in my June garden  
but then stayed curious  
snorting and stamping  
tiny forefeet  
at my talk:  
"You kids better  
take a walk  
before my dogs smell deer!"

I'd saved another bounding by,  
snatched up by the legs  
and held like a jerking spring  
above my head  
above my leaping hound  
Did the same boon  
one summer night  
to save a nursing coon-  
held up the struggling dog  
to let her get away

Oh no,  
there's seldom a dull day  
where life cycles  
leap and play  
pursue, devour  
unfold and flower

Hour by hour  
some shining fragment of  
this living mystery  
takes place  
whether or not  
we have the grace  
to see

Beside the benefits  
of heightened sense  
and tightened skin  
something expands within-  
lets in  
that hidden universe  
supporting us  
we scarcely notice  
living  
buried among men,  
revives an ancient ken  
that's been allowed to wither  
in our race

Yes, something Eden-like  
expands inside  
each time  
I step around a bush  
to face- red, white, and blue-  
some patriotic gobbler

Or wake to see a snuffing bear  
swinging his head  
as my old bitch  
rowf-rowfs at him  
from some safe niche  
behind the kitchen  
Then dash out  
to watch old bruin  
run off looking back  
bounding sidewise  
like animated bedsprings

Or in fitful Spring  
mark with surprise  
the starburst prinking out  
of mountain slopes  
by sarvis trees  
Relish the slow unfolding  
as bud-veils  
champagne and goldy-green  
drift across the scene

Or drift oneself in a glassy pool  
at summer's end  
as I did once  
with one dear friend  
while bumptious black Lab Teddy  
rummaged a root-wad curtain  
suspended from the bank  
wagging his furious tail  
(for certain something  
musky-delicious  
no doubt  
stank  
within that hole)  
"Teddy, back out!"  
I called  
just as a sour-faced chocolatey  
boar mink  
emerged between Ted's legs  
trotted along the bluff  
and up and out of sight  
as Ted still fought the fight  
with roots and rocks  
Still flailed his tail  
(that metronome of doggy life)

that of a sudden ceased

Ted's shaggy mug came forth  
and rose and sniffed the breeze  
gave out a wondering wheeze  
and snuffle  
He did a double shuffle  
took on a look  
of pure befuddlement-  
an I've been snookered look-  
and far too late  
hot-footed in pursuit

We laughed and floated on-  
Fat tadpoles in  
the bath of life  
and watched a star come out-  
Basked on the cusp of things  
(savoring both  
the kernel and the husk  
of being)

and reached our yard gate  
in a golden dusk.

## APPENDIX G

### NONCE (IT MUST BE WILD)

Beyond my door crack  
twenty feet  
muscled and fur-mottled  
taupe and blond and tawny  
the dog coyote  
aligns itself  
stiff and snout forward  
with the drifting food scent  
it traced upslope

Once, years before  
in snow  
I'd been this close  
only to say boo!  
and watch coiled fluid force  
reverse and drive its form  
through and over all  
to a last triumphant leap  
and gone!  
as now

Such rare moments  
compress my woods- hermit days  
into beads I tell over and over  
like prayers, a spirit diary

Our first year here  
innocent and quick  
beneath the supper table  
white-footed mice took cracker bits  
from the hand

Grey fox pups peeped from their rock  
to spy our breakfast

The vixen barked a raucous greeting  
and fetched our supper scraps to them

The roadrunner flared its shining crest  
and met me at the door.

The 'coon nightly unscrewed the cap

to the cooking grease

Luckily I noticed the solitary wasp  
stuffing my gun barrel  
with eggs and larvae

That drought summer a hummer on the  
hammock  
stepped sideways to spear my sour  
bandanna  
and shake its head in disbelief

Only that once a Virginia rail appeared  
trotting along the ghost of rail fence

One final summer  
the tanager's stuttering song  
defined our clearing

And twice a redstart hung above us  
flaring its butterfly wings

After a storm a rose-breasted grosbeak  
came to call

That one spring  
a whippoorwill on the gatepost  
hammered our ears till dawn

one evening a trio of tiny owls  
fluttered above our heads  
in whickering passion

Just that one summer  
The black-crowned night heron  
graced its favored rock  
above the rapids

And once I saw five wood duck babies  
race across our pond  
and back to mother



for their first and final season  
I flushed a cock grouse in our yard  
and heard their fruitless drumming  
for their mates

And one time only  
five harsh-voiced cranes  
sailed past the mess hall  
to flare and settle  
on our stream

Once only we stood  
nude, thigh-deep, and bathing  
when with swoop and flutter  
a heron lit beside us

That privileged time alone I witnessed  
speckled kingsnakes twining and vibrating  
in a bright cadeucis  
across spring grass

It was destiny that I came upon  
a watery pas de deux  
of joyous snappers  
long necks grazing and caressing  
careening around their bedrock pool  
transformed by desire  
from ungainly to unearthly

It is a discipline to set self aside  
to watch, say, a fire-blue skinklet  
slowly map the thickets  
on my hairy leg  
while a harvestman pair below  
do-si-dos against my toes

Even their arts enrich me  
like the once-found, cunning  
doorless, straw-ball nest  
of a golden mouse-  
face-high in our thicket

This is beyond price  
what's the value  
if I watch a sun-drunk wren  
slip toward bliss, basking

with nodding head, spread wings  
and shuttered eyes?

when I might as well blunder on  
unawares  
as blundering I  
came nose to nose  
with fellow bears?

What value to the time  
I freed a young goshawk  
buried to the breast in pond mud  
when it missed its prey  
and laughed to see it  
exploding back to grace and air  
in spray and power

And why compelled to snatch back my  
thumb  
and beg pardon of a piece of deadwood  
that morphed into a tree frog  
and turned its gaze on me in mute reproach?  
Or mumbling an excuse again  
cleaning the birdhouse  
finding both bands full of warmth and silky  
fur  
staring at me in wide-eyed mild surprise-  
six flying squirrels

Oh I'll never tame this hunger  
that makes me freeze myself  
become a rock with eyes  
a plant with juices pulsing  
deploy my sensory net, a nimbus  
spread to save  
these magical bits  
of lives most never know

To live bathed in this green surround  
that first sustained me  
as a wandering child

No doubt about this  
It must be wild.

## APPENDIX H

### SHOOTING FLOWERS by John Rule

"Hey, look!" Pistol cocked  
at an innocent blue zenith  
he lopes up swinging  
a silver plummet, a bass  
head down  
(gillcovers snap  
the polychrome eyes glaze  
blood ropes the shining side)  
then tosses it on the rocks  
Where universals  
patiently as ever  
re-start a miracle

He grins at me knowingly  
Peck's Bad Boy of the universe  
A Saturday de Sade  
Note bow the flower eludes him  
cleverly bouncing on the breeze  
Petals explode!  
The brilliant triumphant grin  
turns my way

As a big-eyed Depression kid  
winter after winter I saw Daddy's hands  
smoothing and stroking the feathers and  
fur  
then ruthlessly stripping bare  
the sweet flesh of mineral salts  
plucked from the blue distance  
in graceful falling curves  
to become our own  
We sucked the bones  
of the beautiful short generations  
that burst from the cyclic planet  
Out of need  
we made our rituals and connections:  
only feelings divide rape from love

But today  
there is this urban savage  
winchester barbarian  
his cut-out buddies and four-barrel aunts

acting out Looney Tunes on Route 66:  
Flatten that rabbit! Plough that cat  
into the runway  
until just a wistful lithograph  
remains  
Those Orientals have no respect  
for life like us-  
they torture  
our crewcut millennia<sup>1</sup> flyboys  
you know

Now watch my Sport  
increase his challenge  
shooting hummingbirds from a bench rest  
at three hundred yards  
with a six-power scope  
It takes skill and technological balls  
to zap something like that

Looking to the future  
all this is just practice  
for the cosmic range:  
In much the same way  
(raptly chanting numbers  
and eyeing a scanner screen  
tracking sparkling moths  
in the petals of a nebula)

someone will shoot live planets.

