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One Last Chance

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ONE LAST CHANCE: COLLECTED ESSAYS ON FINDING PEACE IN OUR TIME

By

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One Last Chance: collected essays on finding peace in our time

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Collected personal essays on Evel Knievel, Butte, Montana, hunting in Maine, and contemporary life in Missoula, Montana.

For Harvest, for my family

Gratitude to J. Blunt for two years of nourishment, thank you to Nancy Cook for allowing Evel Knievel to take off, and appreciation to Phil Condon for allowing me a foot in a different department.

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Believe in Evel

Evel Knievel died in a condominium in Clearwater, Florida, two days after settling a lawsuit with the rapper Kanye West. In his "Touch the Sky" video the rapper appears as "Evel Kanyevel" and crashes a rocket motorcycle, while a bunch of women in hot pants look on in horror. The video is actually a fairly accurate historical portrayal of Knievel's jump over the Snake River Canyon. However, Knievel was initially not pleased with the homage. "He's using vulgar and offensive images based on me to promote his filth to the world," Knievel had said of West.

Two days before Knievel's death the rapper visited Knievel at his condo to work things out. After the visit Knievel made what ended up being his last public statement. "I thought he was a wonderful guy and quite a gentleman," he said of West. "I know Kanye has had some tough times these past few weeks, with the death of his mother, and I hope things work out for him."

Two weeks later the real Evel, whose real name was Bob, was buried in Butte, Montana, during an early winter snowstorm. Knievel had planned his own memorial long in advance, and I got up before sunrise to go see what would be his last public performance. The same year I was born Knievel had driven to Hollywood and beaten his former publicist with a baseball bat. I never got to see him jump in person. By the time I was five and beginning my obsession with bikes and motorcycles Knievel had served six months in jail, lost all his endorsement deals and his fortune. He had to head to Australia

to find people who would pay to see him. One of his last jumps was in a dusty inland ranch town called Wagga Wagga.

Here in America he was only seen on occasional Saturday afternoon reruns when ABC's Wide World of Sports could find nothing else to cover on any continent. These reruns though, were enough to convert my brother and I to Knievel's religion. They sent us out onto our dead-end dirt road in the Maine woods with our bikes and a short sheet of scrap plywood. More than Peter Pan or E.T., Evel made us believe in every boy's dream, that gravity can be suspended. If you ride fast enough, if you wear the right suit, if you will your body to be light enough, you *will* fly. Neither his pinwheeling crashes nor our own trips to the emergency room for a broken arm or a gravel-embedded face could dissuade us. Like all true believers, faith mattered more to us than facts.

Driving east in the dark I worried I had not dressed formally enough for a memorial service. I had ironed my pants and tucked in my shirt, but because of the snow I wore winter boots rather than black wingtips. At the same time I worried that I might not have dressed with enough flair. Knievel's own style was somewhere between Liberace and Neil Diamond. Had I owned them, white leather chaps and a fringed jacket might have been better, or something with a fur.

The parking lot around the Butte Civic Center was filled with cars. It was only 8 in the morning, and the service would not start until 11. Even so I had to drive out to the overflow parking in a windswept gravel pit. Once I stepped into the Civic Center I saw there was no dress code. Evel Knievel was a man of the people, and his people turned out in what they had. Taking my place in the viewing line I traded a solemn nod with the man in front of me. He wore gray sweatpants worn white at the knees and seat. His

stomach stuck out between the waistband and his t-shirt, and was red from the cold. His wife had rust-red hair and a satin nylon jacket with "National Finals Rodeo" embroidered across the back. Behind me two young guys in RealTree camo jackets and baseball hats spit chew juice into styrofoam coffee cups and talked about getting new mufflers for their 4-wheelers. Behind them a silver-haired gentleman in a black overcoat and a gray fedora leaned on a silver-handled cane. At his side a young girl with thick glasses and no front teeth gummed at a frosted pop tart.

"I'm glad I didn't have to go to school today," she said to the man with the cane.

The velvet ropes leading to the casket were lined with ushers wearing white tuxedos. Some had tails, and some did not. Some came with cummerbunds and some did not. In the Miami of the 1980s it might have been possible to find 30 matching white tuxes on two day's notice, but Butte is an old hard-rock mining town. It is not the kind of town where large groups of men regularly demand white pants and white patent leather shoes.

When people reached the head of the line most took three steps up to the casket and clasped their hands in front of them. An usher in white stood on either end of the casket looking grave. Every tenth person or so asked one of the ushers if they would take a photo of them with Knievel. One woman with an electric blue pantsuit and a big blond perm put her hand on Evel's in the casket and smiled for her photo.

As I stepped up to the casket the four-song mix playing through the PA began on Sinatra's "My Way" for the eleventh or twelfth time. The casket was surrounded by poinsettias, white Christmas lights, and towering arrangements of white tropical flowers. Evel Knievel was wearing his leather jump suit. His hands were crossed on his chest and

he was wearing a big diamond ring. The only dead people I'd seen before had died in the mountains from falls or freezing. I'd never seen someone who'd been dead for so long. His cheeks were dusty with makeup. He looked small, plastic and packaged. But, for a man who once bought two yachts, two Ferraris and three houses on the revenue from plastic action figures of himself, his final appearance was perhaps fitting.

Beyond the casket the red ropes led viewers past huge photos on easels. They showed Knievel in his prime: looking at the camera with bedroom eyes and his jumpsuit unzipped, a thick gold chain on an equally thick pelt of chest hair. In another he had a full head of feathered hair and was about to jump and crash terribly at Wembley Stadium.

There was plenty of Knievel's life that was not shown in the photos. He was the best ski jumper in the Rockies during high school. After graduating he organized a semi-pro hockey team in which he was the general manger, coach and star player. The team folded after he organized an exhibition game against the Czechoslovakian Olympic team in Butte, then left town with the cash ticket sales.

After his hockey career he ran a hunting guide business called "Sur-Kill." For half a hunting season his clients had the highest success rate of any guide's in the area. In the second half of the season it became clear why, when he was arrested deep in Yellowstone National Park with two clients and four downed elk.

After his guiding career he became an environmental activist. He hitchhiked from Butte to Washington, D.C. with a 40-pound six-point elk rack. The National Park Service had announced plans to slaughter 5,000 elk in the overpopulated Yellowstone herd and Knievel lobbied to have them relocated to Idaho and Montana instead. He talked his way into the office of Stuart Udall, the Secretary of the Interior. Udall agreed

to call off the slaughter. The relocations which followed reestablished Montana elk herds which still exist today.

After his trip to D.C. Knievel worked 4,000 feet underground in the Butte mines and drove a bulldozer on the tailings piles. Bored on the bulldozer one day he used its blade to knock down the high tension lines carrying power to the city. After this episode he moved his family to Oregon and opened a motorcycle dealership.

Butte retains its mining camp morality though, and once Knievel had money he was welcomed back as a native son. In turn he lived like both a copper baron and rural lottery winner, spending his fortune on the best ephemera; drinks and gold-handled canes and things with engines. Like his hometown, his decline was decades longer than his heyday. Like Butte there was little left at the end. When he died his estate was worth $12,000 and that included a $10,000 Harley Davidson. There are $64 million in lawsuits against his estate, none of which will ever be collected.

As it got close to 11 and the floor seats began to fill with well-dressed people who knew Knievel first-hand I took a seat up in the stands with the majority who did not.

In front of me a retired couple looked down to the floor of the arena and speculated on which mourners were celebrities.

"I think that guy there is a movie star," the husband said.

"Where?" his wife asked.

"There, with the fringed leather jacket and the silver hair."

"Oh, well, he does look like he's from California," she said, "And look at his wife, with the fur..."

A man a few rows down turned around.

“That man is Reverend Sullivan,” he said, “and he’s from Billings.”

Reverend Sullivan’s wife turned, and the back of her fur-trimmed jacket shimmered out “Jump for Jesus” in sequined script. This is the name of the evangelical ministry her husband founded. The 60-year old Reverend Sullivan jumps his motorcycle through flames in a leather suit with a white cross on it. After the jump he ministers to the crowd and accepts testimony. The Reverend’s website lists the King of Tonga as one of his conversions.

Before Sullivan found Jesus he did two tours in Vietnam on an aircraft carrier and won the Navy’s heavyweight boxing title twice. When he got home from southeast Asia he became a bodyguard for Evel and beat up Hell’s Angels who tried to interrupt the jumps.

In the row in front of me two young mothers with highlighted hair and low-cut shirts paid no attention to Sullivan. They scanned the crowd with a pair of binoculars while their toddlers crawled back and forth over people’s feet in the row. One was named Tina and the other was Stacy.

“When do you think he’ll get here?” Tina asked.

“I don’t know” Stacy said, “but I am sure glad you thought to bring these binoculars. I hope everything he wears is tight.”

“When he comes out I want those back,” Tina said.

As if on cue a flicker of flashbulbs and a few "woot-woots" heralded Matthew McConaughey’s arrival.

“Look how tan he is,” the retired man said.

"And look how white his teeth are," said his wife.

He was led over to shake hands with Joe Frazier and the flashes glittered from every corner of the hall. The old boxer sat in a wheelchair and McConaughey leaned down to embrace him.

An old man beside me kept saying. "Smokin' Joe Frazier, Smokin Joe Frazier, he was quite a fighter. You couldn't keep that man down. Same with Evel. That's why that Smokin' Joe Frazier is here. He knew a fellow scrapper when he saw one!"

"His job and my job were pretty tough jobs," is what the press will quote Frazier saying.

"I'm going to ask Matthew McConaughey to sign the top of my boobs," is what Tina will say as the actor takes his seat.

The televangelist Robert Schuller had been airlifted in from Orange County, California, and his Crystal Cathedral television ministry to deliver the eulogy. At 11am sharp the host of the "Hour of Power" opened the service with his deep, voice-of-God voice.

"This is a day," he said, "This is a day, for Evel Knievel."

What it became was a long day of eulogies. For three hours everyone from the former governor of Montana to Knievel's producer at ABC Sports held forth.

Matthew McConaughey's connection to Evel was the most tenuous, he narrated a History Channel biography called "Absolute Evel." However, he took the podium to the biggest cheers and whistles. By now Tina and Stacy were sharing the binoculars, their heads pressed together and their kids asleep on coats on the floor.

Like many of the eulogies, McConaughey's centered around the metaphor of Knievel's death as a jump. But his combined several of the most popular including; "he's made his final jump," "he's in the air forever," and "he doesn't have to land now." The actor ended his remembrance with a double fist-pump as if he himself had just cleared some Mack trucks.

It was now after noon, and the 81-year-old Rev. Schuller continued to stand unmoving on the stage, like an Easter Island statue. "Is this the last guy?" a little kid asked loudly from high in the bleachers as Kelly Knievel walked forward to the podium.

"I'm Kelly, the oldest son," he said. Unlike his younger brother Robbie, Kelly does not jump motorcycles for a living and he spoke softly. "One of the first things I remember is walking somewhere with my mother. I don't even remember where we were going. I asked her 'Mom, why are you walking so fast?' and she said 'I have to keep up with your father, child.'"

He was the only speaker to mention Linda Knievel. In addition to raising his sons she was the person who filmed Evel's jump over the fountains at Caesar's Palace. He couldn't afford to hire a cameraman so he put her at the end of the landing ramp. This was the jump that made his career, and the crash that came closest to killing him. He rag-dolled off the landing ramp at 90 mph, breaking his pelvis, femur, wrist, and both ankles. She filmed the footage that made him famous and even as he goes down the camera never shakes. Her husband is always in the middle of the frame.

In early afternoon Rev. Schuller finally stepped to the microphone himself. He described how Evel's baptism on his show in 2007 was one of the highlights of his 39

years of "Hour of Power" broadcasts. "Seven hundred!" he thundered. "Seven hundred souls converted and baptized in Christ that morning on his example!"

You can watch the footage from the "Hour of Power" on YouTube. Evel Knievel shows that even with his scarred lungs sucking oxygen out of a cylinder he could out-preach a televangelist. On the show he steals the spotlight. He describes his conversion to Christ during an unlikely event this way: "I rose up in bed in Daytona the second night of Bike Week. I rose up in bed and I was by myself. And I said, 'Devil, devil you bastard, you get away from me. I cast you out of my life.' I went to the balcony of my hotel room, and I said, 'I will take you and throw you, throw you on the beach. You will be dead, you will be gone.'"

Dr. Schuller spent the better part of another hour making the case that this late-life conversion to Christ would forgive even Knievel's crimes (which include, but are not limited to: theft, tax evasion, soliciting sex from an undercover policewoman, assault with a baseball bat, and illegal possession of firearms by a felon).

Knievel was the kind of man whose popularity can rival Jesus in a place like Montana. He's popular in the parts of America where people do work that gets them hurt. Not paper cut, slipped on the stairs, burned your finger while changing the laser printer cartridge hurt, but hurt like Evel; bones crushed and pinned back together with steel, the kind of hurt that Wild Turkey and a handful of pills can't kill.

He's popular in places that know something about failure, of boom and bust, the end of industry and the last good land played out. "I've never been famous for riding a motorcycle," he said. "I'm famous for crashing them." He made spectacular failure into a virtue, a career, and for a time it made him rich. Knievel did not have the 200-pound

150-horsepower motocross bikes that his son uses in his jumps, nor the computer-designed take-off ramps and graphed flight parabolas. He had a 475-pound Harley-Davidson and a shot of bourbon before each jump. By the end of his life he'd broken 37 bones. In his late 50s he had a morphine pump stapled to his stomach and wired permanently to his blood stream. The last endorsement deal he ever signed was as a spokesman for the company that made the pump.

Evel is popular in places where the two ways to get rich are to leave, or to get desperate. Evel's first show was at his own failing motorcycle dealership in Moses Lake, Washington. People weren't buying the cheap Japanese motorcycles he was selling, and he needed to prove they were tough. He jumped a crate of writhing rattlesnakes, then a cage with a live mountain lion in it. Soon enough it was pickup trucks, then dump trucks and Greyhound buses. He became the first television stunt man. All the sponsored skiers, snowboarders, BASE jumpers, and X-Game athletes owe their careers in part to him. All the small town schemers who have one last big plan say their prayers in part to him.

At the end of the third hour of the service Reverend Schuller was still going strong. A single hour of Power is too short for a man of such endurance. However, he sensed the crowd's restlessness, and drew the service to a close, saying:

"On his tombstone under his motorcycle, he had it engraved 'Believe in Christ.' I believe those should be the last words."

The crowd applauded, and put on coats, or in a few instances, rushed McConaughy with loud squeals, permanent markers, and their shirts pulled up. Six of

Knievel's friends in leather jackets with "Evel" stitched across the back lifted his casket. They moved through the crowd behind a bagpiper.

Outside it had stopped snowing and hard gusts of wind swayed the streetlights on their wires. The hearse and the sky were the same cold gray. I stood next to an old giant of a man with only one arm, maybe lost in the mine, or in a machine, maybe just always been that way. He pulled on his hat and rubbed his unshaven jaw in the cold. His wife stood next to him with a plastic bonnet over her curled gray hair. "He was one tough son-of-a-bitch," he said to her. She nodded. "Even in Butte," she said, "even here."

Butte, America

The bumper stickers on the jacked-up pickup trucks in Butte, Montana read: "Butte, America." The city has always considered itself an insular place. An East Coast newspaper reporter passing through Butte in 1900 called it, "an island entirely surrounded by land." The old mining city is marooned on the wrong side of I-90, uphill from the exits, the fast food and the Wal-Mart strip of pre-fab, post-war Butte. The brick city sits just below the Continental Divide, and bristles with black steel hoist towers and the steeples of ornate, empty churches. Uptown street signs carry the names of metals and minerals instead of the names of trees or frontiersmen; Mercury, Platinum, Quartz and Copper. The sprawling three-story houses built for mine owners sit next door to the three-room bungalows once owned by immigrant miners. The mouths of the mines sit on the same streets and their tailings cover the vacant lots.

The hoist house at the Mountain Con mine reads "Mile High, Mile Deep" in faded twenty-foot letters. The miners in Butte were the best in the world at what they did. They came from the hard rock mining towns of western Ireland, Yugoslavia, and the north of England. Before arriving in Butte many worked at the Comstock in Nevada or the high-altitude mines of Leadville, Colorado.

Ten thousand miles of tunneling run beneath the city. The diameter of the earth is about 8,000 miles. If the Cornish, Finns, Italians and Irishmen could have tunneled through the earth's core they would have emerged at Butte's antipode in the southern seas of the Indian Ocean.

The original old-growth forests of Montana and north Idaho were fed to mills in Missoula then taken down below ground in Butte to timber fresh tunneling. Coal from the Wyoming plains fed the smelters at Anaconda. Immigrants rode west on the trains to fill the shacks of Butte's slums; Dog Town, Chicken Flats, Busterville, Seldom Seen and the Cabbage Patch.

By 1915 Butte was the biggest city on the borderlands between Minneapolis and Seattle. The mines ran three shifts every day of the year. The saloons, gambling parlors and brothels did the same. A correspondent for Harper's wrote in 1903 that Butte: "gives the impression of an overgrown mining-camp awakening suddenly to the consciousness that it is a city, putting on airs and properties of the city, and yet relapsing into the old, fascinating, reckless life of tremendous disorder, of colossal energies in play." The nation was electrifying and copper was carrying the current.

Despite its isolation, Butte was ultimately brought low by forces far beyond Montana. By 1910 the city, and much of Montana, was strangled by the aptly-named Anaconda Company. During the 1920s, shares of the Anaconda Company were grossly inflated by financial chicanery engineered by the Rockefeller family. When investors discovered the scheme share prices fell from $175 to less than $4. The Anaconda Company was one of the largest publicly-traded companies at the time, and the losses investors suffered on this stock alone were one factor in the market crash of October 1929.

The Anaconda Company limped along through the middle decades of the century. It began tearing a hole in uptown Butte to begin the Berkeley Pit mine in 1954. However, the majority of the company's profits came the vast Chuquicamata mine in Chile. In 1971 Salvador Allende nationalized the mine, and by 1977 the Anaconda Company no longer existed.

Robert Knievel was born in Butte in 1938 and grew up amid the decline of the copper camp culture. He was surrounded by the remnants of the boom years; aging unemployed miners, grandmothers who had bobbed their hair and flirted in saloons, and fading memories of quick fortunes. Knievel's life played out much as the life of the city he grew up in. When he died it was of a rare lung disease seen most often in hard rock miners.

W.A. Clark, the great copper baron of Butte once said in Congress: "In rearing the great structure of empire on this Western Hemisphere we are obliged to avail ourselves of all the resources at our command. The requirements of this great utilitarian age demand it. Those who succeed us can well take care of themselves."

Evel Knievel was fond of saying, "You can't buy your way into heaven and you can't buy your way out of hell. So you might as well spend your money here."

Knievel only jumped his motorcycle in Butte once during his career. Late in life he spent more time in Las Vegas and Florida than in Montana. But he asked to be buried where he grew up. Knievel's grave is in the Mountain View Cemetery, on the road leading south out of town. His grave is just off the highway and faces the parking lot of a Wal-Mart Supercenter. The headstone is recycled; it once marked the site of the place

where he tried to jump the Snake River Canyon. Before his death he had the granite block moved to Butte and the blank side engraved. It reads, "Words to live for: Faith. Health. Education. Love. Work. Honorability. Dream."

Jump for Jesus

Jump for Jesus

Gene Sullivan is a big man in blue jeans and cowboy boots. It's been nearly 40 years since his last heavyweight prizefight, but he still carries himself like a contender. His 6'4" frame fills a doorway and smaller men step aside to let him pass. When I meet him at a coffee shop in Billings, Montana he's wearing a platter-sized silver belt buckle reading "Jump for Jesus." This is the name of his evangelical motorcycle ministry. At 61 Sullivan is the oldest motorcycle daredevil in the country, and also the largest. He carries the keys to his truck on a steel spring hand strengthener and has the handshake to match. Like any stuntman or extreme athlete everything that can be labeled with his sponsor's name is: his briefcase, the coffee mug he carries, his sweatshirt, belt buckle and the doors of his white Chevy pickup.

He travels with a sidekick he introduces as Joe, a thin, lizardy man who squirms in his seat, but does not speak. Joe carries Gene's briefcase and his main duty seems to be to nod in agreeement. On the Jump for Jesus webpage there is link to a born-again website called "Precious Testimonies." Joe's autobiography as a Christian is posted there. Before coming to Jesus Joe lived a fairly normal life as a computer systems engineer for American Express. He was assigned to Germany, and according to his testimony, "was wearing nice suits to work, driving a classic Mercedes, and the women in Europe are a lot less moral than American women." Now Joe works for free for Jump for Jesus and wears black jeans with white leather sneakers.

Before Gene Sullivan found Jesus he worked for Evel Knievel. He met the stuntman through his father, Prescott Sullivan, a sports writer for the San Francisco Chronicle. He tells me, "In '69 I was just back from two tours in Vietnam and dad said to me 'I'm going to go interview this guy Evel Knievel, and I've heard some stories that he's a rough character from Montana, why don't you come along.' Well I was the two-time heavyweight boxing champion of the Navy, I weighed 240 and could bench press 460, and I was up for anything, so I went."

A few beers into the interview Gene agreed to help Knievel with security at his upcoming jump at the Cow Palace in Daly City, California. The Oakland Hell's Angels were going to be there, and they'd vowed to sabotage the jump. Knievel's white jump suit was a deliberate opposite to the black leather of most riders. As part of his act Knievel delivered an anti-drug speech before each jump and denounced outlaw bikers. "I hate druggies and zeros," he said. His gate receipts and endorsement deals depended on motorcycles becoming mainstream, wholesome, and family-friendly. The motor-oil-covered, chain-whipping, gang-raping barbarian horde of Hell's Angels hated everything Knievel was selling.

Gene Sullivan blames the riot at the Cow Palace on the announcer. "He was drunk," he says. "And he started running his mouth while Knievel was warming up his bike. He said, 'If Knievel makes this jump, he'll set the Hell's Angels back 100 years.' Well right about that time Knievel was circling the ring and some Angel threw a heavy wrench at him. Knievel went over there and threw his bike down and dragged the guy out of the stands and over the retaining wall. But he still had a busted hip from his jump in Reno and so the Hell's Angel threw him to the ground and started pounding on him. I

ran over there and I had a good thirty-yard head of steam. So that Hell's Angel was out, but then they all came over the wall after that and I really got into it. Eventually we dragged Knievel back to the trailer and had a few shots of Wild Turkey while we watched the cops beat on the Angels with their nightsticks. It was a great time."

Gene went on to work for Knievel on and off for two more years while starting his own motorcycle stunt business on the side. Knievel was not an easy man to work for. "In many ways he was kind of a jerk," Sullivan says. "He had a way of taking over a place, you know, going into a bar and saying 'I'm Evel Knievel and I'm buying everyone a drink,' and then hitting on the women. Well there's always going to be some guy in the bar who says, 'Who do you think you are?' and will want to take a shot at a guy like that. But Knievel, he was only about 6'1" and all cracked up and pinned together, he couldn't afford to get in a fight."

Sullivan found himself pounding men he sympathized with. "I was on the wrong side of the fence," he says. "I was defending the bad guy from the good guy. That gets to you after a while." Joe, who had remained motionless for so long I had forgotten about him, suddenly nodded his head vigorously.

After Knievel's death in 2007 the FBI released his 290-page file. The agency had investigated him in the '70's for ties to organized crime in Chicago and betting syndicates in Las Vegas. Bets were made on whether Knievel would make his next world-record setting jump, and there were shady characters with big money riding on these jumps. Bob Gill was a contemporary of Knievel's who for a time challenged him for the longest jump title. In 1971 Gill was beaten by unknown men just before an attempt on Knievel's record.

"I don't think Evel sent them," Sullivan says. "He might have known about it, he might have said, 'Hey someone needs to go talk to Bob,' but I don't think he would ever have ordered that sort of thing."

Another document in the FBI file describes a beating in San Francisco, Sullivan's hometown. The victim, a motorcycle stunt rider says, "It was a dark room, he had dark glasses on him. All I know is he was big. I could describe his shoes better than anything, black loafers." It is hard to picture Gene Sullivan in loafers, but it is not hard to imagine the force his arms can exert. When the file is mentioned Sullivan leans back in his chair and cracks his neck. "No," he says, "I wouldn't know anything about that." Across the table Joe clutches the briefcase to his chest and squirms like something suprising has snuck into his pants.

Sullivan is more effusive about the challenges of working for a man who was constantly recovering from broken bones and orthopedic surgeries. As a native of Butte Knievel was a heavy drinker by birth. Once he'd had a few wrecks drinking became a neccesary part of his work. At the height of his career he was often on a steady cocktail of hard liquor and painkillers. The chronic pain, addiction, and fame made him a bipolar boss.

"He didn't treat the people closest to him the way he should have," Sullivan says. Though Knievel often carried tens of thousands in cash Sullivan often went without pay.

"Before a jump he'd be just hyper," Sullivan says. "He'd have a few shots of Wild Turkey in him and you just couldn't even talk to him. In Detroit in '72 before his jump he asked me to stay in his hotel room while he went out for something. He had $74,000 in cash in there and he wanted it watched. Well I looked around and the walls of that room

were just papered with those little yellow sticky notes, and he's written on each one different things like: 'I'm the best' or 'I can make this jump' and 'I'm the greatest.' It was obvious he was fighting demons."

Gene Sullivan gets a lot of mileage from the line, "Just like the Bible says, I found Jesus when I departed from Evel." You can find it on his website, in his jump programs, in interviews and in his eulogy for Knievel. The truth is less biblical. He became an Evangelical Christian at a Rotary pancake breakfast in Truckee, California. After hearing a recovered heroin addict speak about Jesus, Sullivan gave up his stunt career, backed out of a stunt tour of Korea and Japan worth $1,000,000, and went to work mowing the lawn of a Baptist church in Florida.

Nearly 40 years later, his decision does make a persuasive case for choosing Jesus. Evel is gone and Sullivan is still jumping. Though he and Knievel were only 9 years apart in age, by the end of Evel's life the spread looked more like 30. Since 1978 Sullivan has used the showmanship he learned from Knievel to minister in small towns across the U.S. He wears a white leather suit with a red cross on the chest. During the summer he tours with an RV, a fleet of support trucks, and an entourage of 30 other Christians. For his jumps he soaks two 6'x9' panels of Celotex in five gallons of gasoline then jumps his Honda 650 through the burning wall. The jump program explains the symbolism of the jump for those who might need the interpretation:

The ramp jump represents our "launch" into life as we become accountable for our sins. The burning wall represents the gates of hell, of which Jesus said "will not prevail against you. (Mt. 16:18) This is also the barrier that stands between us and our eternity, The landing ramp represents the other side of this life, eternal life in Jesus Christ.

After the jump he invites the crowd forward to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, and give testimony. A potluck lunch is served, and Sullivan's son's band, The Watchmen, plays light Christian rock.

He takes his ministry wherever God calls him. In 1994 he spent $45,000 to ship his ramps, bikes and support vehicles to the South Pacific nation of Tonga. There he jumped for the king and a crowd of 10,000. He recently jumped over the world's largest model of a horseshoe crab at a Baptist church in Blanchester, Ohio. The crab seats 60 inside its shell and is available for weddings and birthday parties. At the mention of the crab, Joe finally speaks in a low voice. "It was a really big crab," he says.

A skeptic might view Evel Knievel's born-again experience as one last late-life stunt to regain narrative control of his life as he faced eternity, but Sullivan's own experience convinced him Knievel was sincere. "Totally convinced," he says. "I believed him because that was never something he wanted as part of his image. But the way he described his coming to the Lord, it was exactly as it happened for me. Anyone who knows him knows it wasn't an act."

Sullivan is happy to talk about his time with Evel, his ministry, or the coming Apocalypse, but he has no plans to reflect on them in sum. Squeezing his hand strnethener he stands up. His forearm convulses like a boa constrictor digesting a rabbit. He tells me that like Knievel he has no interest in autobiography, or living an overly-examined life. After working for the government, a folk hero and now a divinity he has learned to take truth as it comes. "No," he says as Joe holds the door open and another man stands aside. "No. I have no desire to look back at it all. You know, you live it, you don't write about it."

Wreckage

Five hundred miles west of Butte the rough sage plains of eastern Washington smooth abruptly. Bow-legged rows of center-pivot irrigators stand on the skyline, straining tumbleweed out of the steady wind. This is the edge of the Columbia Basin Reclamation Project, home to the Grand Coulee dam and a vast network of irrigation canals. Like Butte, the area is a landscape created by decades of feverish earthwork, blasting, and bulldozers. During W.W. II the power of the Columbia River was turned against the Germans and Japanese. The Coulee's massive turbines fed electricity to aircraft aluminum smelters, Boeing assembly lines, and the Manhattan Project's plutonium reactors. The dam is the largest concrete structure on earth. "How much concrete is that?" the Bureau of Land Reclamation's brochure asks. "Enough concrete to wrap a sidewalk 4" thick and 4' wide around the equator twice!" is the BLR's hearty answer.

After the war the waters of the Columbia were turned loose into the irrigation ditches running south. The town of Moses Lake sits along one of these canals. Ray Gunn has lived here for 55 years.

"My father and I came in '49," he says, "and the water came in '51." Evel Knievel pulled in from Montana in 1963.

Ray is a thick man who carries his extra weight well. I meet him at McDonald's to drink coffee and eat those apple pies that slide out of narrow boxes. He wears tinted glasses that are supposed to adjust to indoor light, but don't. His sweatshirt is white and neon pink, a souvenir from Daytona Bike Week '88.

"The Honda's were comin' in good then," Ray says of Knievel's arrival. "Evel had borrowed some money from his grandma and bought into a Honda dealership here with a guy named Daryll."

Gunn had returned from two years in Japan with the Air Force and started riding motorcycles. "No one rode motorcycles back then," he says. "It wasn't like now where people who ride are considered normal."

Soon after arriving Knievel talked Gunn and a few other farm boys into racing their bikes together. They borrowed a bulldozer, scraped the sagebrush off a lot owned by the town dentist, and made a dusty course with a single jump.

"I have a picture somewhere of me going over that jump on a Norton," Gunn says. "No helmet or nothing, those were good times. We were lucky then."

The Moses Lake visitor's guide may boast about the town's runway, one of the longest expanses of tarmac in the country, (13,500 feet long, capable of landing the Space Shuttle and the biggest Boeings) but it is generally a quiet place. Knievel's restlessness soon led him to organize a spectacle. "There was a guy up in Grand Coulee," Gunn says, "and he had kind of a roadside zoo. So Evel went up there and talked him into loaning out two mountain lions and a big crate of rattlers."

Evel then passed word around town that on a Sunday afternoon he was going to jump these wild beasts.

"Now Knievel didn't use a landing ramp then, since it was his first jump," Gunn says. "There were maybe 200 people there to see him, and the zoo guy was there with the mountain lions on leashes. Evel made the jump just fine, but when he landed his back wheel caught the edge of that snake crate and smashed it all to hell."

The writhing ball of rattlesnakes rolled out onto the ground. There were as many snakes as spectators. The zoo man let go of the mountain lions to chase the snakes and the crowd ran for their cars clutching their pant legs.

"I'd say he got maybe 90% of those snakes back in that box," Gunn says.

Most of Knievel's time in Moses Lake was absorbed in the more mundane details of running a small business. The town was populated by frugal dry-land farmers who had to be talked out of every nickel and dime. Occasionally, though, men came through who worked at the air field for Boeing or for the Air Force. These customers had enlistment cash or overtime wages smoking in their pockets.

My friend's father John bought a motorcycle from Knievel's shop. He sent me a letter describing his purchase:

> *It was a used Norton Manxman 650 cc, all set up for hill climbing with big knobby tires and small sprocket in the front for high torque. I borrowed $600 from my dad to buy it, then paid him back over a year's time. My mother thought I was crazy but dad just shrugged his shoulders. I got it somewhere on the western edge of Spokane, WA at a shop where I met Evil. We thought he was an asshole with such a pretentious name, but later we learned to laugh at our naive notions about who was crazy and who wasn't. No battery -- just some kind of weird alternator/generator, so the front light only worked when the thing was running, and of course it was kick start. Many times, the headlight would go out in the middle of the night in the middle of nowhere. At one point, I had a Great horned owl I'd rescued from a hit and run. It would ride on the handlebars with a hood over its head. This really hot some attention. Later, I modified the gearing for street use, and I rode with my tribe of lunatics all southern Canada, Washington State and Montana. One of my most memorable rides was after someone at a funky bar, a hippie combine operator from the endless prairie, gave me and my buddy (who rode a Harley) a couple of interesting green pills which we immediately gulped down. This turned out to be some riotous version of synthetic mescaline, and I -- shall we say -- became my bike, discovering my inner carburetor. I wish I had some photos but they are long gone.*

Knievel was a good salesman. He was selling four or five bikes a month, but he wanted to sell ten times more. The bank in town would only loan him money to put six

bikes on the floor of his shop, so Evel ordered 50 new bikes. When the truck arrived from California loaded with bikes, Knievel called Honda headquarters. He explained that it was through the fault of the bank he had no money for the shipment. However, he'd be glad to do them a favor and sell all the bikes in a month, saving them the shipment costs back to Los Angeles.

He did sell all the bikes in a single month. He also sold his half of a "wildly successful Honda franchise selling 50 bikes each month!" to another man. Honda never saw a dollar from the bikes. Knievel had packed a suitcase full of cash and headed back to Butte with his family. Honda sued him, and Knievel filed a countersuit for delivering goods without a contract.

Ray Gunn didn't see Knievel for a year or two. "The next time I saw him he came through here in an old Studebaker towing a Yamaha Ascot Scrambler race bike," Gunn says. "He had his family in the back. He says, 'I'm going to California to race dirt bikes,' and I told him 'Bub, you're not going to make it down there, those guys have real skills and they are going to eat you for lunch."

Gunn was right. Knievel was not as fast as the California riders. As the suitcase of cash got lighter Knievel began to organize a stunt show with some of the other racers. Eventually he began to stage his own jumps over cars and delivery trucks.

"He'd call me up and ask me to come help him," Gunn says, "but I wasn't sure he was going to amount to much." Gunn was running a shoe store and a liquor store, two sure commodities in an isolated ag town. However, after Knievel's New Year's Day jump and crash at Caesar's Palace Gunn decided to go on the road. "While he was in the hospital I realized he might be on to something," he says.

"Basically I'd help him set up the whole thing," Ray says of his job. "Once we'd get the ramps roughly set up he'd start making some passes at speed. I'd watch him go by and figure if he had enough speed to make the distance. If not I'd tell him to go faster. I had to use the idea," he says, tapping his temple.

"You could always see it in his eyes before a jump," Gunn says. "He was afraid. But I always thought he was going to make it. There wasn't one time that I didn't think he would clear it all."

When Knievel didn't make the landing it was often Gunn and Gene Sullivan who drove him back to Butte to recuperate. After a bad wreck in Carson City he called Gunn and told him he thought the doctors and nurses were going to kill him with neglect.

Gunn walked into the hospital and slipped surgical scrubs on over his street clothes. He wheeled Knievel past the nurses station at dinner time, then drove northeast through the night. They pulled into Butte early in the morning as the third shift miners were heading home to sleep.

Like Gene Sullivan, Gunn quit working for Evel in Phoenix in 1972. Knievel was scheduled to do some high-speed wheelies for the press and his American Eagle motorcycle (which was actually built in Italy and rebranded) was only running on one cylinder.

"He basically had a temper tantrum in front of a bunch of reporters and accused me and Gene of sabotaging his bike," Gunn says. "Well I didn't need that, it was just a loose spark plug wire from the trip down, and so I said 'I quit,' and Gene and I had a pact that if one of us quit the other would too."

Knievel was contrite and rented a car for the two of them. They drove to San Francisco and then Gunn headed back to Moses Lake. For the last 30 he has been driving a cement truck. Evel tried to convince him to come back and help on the Snake Canyon jump and his trip to Wembley. "I told him 'I have no interest. I'm you're friend but I'll never work for you again.'"

Gunn remained friends with Knievel in the decades after his jumping career. The two talked the day Knievel died. "I'd get these phone calls, one, two or three in the morning. He'd be back in Florida and he couldn't sleep because of all those old injuries, and he'd call me to talk. Of course it's three hours earlier here, and I'd say 'Evel, what the hell are you doing calling at this hour?' And he'd have something he'd want to tell me about some scheme he had to get some money or about some trip he was about to take."

The last year of Knievel's life he flew Gunn and several other old friends down to Daytona Bike Week. "He called me that time and said, 'Ray, I want you to come down to Daytona, I'll pay for you and your wife, you'll have a room at the Holiday Inn, all expanses paid.' And so we went and he gave each of us who came a leather jacket with "Evel" stitched across the back and $2500 walking-around money."

The friends who went to Daytona were the men who carried Knievel's casket to his grave, wearing those black jackets with "Evel' stitched in red letters.

Ray Gunn went back to Butte this summer to attend Knievel Days. "It was one of the best ever," he says. While he was back he ran into Knievel's first wife, Linda. She works at the Super Wal-Mart across the street from her ex-husband's headstone, running a cash register. "Not all love is good love," Gunn says. "And I know, I've been married five times."

In the late afternoon Gunn leads me through Moses Lake out to the old site of their race track, the place Knievel made his first jump for a crowd.

"I'd show you where the old shop was too, but the building just burned down two weeks ago, burned right to the ground," he says. "Nowadays it had one of those stock trader companies in it, Edward Jones I think. Maybe with the stock market crashing it was a good time for a fire."

Gunn parks behind some industrial buildings at the edge of a junk yard. He climbs out of his Suzuki jeep carefully. Gunn rode motorcycles for 40 years without a crash, then seven years ago an uninsured kid in a pick-up truck broadsided him on his Triumph while he waited at an intersection. "I should be dead," he says. "They life-flighted me to Spokane. It was $150,000 worth of surgeries. They took skin from my butt and put it on my foot. My leg was full of all kinds of steel screws."

Knievel called him while he was in the hospital and encouraged him to dispense with the follow-up orthopedic visits. "You can get those screws and pins out yourself," he said, "you just make a slit in the skin and unscrew them or yank them out with needlenose pliers, I did."

Other than getting out of the car slowly Gunn shows few signs of his accident now. He hops the low fence around the salvage yard without a limp. "The track was somewhere out in here," he says. We are soon lost in the maze of ruined machines. The salvage yard stretches to the horizon.

"The jump must have been somewhere around here," Gunn says, taking off his ballcap and scratching his ears. A tall pile of engine blocks sits in a greasy heap, fan belts split in the sun, cam chains rusted solid. Two silver milk tank trailers form a long

crumpled wall of stainless steel. A station wagon folded like an accordion sits next to a ranch truck with beer cans on the floor. The truck's steel steering wheel is cupped to the shape of a face. If the track is here it is hidden by the wreckage of too much velocity and a thousand small miscalculations.

Gunn wanders among the twisted steel frames for a few more minutes. Broken class crunches under his white sneakers. "You know, Evel didn't have to stretch the truth very much to tell a story," he says. Standing in a spot that looks like everywhere else in the yard he says, "We'll just say it happened here, and call it close enough."

Talk of This Town

The following essays follow the general style and format of *The New Yorker's* "Talk of the Town" section. They are intended as expository time capsules, holding the ephemeral details of life as it was lived in the early days of this new century.

Abandoned

Abandoned cars can be found in every neighbourhood in this western town. Dull with fire ash in the summer, surrounded by unshovelled snow in the winter, forlorn and flat-tired, these vehicles come to rest in the University district, in the slant streets to the south, and beside the coal trains in the railyard. Eventually someone calls the police, and the police dispatch a towtruck. Those vehicles beyond any redemption go straight to the scrap yard. The rest go to auction like canner cows.

On a recent Saturday morning the Missoula Police Department held its first-ever auction of abandoned vehicles. The Sheriff's Department used to dispose of the cars, but they abandoned the job because of budget cuts. City Traffic Sergeant Shawn Paul, who is whiter and taller than the Jamaican dance-hall singer of the same name, is now responsible for the program. To handle the extra work he had to pull an officer off the street.

Annie Nordby is that officer. Two days before the auction she sat at her desk with an 8-inch stack of vehicle titles and a 48-oz Diet Coke. "There are a lot," she said. "Two-hundred and thirty-one abandoned in July and another 235 in August."

At ten of nine on Saturday a small crowd milled around the tow lot out on the industrial plain west of the city. It was cold and gray and the men sauntered around with their sweatshirt hoods on. Most had Leathermans and cell phones on their belts and grease under their fingernails. They had hands like crescent wrenches. If you break down someday on an empty Montana road you would be happy to see any of them. They poked around under the hoods and cupped their hands on the windows to look at

mileages. Some cars were missing wheels, a few had no engines, others had engines where they didn't belong, like the backseat or in the trunk. A few conspicuous, frowning girlfriends stood with their arms folded across their chests.

Who abandons cars? Sgt. Paul suggests it's graduating college students. "They're out of here," he shrugs, "they don't care."

A brown '87 AMC Eagle 4WD station wagon with 114,283 miles and fake wood paneling seemed to confirm his theory. Its trunk contained a copy of "Conceptual Issues in Human Origins Research," a nearly-new XXL jockstrap presumably purchased for costume purposes, and a blank form for requesting a transcript.

However, most of the vehicles suggest less ascendant lives. A gray Dodge Caravan with a flat tire and three bald ones contained a cookbook (*Good Housekeeping's Best One-Dish Meals*) and a First Interstate Bank receipt showing a balance of $2.12 in checking.

A red '91 Nissan pick-up came with a bed full of bricks, a set of branding irons, several half-full bottles of motor oil, at least a dozen empty Copenhagen tins, a notice from a collection agency for $129.46 eight months past due, and several pairs of work gloves worn through at the thumbs.

A black'87 Nissan Maxima with fancy chrome hubcaps came with a make-up case, go-go boots with 4" platform heels, a Bundt cake pan, a well-used car jack, and an extra tire.

There were two minivans filled to split town. The '87 Ford Aerostar was packed with moving boxes, one labeled "Hats and Scarfs," the others covered neatly with a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles blanket. In front a kid's sock sat on the passenger seat, a

half-used box of Nesquick, and a Clifford the Big Red Dog book lay on the floor. The Chevy Lumina had white dog hair on the seats. There were lamps, bookshelves and a bed with Care Bear sheets in the back.

A '94 Hyundai Elantra with tinted windows came with a "Horny! Horny! Horny!" air freshener on the rearview mirror, an Ab Roller, a pair of blue polyester short-shorts, a receipt from the night of 7/1/07 at the Sleepy Inn Motel on West Broadway, and a hand-written list of apartments in the $300/month range.

A Ford Escort with Illinois plates had a pay stub for someone named Dianne Bonvallet. She worked at a cigarette store in Boulder, Colorado, thirty-four hours each week, $6/hour, $372 every two weeks after taxes. On the floor lying under some unopened mail was what appeared to be a child's doll with blond hair. Closer inspection revealed it to be a bread loaf-sized bundle of severed blond dreadlocks.

Another pick-up had nothing in it but a letter to Joey Stockton from Bertha B. Booth of 17420 N. Wilkenson Road, Rathdrum, ID 83858.

There were some items common to many vehciles; full ashtrays, and empty packs of Camels, Marlboros, Newports, fast-food wrappers and pizza boxes, work gloves and and waitressing aprons.

Almost every vehicle contained medicine chests of automotive additives, desperate $2 treatments to delay $2,000 overhauls. The bottles were piled in back seats and on passenger side floors; transmission fluid for stripped gears, radiator stop-leak for failing head gaskets, motor oil for worn-out rings, starting fluid for the old carbureted trucks, boxes of fuses for shorting electrical systems.

Did the buyers at the auction say, “This is like walking around Pompeii, all these interrupted lives! All these plans derailed by fatigued metal in a piston, worn bearings and dried up hoses”?

They did not. They said, “Jeep Wagoneer over there. 401 in that, it’d make a good woods truck. That’ll climb the bark of a tree if you put it in low.” Someone else talked on his cellphone with his backers back home, “No ma, I know, I said $300 was my limit, and that’s what I’m gonna stick to.” A father and son looked for a parts truck for their ’78 Ford ranch truck.

Sergeant Paul presided over the auction, and seemed to be glad for the break from writing traffic tickets. Traffic enforcement is perhaps not the funniest division of law enforcement, and Sgt. Paul is a comedian at heart. He described an ’87 Honda Accord with a board through the shattered back window as, “loaded; with a free 2x4 and air conditioning.” Trying to sell the Nissan pickup and finding no bidders he said, “People, this truck comes with bricks in the back. And some cattle brands. That’s worth $85 right there.” Looking over the AMC Eagle he noted its strong points: “roof racks on this vehicle. People, these are adjustable roof racks. And an XXL jockstrap is included at no extra charge.”

Most vehicles found no taker even at the minimum $85 bid. One red Ford F-150 with a lift kit and a big chrome toolbox went for the astronomical price of $700. However, the city won’t come close to covering its expenses with the six scheduled auctions this year. The city expects to spend $25,000 a year removing vehicles. Like most budgets, this one may have been optimistic on the expense side, as July and August’s 466 vehicles surpassed the department’s prediction of 336 for the entire year.

After the auction those who won cars worked on the engines or tried to pick the door locks while Sgt. Paul looked on. When people leave their cars for the last time they lock the doors and walk away with the keys.

The unsold vehicles were towed a half mile south to Pacific Steel and Recycling. There the tires come off and the cars are crushed into what steelmen call a "shred log." These logs are shipped off to shredders in Salt Lake and Seattle. There 5000-horsepower hammermill shredders tear the vehicles into scraps the size of playing cards. Western steel mills don't roll sheet steel, so the cars won't be reincarnated as luxury sedans, toasters, or refrigerators. In Seattle and Salt Lake they pour rebar. The rebar goes into bridge deckings, parking garages, and exit ramps. There, steel that rolled all over the long roads of the West will finally sit still.

Go Fetch!

Scott Timothy is a man with two first names and he is driving a short bus. This short bus is not filled with handicapped people or students of a very small school district. It is filled with dogs. They are going on a hiking trip. They are held behind a steel screen with a door in it so they don't try to get in the driver's seat. Two golden retrievers sit on the single green bus seat and look calmly out the window like old ladies. The rest roil about and the sun through the windows catches the many colors of dog hair floating in the air; black, white, gold and red. There is a lot of sniffing, circling and panting. There is also a lot of dog gas, or by the smell of it perhaps more than gas. In a practiced motion Scott slows the bus while looking upside down along the floor, all the way back to the emergency door.

"We're good" he says, and accelerates. The dogs bark.

In the university neighborhood he picks up the next to last passenger, a goldendoodle named Bailey. Goldendoodles are a cross between a golden retriever and poodle. Their long legs look like the cylindrical limbs on a giant gold teddy bear. If dogs played basketball you would want Bailey on your team. Scott brings him to the bus on a short leash, just like you see Cesar Millan do on his TV show. When he tries to run Scott holds him close until he sits.

"He's still a teenager" Scott says. Like a teenager, Bailey seems unsure of how to handle his giant limbs. He trips up the stairs of the bus and Scott orders the other dogs back from the door. When Bailey gets inside the dogs all go for a sniff at once and the bus fills with yips and barks. "You often hear some vocalizations like this," Scott says.

Just as he's about to latch the door to the divider a chocolate lab/rotteweiler mix gets aggressive with the goldendoodle. "No Trooper!" Scott yells. Trooper does not desist and he then finds out what happens when the bus driver follows through on his threat to "come back there."

You get bitten on the face.

Well, not really bitten as Scott explains, with Trooper's lower lip still in his mouth.

"I'm not really bearing down at all" he says over Trooper's whines. "See? I keep one hand around his muzzle, and one hand here on his collar. This is a simple correction."

Trooper goes limp and sinks to the floor.

"Gentle, gentle, gentle," Scott says softly, until Trooper is quiet.

Then Scott stands up and Trooper springs up too, swinging his tail and putting his nose in Scott's hand. He goes over to Bailey and they touch noses.

"Dogs are not people," he says, closing the door. "Most of the problems people have with their dogs come from treating them like humans. A puppy has a mother in the wild. We take puppies away from their mothers and most people don't discipline their puppies the way a mother would. You can't assume that dogs understand what you are telling them verbally."

Scott grew up in Maine, the son of a doctor. His brother got his PhD in fluid dynamics from MIT, his sister is a lawyer. Scott dropped out of college after his freshman year and became a fly fisherman. After teaching classes for L.L. Bean he came west to guide for the Flying B Ranch in Idaho. Five years ago his own golden retriever

Bella had some health problems; he discovered she was allergic to her corn-based dog food. Not long after Scott cashed in his retirement plans, sold his house, and opened a store selling premium dog food. A second store, a bakery, a canine day spa and the two buses for hiking trips have all grown out of Bella's sensitive stomach.

There's one more dog to pick up and Scott pilots the bright green bus up switchbacks in the South Hills. We turn into a subdivision named Mansion Heights and immediately pass a house that has a turret like a castle. Sadie the dog lives in a big but unturreted house with three bay windows, each displaying a 6-foot fake white Christmas tree. Sadie hops in and takes her place in the back without incident.

"Good boy," Scott tells Trooper.

As we drive out of the South Hills, Scott says his clients are generally affluent people who often own high energy sporting breeds but don't have time to exercise them.

"Then they come home and the dog is going nuts and they just can't deal with them. And we have some trust fund people too. They're the ones that come to the door in their boxer shorts at two in the afternoon."

Go Fetch! charges $18.50 for each three hour hike, and most dogs hike twice a week. Scott and the four other dog hikers run ten packs of 12 dogs. Last year the business brought in $700,000 in gross receipts, with $140,000 of that coming from dog hikes. The other half-million dollars comes from sales of food (New Zealand venison and sweet potato, and chicken and rice are among the choices), baked goods (dog birthday cakes, cheddar, white chocolate dipped, or whole wheat beef flavored biscuits) and dog accessories (hemp leashes, dog beds, shampoo, toothbrushes).

"No one is getting rich though," Scott says. He is still paying off renovations to the store, he pays his employees at least $8 an hour in a town where he could get by with $6.65, and dog food is not a high margin product. His old L.L. Bean jacket and even older L.L. Bean snow boots seem to confirm his accounting.

As the bus nears the top of Pattee Canyon the dogs reach a boil. The back of the bus looks like a hot air corn popper. A small Boston terrier named Maddie turns somersaults, barrel rolls and flips under the stomachs of the bigger dogs. "She's a low clearance dog," Scott says, "once the snow gets deeper she has some trouble."

After parking Scott lets them out one by one, but only after they have sat by the door and waited their turn. He steps out of the bus last and seems unconcerned to have eleven dogs tearing off in all directions on the border of a forest; eleven dogs which are not his, and are mainly owned by couples for whom the dogs are child surrogates.

"We've never lost one" he says. "Well, JT had a heart attack, but he wasn't technically lost. His owner runs the Ironhorse, and so he'd been eating bar food his entire life. He lay down on his very first hike and I had to carry him two-and-a-half miles out. I carried him until I couldn't anymore, then help came. He died right after we got him out of the woods. I thought that was the end of this business."

After bolting in circles, peeing on every bush not buried in snow and sniffing the bus tires the dogs gather loosely around Scott. He starts up the trail and they race before him. Griz, whose full name is Lady Griz, only makes it a few hundred yards up the trail before she sits down to pick at ice between her paws. Cowboy and Gus run off the trail to inspect one of the many deer carcasses hunters scatter along the nearby forest road.

"We call this the gauntlet," Scott says after commanding the boys off the carcass and ordering Griz to cut that out. "There are distractions everywhere. I have to be real careful to focus their enthusiasm through here."

Cowboy is a sheepdog mix, and his long white snout makes him look like an aardvark. At the start of the hike he has a jaunty red bandana tied around his neck. At the end he does not.

After three hours and eight miles on the snowy Plum Creek timberland the dogs have slowed down. Maddie looks baleful and tries to keep only three feet on the ground at rest stops. She shivers despite her dog vest ($22.50 at the retail store, more for larger breeds). Scott leads the pack down a very steep slope through a stand of giant tamaracks. The dogs look like they are skiing, sliding on all four paws.

Scott gets them on the bus without incident. They settle down in a semi-pigpile, cold after the time outside. Scott drops off Sadie, then a shuffling and sleepy Bailey. As he locks up the house and puts the key back in its place a fat cat waddles from the bushes meowing and taps his leg. The key comes back out, Scott scoops up the cat and pets him, then lowers him through the open door.

Is there an unexplored retail and service economy for cats in Missoula?

"Oh I bet," Scott says. "Dog owners are nuts. But cat people? They are completely crazy."

Origin of a Species

Like much of the American west's history, if you want to find the origin of the maple trees in Missoula, Montana, you have to head east, east until you meet town founder Francis Lyman Worden's ancestors coming west.

Ralph Shepard was born in 1603 on the outskirts of London in a slum called Limehouse. Named for the lime kilns that fired pots for trading ships, this port on the river was the first place ships sailing up the Thames docked. Chandlers saw to the ships while the saloon keepers, whores and gamblers worked on the sailors. Pitching ship decks must have made Ralph seasick because instead of heading to sea he headed into the fields northwest of the city.

By 1632 he was halfway between Birmingham and London marrying a farm girl named Thankes Ye Lord. Thankes was from Towcester, which you say "toaster," and is mainly known today as an exit on the A5 motorway and the site of a horsetrack. With a one-year old daughter and pregnant with a son, Thankes Shepard and her husband joined the Great Migration to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They crossed the Atlantic in 1635 on a ship called the Abigail. Thankes gave birth to 12 children on the new continent, the last at age 41.

Her daughter Trial Shepard married Walter Powers, a recent arrival from Essex, England. The Powers family lived perpetually on the western border of New England wilderness, and each generation is buried further west. Trial and Walter lie in Concord, Massachusetts, Walter Jr. and Rebecca in Littleton, Ezikiel and his wife Abigail in Chesterfield, New Hampshire. Within a hundred years the old-growth forests of southern

New England had fallen to Puritan work ethic and counterweighted axe blades. Settlers like the Powers recreated the pastoral landscape of their English birthplace. By 1808 when Susan Powers was born, the family had pushed west to Marlborough, Vermont, on the New York border. Susan married Rufus Worden and they soon had a son they named Francis.

Somewhere on his western travels Francis met Christopher Powers Higgins, an Irishman. After the two made a killing at their Hellgate Trading Post they began to lay out Missoula. Higgins must not have minded the open Palouse prairie with its bluebunch wheatgrass, prairie smoke, and snowberry. Worden, though, must have missed the maples of Vermont. In 1872, after establishing a sawmill, but before building the town's first bank, he ordered a load of Norway Maple whips from back East. Like contemporary town founders around the west he decided planting trees, rather than cutting them down, was the mark of civilization.

Scott Stringer, Missoula's City Forester, has an old document that describes the immigration of those first trees. The whips were raised in western New York, and put on a train at Geneva. The train ran west on fresh rails to Bismarck in Dakota Territory. There the bundle of trees was carried down the banks of the Missouri to a wood-fired steamboat. The boat churned upriver for a week, its boilers burning through 30-40 cords of firewood per day. At Fort Benton the maples were loaded onto an ox-drawn freight wagon. The last 200 miles up and over the Continental Divide followed Lt. John Mullan's rough frontier road towards Walla Walla.

The maples, like most of the early Missoulians, were European invasives, and they too thrived in the valley. They are the Vikings of trees, thick-trunked and broad-

limbed, they turn yellow-blond in the fall. Norway maples don't mind dust, exhaust or smoke, and their spreading crowns turn the streets into tunnels.

Francis Worden didn't live long enough to walk Pine Street, shaded by maple leaves. When he died in 1887 his trees would have been spring poles at best. But the residents of Missoula followed his example. They must have liked how the trees broke up the plain, or reminded them of the home. To an easterner the sound of rustling leaves beyond an open window is less lonely than the whistle of wind through sagebrush. Residents continued planting maples through the new century, eleven trees per block, fifteen feet between. By the time the first tree census was done in 1979 there were 2,167 maples in the University District.

Somehow McLeod Avenue ended up with sugar maples. No one wrote down how it happened back in 1911. It was a busy year: South 3rd Street became the first paved street in the city, the electric streetcars were only a year old, and the Missoula Lodge (#556, Loyal Order of Moose) was established. No one noticed that a few of the city's new saplings turned red instead of yellow that fall.

From the side of Mt. Sentinel last week McLeod Avenue was a crimson dash dividing the otherwise yellow canopy. Maples live strenuous lives, freezing each winter, releafing each spring, and their life spans are usually human, four score. Many of the trees on University and the streets named for C.P. Higgins' children (Arthur, Helen, Hilda, Ronald, Gerald and Maurice) are now nearly a century old.

Down on the street itself homeowners were out raking their yards. On one lawn a small girl was trying to bury her even smaller terrier in a pile of leaves. Her father leaned on his rake and looked at one of the inevitable blisters that come from vigorous, manly

raking. Asked by a passerby if she knew what kind of trees the leaves fell from she replied without hesitation, “The syrup maple.” When her father was asked if he had any idea where the mysterious sugar maples came from she answered for him.

“The ground,” she said, with absolute certainty.

Range-Finding, Western-Style

The first day of fall fell on a Sunday this year. In the jungles of the northern Amazon the sun beat directly down on the Equator, while up here on the 47th parallel the day and night were evenly divided. The longer nights compel hardwoods to stop producing cholophyl, snow geese to head south, and Montanans to prepare firearms for hunting season. Up here, "autumnal equinox" is Latin for "shoot the shit out of some shit."

Those with a scientific mind head to a shooting range with day-glo target sheets, a ballistics chart, and a padded rifle rest. The rest head for Forest Service land with cans, beer bottles, or in this Information Age, a computer monitor. Any dirt road with more trees than houses has at least one backwoods shooting range.

Up a creek outside of Missoula, Montana, there is just this sort of place. Like many western streams the creek first watered herds of elk and deer, then cattle and ranch families. Now it grows green grass around herds of half-acre homesteads. Past the housing developments, the mountains close in, providing a baffle for sound and a backstop for stray bullets. A pull-out in front of a gated Forest Service logging road marks the range. In case you are not sure if you have the right spot, it's also marked by bullet-riddled carcasses. In the weeds by the gate a whitetail is melting back into the ground, one hind leg investigated, but not consumed by coyotes. The ground is confettied with red, yellow and green shotgun casings. In front of the new green steel gate is another older gate. It is steel Swiss cheese, perforated by so many large-caliber rifle bullets that the government had to replace it.

The range is also marked by the stump of a foot-thick ponderosa pine. Townsfolk pumped so much lead into the trunk of this tree that eventually the bullets formed a fatal wedge of lead. The bullets burrowed into the wood like fat metallic pine beetles and toppled the tree.

The carcasses of computer monitors lie beyond the tree and the gate. They rest on their sides with their green silicon guts around them. Computer monitors are the Cape Buffalo of the backwoods shooting range, impervious to all but the largest calibers. Several rounds from a deer rifle only put small holes in the screen. The bullets do not emerge from the back. Number Six shot from a 12-gauge at ten paces only leaves shallow dents on the plastic housing. Before being saturated by bullets each monitor already contains several pounds of lead in its picture tube, and copper in its core.

Despite the countdown to hunting season's opening day, this September Sunday it was raining and traffic at the range was light. The first marksmen to arrive came with a small gym bag of handguns. The two men were wearing sweatpants and backwards Yankees hats.

"I don't hunt. I can buy burger at Albertson's," the short muscled one said. "I keep a .38 Special under my couch and a Ruger .40 S&W in the freezer for personal protection."

His friend lit a cigarette and said, "I carry a Glock 19 concealed, especially in the bank, even though that's the one place the state doesn't want you packing."

The men preferred to remain anonymous, but they did offer a show of their shooting prowess. After setting up some milk jugs they stood back 20 feet.

"Say there is an assailant pursuing me," the smoker said. "This is how it would roll."

He took a gunslinger's stance and squinted at the milk jugs. Suddenly he lifted his pistol from his hip, aimed, and said, "Shit. Safety's on."

"Those Glocks have three safeties," the bodybuilder said, in defense of his friend.

The second try was a success, and the milk jug bounced along the ground and 15 brass cartridges flipped end-over-end onto the ground. After a few pistol duets the men packed up their things and left to catch the Seahawks game. They left the shredded milk jugs behind as a warning to potential assailants.

As their pickup pulled away a maroon minivan arrived with a father/son pair. Zaymore had just turned three, and this was his first time at the range. "It smells funny," he said, catching wind of the whitetail.

His father Scott walked behind, puffing under the weight of a computer monitor.

"Are we going to kill it?" Zaymore asked.

"Yep," Scott said. Another trip to the minivan produced a very nice Browning A-bolt rifle in 7mm Remington Magnum ("for the big stuff, elk, a trip to Alaska for moose someday"), a Smith and Wesson .44 magnum ("for bears and for my wife when she's home alone"), and a .22 pistol ("for Zaymore").

The computer monitor stood on its Boot Hill awaiting its fate while Scott outfitted Zaymore with sunglasses and earplugs. With his father kneeling next to him and his still-knuckless baby hands on the pistol, Zaymore took aim. He had the right squint and Scott only corrected his footwork, "Left foot forward a little, there." Zaymore closed his eyes as he pulled the trigger. He hit it anyway. When he saw the spiderweb across the glass he

let out a kid's belly laugh. "Again!" he said. They went again 5 more times, until Scott had to explain, "there are no more bullets in there cowboy."

When Scott shot the big gun Zaymore's mouth made a small o. The report echoed between the hillsides like a canon. Then he fired the .44. After roaring and jerking through the six-shot cylinder Scott blinked and took out his earplugs.

"I guess this is sort of a big gun for my wife. She only weighs 100 pounds. I weigh 210 and I still get pushed around."

He and Zaymore walked over to the remarkably-intact monitor and poked it with their toes. Scott peered into its innards.

"Jeez there's a lot of metal in here. It seems like kind of a waste to just throw all this out. That 7mm will take down any animal out there, and at 400 yards. I thought this would kind of explode more. One of the shots didn't even go all the way through. Must be all this copper and metal in here. And look how thick the screen glass is."

Zaymore also looked thoughtful.

"Are you going to bring it home and show Mom?" he asked.

"No," Scott said. "We'll leave it for someone else to shoot."

They packed the guns back in the minivan and Scott put Zaymore into his car seat. As they pulled away the sun came out for a minute and the ground glittered with brass. .308, .45, .22 LR, .30-30, .223 Remington, 9mm Ruger, .340 Weatherby, 30 Carbine and 7mm Mauser, the cartridges crunched underfoot like shells on a beach. In the fall, only a hundred miles and a few mountains away from the Anaconda, Montanans pour copper back into the ground.

Winning is Fun

This week our foreign war rolled on, the word recession appeared in bold headlines, and this western town came out to watch its university play football. On Friday night RV's lumbered into a line around the stadium, staking claims to the prime tailgating spots. Named for actions they are not capable of (Bounder, Sprinter) or for carefree modes of travel their bulk discourages (Hitchhiker, Rambler) they have satellite TVs, air-conditioning, showers, full kitchens, and 12-way power captain's seats. One had a garage on the end holding an ATV and a Jetski. No RV had a tailgate.

When a passing fan referred to *his* vehicle as an RV, Les Jensen, a cattleman out of Billings hopped from his folding chair. "Let me set you straight on your terminology," he said. "This is a Coach. Coaches start, that's *start*, at $200,000." His coach was black and gold, with a motorized extendable living room and bedroom. A significant part of its 34,000-lb heft appeared to be carried in chrome trim. He pointed to a shorter RV across the parking lot. "See that 24-foot piece of shit down there with the "W" on it? *That* is an RV." Les Jensen had red, chapped hands and auto-tinting aviator glasses. He hitched up his Wranglers and walked to the rear of his coach. "See this chrome pipe? That runs to a Cummins 400. I do 85 easy unless I hold it back with the cruise control."

When a fellow tailgater inquired what he gets for gas mileage he ran his palm down the side of the coach like it was a horse. "It's 690 miles round trip. I spend $400 on diesel alone to come see the game. You tell me what it gets for mileage." At an average of $3.10/gallon the 42-foot Mandalay Coach is getting a bit over five miles per gallon. Watching one of his coach's four TV's, this one housed in the baggage compartment and

weather-proofed for outdoor viewing, Les Jensen said, “This is tailgating in style. You tell me how the price of beef is doing.” He chuckled and pulled out a tin of dip. “If you want to know how the price of wheat is doing go ask Claude.”

Les Jensen’s game-day neighbor is a dry-land farmer named Claude Hawks. World-wide supplies are tight and wheat is at a record high, closing in on $10/bushel. However, wheat still lags calves by 6-feet and 100 diesal horsepower. Hawks only has a 36-foot Winnebago Custom Coach pushed by a Cummins 300 and an Allison six-speed automatic over-land transmission, warrantied for half a million miles. More modest in chrome and televisions, the long north side still created its own climate, a slice of shade 20-degrees cooler than in the sun. Like Les Jensen, Hawks pays $45 per game for his reserved parking spot. “These spots are better than gold,” he said. “Only way you get one is if someone dies or moves away.” On game days Hawks leaves his home in Chester up on the Hi-Line before 6am. Hawks favors a straw hat and is generous with his beer.

“My grandfather came out here in 1910 to claim his 320 acres. By wagon. From Virginia. Then he sent back for his mother and father in-law. Can you imagine? He was 18. Imagine trying to start something from nothing back in those days.” Inside the coach Hawk’s 6-month old grandson slept through his first football game on the king-size bed.

“That’s the best part of coming in an RV,” Claude said, “later in the season we can come out here at half-time and warm up, he can take a nap. It’s a luxury.”

Across the street from the coaches was a custom van in university colors. It had shiny low-profile tires and blinding rims. Jim Kelly sat bewildered outside the van while his four kids crawled back and forth across the seats inside. “I haven’t driven it more

than 50 yards," he said, adjusting a hearing aid. "I won it in a raffle and I picked it up today." As curious tailgaters gathered he gave a tour. "Here, look, it has TVs that drop down from these doors." His daughter came up and signed to him. "Oh yeah, and it has these TVs you can see through the back windows." She signed another sentence. "And satellite radio. And a fold out BBQ. And a poker table." On the dash were 4 separate remotes to control the van's video and sound systems. Two beer taps sprouted from the side, connected to kegerators in the back. Kelly removed the taps and put them in the glovebox. "I have four kids," he said.

Beside the university maintenance shops, in a far corner of the stadium lots, there was less traffic. Along the open bay doors were a few pickups with their tailgates down. Mick Alva leaned against his truck the way men who work outside do, left elbow hooked on the side of the bed. Because it was Saturday his other hand held a beer. Extension cords from the sheds ran to crock pots of chili and elk stew. "No one's supposed to be here during games," he said, "but I figure if nothing gets broken or taken its ok. Paul from the plumbing shop and Dick from electrical, they both come down here too. I don't always get Saturday off because I'm the Labor Crew Foreman. When I work a game day I'm here before 7 and I work until after 10. Later if it's a big crowd. The bigger the game the bigger the mess." Mick pulled at the corners of his handlebar moustache and told his toddling granddaughter she shouldn't crawl underneath the truck. "It's a nice time," he said.

Each time the home team scored, the ROTC boys fired a canon. Out in the tailgating thoroughfare a group of college boys heard the gun and bellowed "Yeah bay-bee." A group of girls with them said "Woot-woot!" Inside the stadium the home team

toyed with a less-skilled team from an inferior division. The home bench grew cold as the 2nd, the 3rd, and even the 4th strings went in. The canon boomed again. A freshman boy and his girlfriend walked by, not yet used to morning beer and afternoon sun. "Are you going to be ok? Do you want some water?" he asked. She nodded "yes," as her pale face and pursed lips said "no." He patted her back. Nearby a group of high school girls with tans from a summer at the lake stood with their backs to the game. A group of boys with new sneakers and shoulders earned from a summer of baling hay or fighting fires walked past. "I NEED to get a boyfriend," one girl said in the Axe Body Spray wake. The girls nodded their blond bangs.

From the bleacher seats in the stadium the crowd looked down on the perfect grass of the field and to the plains stretching west. The sun shone on a scoreboard reading "49-0." On the highest bench a young fan swung his feet and poked his mother with a giant foam hand. She looked down and he said "Winning is fun." "Yes," she said, "it is."

In the Boxes

On my first morning of work I walked into the South Boston warehouse and watched a large wooden crate tip off the front of a forklift. The box fell four feet and the plywood sides crumpled like wet cardboard.

"You fucking fuck!" a short redheaded man in coveralls screamed at the black driver. "Look at what you did."

The driver jumped down from the cab and almost fell over.

"I'm feeling a little dizzy this morning Jimmy," he said.

A teddy bear, a clock radio and a copy of *A Year in Provence* lay on the wet cement soaking up water. The label on the broken crate was addressed to "C.J. Diamond and Family" of Lincoln, Massachusetts. The return address was an investment firm in London.

"These are personal fucking effects Larry," the short man shouted. "Now these fucking people are fucking fucked. Jesus and Mary…" This angry man then turned to me and shouted "And *who* the fuck are you?"

"I'm the new forklift driver," I said.

"Well I'm Jimmy-the-Foreman. And you won't drive shit until I say so. You found this job through the want ad in the free papers I bet, and those ads always say 'Forklift Drivers Needed.' Everyone wants to sit on their ass and get paid. You're working as a lumper in the trucks and that shit ain't for fat asses. I hope you've got a strong back."

The warehouse was a brown windowless box on Channel Street near the piers of South Boston. It was a two mile walk from the Red Line, across the bridge over the Fort Point Channel, past the end of the sidewalk, a dead gull, a leaking car battery and a diaper shredding in the wind. The loading dock faced a fish processing plant whose fryers and flash freezers ran day and night. The air smelled like school cafeteria fish sticks for three blocks in every direction.

As Jimmy guessed I had found the ad in a free newspaper, the ones handed out in South Station by men wearing dirty sweatpants and sneakers with velcro straps. I'd moved to Boston in the middle of winter with a new liberal arts degree and a list of alumni contacts. I had applied for work as a grant writer, a photographer's assistant, a travel agent, a sales clerk and even a paralegal. Weeks of walking the slushy streets to drop off cover letters and resumes and attend interviews left me with no job, $174 in the bank and $450 in rent due. Ten dollars an hour to drive a forklift had sounded good. On my application I wrote that I had driven big diesel-powered forktrucks during the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. A secretary eating a baked potato in the shipping company's Copley Square office glanced at me and asked if I had any felonies.

"No," I said.

"Well, it doesn't matter one way or the other," she shrugged, and told me to show up on Monday. She did not at any point mention lumping, Larry's "dizzy spells" or Jimmy-the-Foreman.

After telling Larry to mark the manifest "goods lost/damaged in sea transit" Jimmy took me on a tour of the building. The warehouse was the size of several football fields. Thirty-two loading bays opened onto the parking lot and a semi truck was backed

up to every one. The trailers were the bright Lego-like sea container boxes you see behind trucks, on trains, and stacked on ships. Inside the warehouse rows of shelving ranked like dominoes disappeared into the gloom. Thousands of pallets of cardboard boxes sat stacked in rows twenty feet high. Amongst all the shelves were odd-sized loads, an eight-foot high anchor for a ship sat between a logpile of rolled Persian carpets and three Vespa scooters. Banged-up yellow forklifts raced down the isles like two-ton go-carts. It was dim and cold inside, and the men wore thick coveralls and hooded sweatshirts cinched tight. Jimmy was the only white guy I had seen so far.

"All this shit is coming from somewhere else, and going another place soon," he told me. For a short Irishman he took long strides and I almost had to jog to keep up. He talked even faster.

"We deal mostly in unconsolidated freight, which means that wherever the fuck this shit is coming from they didn't have forklifts or pallets or any of that shit. But they do have lots of Chinamen, or Indians, or whateverthefuckians and so they load the boxes into the containers loose. We take the boxes and put them on pallets. That's what a lumper does. Lumps the shit together."

Waving his arms at the cavernous space he said, "Look at this, we Americans have become a bunch of lazy fucks, we don't make anything anymore. Not a single thing in the whole goddamn place was made here. What we've got is a service economy. And that doesn't amount to shit. My old man worked in Manchester, New Hampshire, for forty-two years for the same mill. He never had anything but a shitty old house and shitty old car. But he owned something. I'll be renting until the fucking day I die."

Walking down one of the canyons in the crates we met an old black man pushing a broom slowly. He didn't look up, but he nodded when Jimmy screamed- "Keep it up Al, sweep that shit up." As we passed Jimmy said, "That fucking guy, he should be in a home somewhere, but he's got no money, no family, so he comes here and pushes that fucking broom around eight hours a day. Don't get me wrong, I'm no Communist, but working here you'll see that capitalism is not the fucking bed of roses they teach you about in school."

Jimmy ended the tour in a windowless break room in the depths of the warehouse. One of the two fluorescent light tubes on the ceiling flickered, the other was burnt out. The yellow walls were ringed with a dark layer of dirt four feet off the floor, dirt and grease ground in by men's shoulders as they smoked a cigarette or drank a cup of coffee. There were dented lockers against a wall, and a microwave splattered with something brown.

"Now," Jimmy said, "here's what I really want to show you." From his locker he produced a handful of Polaroid pictures. In the photos two naked women with huge sagging breasts and purple mascara straddled the faces of two red-faced men.

Jimmy cackled, "Yeah, those are the two Polish guys who just left. That's who you're replacing. They were getting deported so all of us chipped in and got them some hookers this weekend. $100 for both of them. Don't you think those are some pretty fucking classy bitches for the price?"

"Indeed," I said.

"Indeed?" Jimmy mimicked. "You a college boy or something."

"Yeah, I went to college," I said.

"Then what the fuck are you doing here? This is some bottom of the barrel shit you're getting into. If you're an alcoholic you work here. Or if you're a con. Or like Larry just a general fuck up. I've never heard of no one not getting a job with a college degree."

I tried to explain that I'd failed the Microsoft Office test at the temp agency, and that rent was due, but Jimmy put up his hand.

"I don't need to hear problems. Everyone's got problems. Money problems, lady problems, kid problems. City's nothing but problems."

Growing up my Uncle Wilmer had told me as much. After he dropped out of high school he did as his uncles before him and left northern Maine. From Caribou he hitchhiked south to Mars Hill, Houlton, Bangor and finally Portland. When he made it to the brick mill towns of Massachusetts he rented a room and looked for work. He bounced around between Lawrence, Lowell, Methuen and the industrial outskirts of Boston.

Thirty years before him, his uncles had worked in the same mills. Once they had saved enough to buy a few acres of land they returned to Aroostook County, and married their high-school girlfriends. During the 1970s Wilmer worked some of the last jobs the mills along the Merrimack River offered, breaking down their textile equipment and emptying the long buildings of everything but the dust.

After a series of rough jobs he hurt his back and spent four years having three back surgeries at Mass General. As a souvenir of his time in the Bay State he has three fused vertebrae in his back. He shrank an inch from the surgeries but he is still a big

man, 6'4" and 260 pounds. He must have been able to lift a quarter ton. Now when he gets out of bed before sunrise at hunting camp he groans like a wounded bear.

Because he hurt himself in Massachusetts he had to drive 700 miles from northern Maine to Boston for surgery. During those months he would drive the 8 hours to southern Maine and spend the night. Sitting on the bench seat in his truck sent electric jolts of pain up his back and down his legs. By the time he got to our house his face lips would be white and his forehead sweaty.

"I wish I had never left Maine," he would say, lying on our living room floor waiting for the codeine to sink in. "It makes me sick to my stomach now when I see those big buildings on the horizon."

When I left Maine after college the skyline of Boston rose for me with the promise of money, culture, and late nights out with girls. It would be everything that my hometown wasn't. I would continue the evolution of my family, my parents had been the first members of their families to go to college, to make a living with their minds rather than their backs. Now I'd be the first to make city money.

The city money didn't seem as easy as I'd imagined when Jimmy sent me off to work with Larry. Though his hair was gray and his face creased, Larry dressed like 50 Cent, with saggy designer pants and a baseball hat over a do-rag. When I walked up to his forklift to introduce myself he was chugging from a pint bottle of Canadian Club.

"Now you don't have to say nothin' about this…," he said, tapping the bottle, then his temple. "This here is just to calm my nerves after that accident prior." He pointed into the dark cave of an white shipping container that read "Maersk-Sealand."

"You grab a pallet there and start piling those boxes on it. We count as we go and you make sure the number we count is the same that's on the paperwork."

Larry's instructions completed my job training, and I got to work. This container from Shanghai was confirmation of Jimmy's assessment that America no longer makes anything. I piled several pallets with 260 boxes of plastic eyeballs for stuffed animals. "Eyes – Plastic, Small, Round," the boxes read, "6000 ct." Next we stacked 400 cases of L.L. Bean raincoats followed by 600 heavy boxes of Ecco shoes. Each time I had a pallet loaded Larry came into the container with the forklift and drove it off into the maze of shelves. As we worked stacking the boxes Larry kept muttering, "Oh there's a lot of boxes, so many boxes." His breath was thick with the smell of whiskey and bad teeth.

At lunch I ate leftover spaghetti and Larry switched to rum. I realized his pants rode low because he kept a pint in each front pocket. In the afternoon we moved to another trailer loaded with sixty 110-pound drums, food coloring headed to a Hershey factory to coat M&M's.

Larry was a decent drunk, but driving a forklift requires a lot of coordination. There are multiple foot pedals and hand levers, the steering is quick, and they weigh over 4,000 pounds. After lunch I was stacking boxes in the front of a trailer with my back turned when I heard his tires skidding. He had come barreling in too fast and was going to hit the front of the truck. I dodged between the forks as they punctured the thin steel skin of the trailer and his forklift jerked to a stop. Another two feet and he would have crushed my chest between the fork brace on his truck and the wall of the trailer.

"I am truly sorry about that," he said while I climbed around his forklift.

After he drove off I checked for messages on my cellphone.

A few minutes later when he came back for another load he pulled through the wrong loading door at full speed. There was no truck at the bay and he drove off the empty dock. Larry and his forklift had no Dukes-of-Hazard moment of weightlessness. They plunged four feet down directly down, landing in a shower of sparks as the forks plowed furrows in the pavement.

Everyone ran over and tried to help pull Larry out. He was fine. "I sure was not expecting that," he said over and over, "not expecting that at all." Jimmy took him out back to fire him and the yelling was muffled. Larry trudged out with a look back and a wave. Before he left he gave me his clipboard and said I could have it to keep my shipping manifests straight. "I won't need it to get drunk," he said. Then he drove off in an old Ford station wagon.

That night my arms and back were so sore I could hardly bend down to unlace my boots. I checked my email and phone for messages about job interviews. There were none. I called my parents to tell them I at least had a job.

The next morning when I punched in at the time clock there was a glossy blue BMW M3 sedan sitting in the warehouse with its engine running. Jimmy was sitting in the driver's seat. "We gotta run the tank dry before we put it in the container. Why this guy needs to take this fucking car to Argentina is beyond me." With that he floored the idling engine until it hit the redline, and then kept it there. "You're working with Edwin from now on," he shouted.

Edwin was a tall black guy with a lean face. I found him piling boxes in the gloom of a container. He tossed the seventy-pound boxes like they were filled with styrofoam peanuts instead of iron fittings for Vermont Castings woodstoves.

He looked at me hard, and set down his box. "Yo Mike, before I work with you, I gotta ask you man, are you a narc?"

"Hell no," I said.

"Well some of the guys, we were talking, and someone had to tell Jimmy that Larry was drinking yesterday, and, well we thought maybe it was you. See, Larry'd been here almost a year, and he'd been trying to quit drinking. But do you know why he was drinking yesterday?"

Before I could answer Edwin went on. "I'll tell you why. He's got a retarded boy with asthma to look after, 'cause his wife got killed in house fire last year. Just last weekend he bought an old Dodge Caravan so he could take his son on trips. But it had a car alarm on it that was always going off so he disconnected the horn, but then he couldn't get it inspected. So he got pulled over on Sunday after he took his boy to the beach to get some better air, an' he got arrested 'cause he's got no license after suspension, an' they took his boy away and impounded the car. That's why he was drinking."

"Well that's a shitty deal," I said, "but Jimmy probably didn't have to work too hard to figure out he was drunk after he drove off the dock."

"Oh no man, see Larry he's done that before, just because he's not very careful. And I like him but man he can be stupid. That was his third trip off the dock this year, the other two he was dead sober. You ask me, it was racism. Jimmy's a white dude, and Larry's a poor black dude. Everybody does drugs around here. Everybody here's got a record. Jimmy? He's the biggest drug addict of them all. Why do you think he talks so fast? That motherfucker does more speed than all these truck drivers combined."

At lunch Edwin asked if I wanted to take a drive and smoke up. Thinking it was my only chance to end suspicion that I was a narc I said "Sure." In his beat-up blue Olds we drove down Seafood Avenue past more fish stick plants. The workers were out smoking cigarettes in their hairnets and plastic gloves. We cruised down Drydock Avenue where a Carnival cruise ship loomed over us, high and dry for service. We turned down East 1st Street and drove past the Conley Marine Terminal. Here blue gantry cranes roamed the docks like brontosaurs. Three ships each with the equally unlovely names Hanjin Irene, Cosco Bremerhaven, and Knud Maersk, were bellied up to the dock. These 1,000 foot long floating warehouses carry as many as 6,000 containers apiece. From the port, truckers tow them to warehouses in South Boston, East Boston, Chelsea, and Scituate.

We smoked and watched the cranes hover over the ships and hoist the containers on steel cables. "It's a lot of stuff" Edwin said. "When you think there's more of these ships unloading down in Jersey, and Baltimore, and out west in California. And then there are more boats out in the ocean, just waiting to unload their stuff. And you seen what we unload, most of it is just cheap plastic shit. I don't know how they can afford to send it over here and still sell it all at the dollar store."

I didn't know either. One weekend I used a friend's ID to get into one of Harvard's 80 libraries and there I read all about containerization. I found that not since the wheel has a simple shape so profoundly changed the way humans trade. These forty-foot trailers enabled a global economy in which you can buy a DVD player for $29 at Wal-Mart, a Swedish desk for less than $50 at IKEA. These same boxes made the factories of New England obsolete.

From 1000 BC when the Phoenicians began shipping in the Mediterranean until the 1970's, boats were loaded and unloaded by hand. The method was known as break bulk. Cranes and cargo nets lifted loads between the boat and the docks, but Marlon Brando piling coffee sacks in the hold of a ship is an accurate picture of shipping before containerization. Ships sat in port for days while loads were lifted out of the holds, and other cargo loaded back in. Every individual item was set in the ship's hold by hand to maximize space and prevent shifting in rough seas. Goods were broken, lost in the disorder of the docks, or "fell off the truck" and into the hands of the Mob. In the 1950s almost 40 percent of the cost of shipping goods from New York to Europe came from the labor required to load and unload the boat. It took five days to load the ship, ten days to cross the Atlantic, and five more days to unload at the destination. Now it takes five hours to load a ship in Hamburg, five days to cross the Atlantic, and a week after it was bottled in France you can be drinking Perrier in New York.

It wasn't an industrial engineer who invented containers. It was a North Carolina truck driver named Malcom McLean. At age twenty-one McLean began a trucking company with a single Ford pickup truck. By his mid-30s his company owned almost two-hundred trucks and grossed $2.2 million. He began thinking about containerization while waiting to unload his own truck and watching longshoreman struggle with 200-pound bales of cotton. He knew it would be easier to put loads in a trailer, then move the entire trailer onto a boat. Standardizing the boxes and the trailer chassis meant you could stack a boat full of containers and leave the wheels in the ports. Once at the docks the containers could be on trains or the highway in hours instead of days. The trailers could

be locked at the point of departure and opened at the destination warehouse, eliminating theft.

In 1955 McLean sold his trucking business and bought two World War II tanker ships. He had custom containers made to fit on the ships, and began running between Newark and Houston. His method proved efficient, but slow to catch on. Few ports had the big cranes required to pick the containers off the boats, and longshoreman's unions fought mechanization.

Like many technologies it took a war to finally establish containerization. During the Vietnam War the U.S. military was shipping enormous amounts of equipment to Asia. McLean was able to underbid other shippers by 300 percent and still make huge profits. In the 1960s, hand-loading a ship cost about six dollars per ton of goods; using McLean's container system cost less than 20 cents.

The containers I spent my days unloading changed the world's economic geography. As transportation became an insignificant cost, factories were built wherever manufacturing costs were cheapest. Today shipping a toaster from China to Long Beach on a ship, across the county by train to New York, and up the coast to Boston by truck adds only a few cents to the price. And so toasters are made in Taiwan rather than Toledo.

The increasing scale of containerships is continuing to reduce prices. Currently, naval architects are constrained only by the width of the Straits of Malacca between Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Malaccamax ships, as they are called, are up to a quarter of a mile long, 190 feet wide, and can hold over 5,000 forty-foot containers. When on trailers and attached to trucks the contents of just one of these ships would

make a continuous line of traffic 56 miles long. These giant ships run routes between the factories in Asia the ports of North America and Europe.

The containers, cranes and computerized logistics have eliminated much of the break bulk cargo, and thus most of the longshoremen. However, even in modern shipping there are orders which just don't fit in an even number of containers. Most of it was stuff, the things which crowd the closets and garages of the developed world.

One day I kept a list of the stuff that Edwin and I lifted in a single day. It read:

cow milking equipment from Japan headed to Vermont, popsicle sticks from China (950,000), bolts (heavy), washers, furniture of returning expats, a nose cone assembly (for rocket?), Italian picture frames, baseball hats, cutting boards, boxes of staples, boxes of D bras for Victoria's Secret (v. heavy), Cole Haan shoes, LCD screens, rope, loofa (light), body puffs (v. light), faucet handles, guitar cases, starting blocks, tote bags for discuses, speakers, more dye for M&M's, soy milk machine, sandals from Brazil (12,000 pair), table cloths, 2 motor scooters, shower curtains, valves and pistons for a giant engine, pink vibrators (Edwin laughs "That load will make a lot of women happy"), bouncy balls, dice, steel toes to be put in boots, golf club handles, bundles of leather, garlic presses, vegetable peelers, 3 sizes of hamster wheel (sm, med, lg)

According to the manifests all these necessities of modern American life totaled 25,187 pounds. It took up only three trailers. Spreading across the U.S. on trucks and trains there may have been 4,997 other containers filled with equal amounts of stuff offloaded from the same ship.

At night I would ride the Red Line back to Cambridge and get off at Harvard Square. I had found a surprisingly cheap room on Concord Avenue, living with a friend's high school prom date and her friends. They all wore mini-skirted power suits and worked on Beacon Hill. They asked me how my work was and I was too tired to tell the story well. So I told them it was a lot like *On the Waterfront*, but with forklifts, much more swearing, and no Italians. "I find that blue-collar world so fascinating," one said. "What gets people like that out of bed in the morning, to do work with no intellectual stimulation?"

As the weeks went by I had the chance to work with most of the regulars. Teddy and Chris were two Irish kids from South Boston who had been working $25-an-hour union jobs as baggage handlers at Logan Airport. But, one night they were horsing around and they drove their baggage conveyor truck into a 737. It tore a hole in the aluminum fuselage.

"It wasn't a big hole, but you can't cover that shit with bondo when it's a jet. My boss said it cost $17,000 to fix," Teddy said.

Now they were on leave while the union negotiated for their jobs with Massport. When I walked into their truck to help them stack they were throwing ten-pound boxes of WWF figurines made in Bangladesh at each other.

"I said 'Throw the boxes faster' you bitch," Teddy was yelling.

"Fuck you, you hit me in the fuckin' head again and I'll flatten you" Chris said, putting his Sox hat back on.

Both were 20, and both had young sons. Chris was already divorced and paying child support.

"I pay $200 every two weeks," he told me while Teddy drove off with a pallet. "Don't get me wrong, I love my kid to death, but my ex is a witch. What is a six year old going to do with $100 a week? I wish I could just put it in an account that he'll get the day he turns 18 so that she won't get a cent. If it weren't for him I'd be at home collecting unemployment. But I can't pay child support on that."

The day I worked with them a snowstorm was hitting Boston. The truck traffic slowed and Jimmy told us to go sweep the second floor. Upstairs the warehouse had a 30-foot ceiling with peaked glass skylights, the kind villains always fall through in movies. There were dusty crates and pallets of toys. The warehouse owners let the Toys for Tots program store collected items for free.

When we couldn't hear Jimmy anymore, Teddy put down his broom and pulled a baseball bat from between two crates. Chris lifted a pail of baseballs from behind a pallet. Teddy started taking rips, hitting long balls up at the distant skylights, trying to take out a pane. He could really hit.

"I've fucked up so many opportunities," Teddy said between swings. "I had a full ride to play football at Framingham State, the scout for Oakland was coming to watch me play. I could still play if I wanted to. I was a good first baseman too. Pawtucket's scout still came to watch me play this summer in the community league."

"Why'd you stop" I asked.

"Because I don't want play anymore."

"Why?"

"Because I have a girl and a fucking kid, and I need a real job, not some pie in the fucking sky dream job."

A few swings later he put a ball through the glass. Snowflakes fell in a slender column through the opening. Chris and Teddy smoked cigarettes and we watched a small cone of snow collect on the floor. Chris talked about taking his son sledding out in Taunton. Teddy talked about taking his to the movies in Roxbury. Then we heard Jimmy screaming our names up the stairs, and we turned to go.

Teddy and Chris were at the top of a steep slide, and when they looked down they could see men like Ron at the bottom. Ron rode a stolen Huffy mountain bike to work every day. He said he'd been a Navy SEAL, but he talked mostly about times in the engine room. He was mostly Hispanic but he used the word nigger like he was black. Almost every sentence ended with it, or "son" or "kid." He idolized the rapper DMX, and knew all his songs. He'd be forty in a few months.

Ron was trying to get back into the military, but he was too old, and he was now a felon. He'd done two years for robbing a Dunkin' Donuts with a steak knife.

"Shit, I can't complain nigger," he told me. "'Cause I made my own lunch, thirty-nine years old, it's too late to cry about it. Sometimes I wish I was back in there, never have to worry about the fuckin' rent, or the utility bills, or getting up to work every day... Sometimes you get a crazy cellmate who won't shut the fuck up, but overall its not that bad son."

Over lunch one day Ron said that he'd seen his ex-wife arrested on COPS the night before. "That was some crazy shit kid. I hadn't seen her in 3-4 years. And here I

am watching the TV and there she is getting busted for assaulting an officer in Wyoming. That bitch gets around son."

"What do you usually do after work?" I asked.

"Well usually I go home, smoke some weed, watch some wrestling, think of all the pussy I'm not getting, watch Buffy the Vampire Slayer, then go to bed. Then I get up and do it again."

He had a hyena's crazy laugh which he often used after statements like that.

"It's laugh or cry nigger, laugh or cry," he told me. "I started at the bottom and I'll end up there, so what's there to complain about? At least I'm not on the street begging. I see some guy this morning with a sign that says "homeless Vietnam vet," but he's got all his arms and legs and shit, walking around just fine. So I went up to him and said 'Are you afraid the burgers are going to shoot back?' and he said 'What?' and I said, 'well I'm pretty sure McDonald's is hiring, and unless you're afraid the Viet Cong is hiding in the fries I think you should get a fucking job. Have some dignity son'"

Ron worked mostly with a big, quiet white guy named John who had known better. John was in his forties, but he had a boyish face and he looked like he should be coaching Little League. He didn't swear, and he spoke softly. His older sister was a dean at the University of Maine in Presque Isle. When he told me he'd been in the warehouse for a year I asked him if he was eligible for any sort of health insurance.

"Health plan? Sure they have a health plan here, its called the first aid box," he said, and pointed to a rusty white box on the wall. When we opened it we found a banana-flavored condom and a dusty band-aid. Ron laughed his crazy laugh.

John had also worked in Gloucester making wooden lobster traps. When metal traps replaced wood he lost that job. Before the warehouse he refinished furniture.

"You know at that job there was still some heavy lifting," he said, "but the job had some art to it. It was nice to have a job that took some thinking."

I asked John what he did outside the warehouse.

"I drink," he said.

My own evening routine was to walk back to South Station, past the diaper, the leaking car battery, and the dead gull (by now mostly feathers and bones). At home I took a twenty-minute shower and tried to get all the black snot out of my nose. The dark dirt from the containers never fully washed out of the lines of my palms. When I had the energy I went out with friends from college.

One night I went out with several students from the Harvard Divinity School. As we sat on Persian carpets in a faux-hookah bar, one of the students revealed her grandmother had just endowed her with a six-million-dollar trust fund. A few hours later she skipped out of the bar to meet other friends, leaving her $30 bar tab. As I put in my extra $5 I thought of how many boxes I had lifted in half an hour.

Compared to Ron, John, or Edwin, though, my own privilege differed from hers only in degree. I was never in real danger of becoming either of them. I always the safety net of a stable family. Even so I slipped into the mindset of the rest of the warehouse crew, trying to find dignity through stubbornness. As the weeks went by, I had less energy each night to look for jobs and type up cover letters. Eventually I stopped looking. I had gotten stronger and other then a sore back after big days, the work was no longer painful.

Other than Jimmy no one accused me of being a college graduate. Edwin did ask me once why I left Maine. "It seems like paradise up there. It's quiet, you got trees everywhere. And you got bears right? But I ain't had no bear ever pull a gun on me. If I were white I'd go live there," he said on a smoke break.

"I moved to the city for a girl," I said, because I couldn't explain to why I left to myself anymore.

"Women are the cause of pretty much everything men do," he said, and we went back to work.

In my odd jobs as a logger, a farm hand, and nightshift snowmaker on ski slopes I had met strong men, and men who thought themselves tough. But Edwin was the toughest, strongest man I had ever worked with. After a few weeks I could lift box for box with him from eight until around lunch. From lunch until five I just tried to stack one for his two. He was never demoralized by opening a container and finding it full to the ceiling with seventy-five-pound boxes of steel bolts. He never seemed to get tired, and he never complained his back hurt. He was forty-six years old.

"I started workin' in a warehouse in Brooklyn when I was 17," he said. "This is the only thing I can do. I don't know any other work."

Edwin was dating a 28-year-old woman from Maine. She was from Millinocket, a paper mill town killed by better, cheaper paper shipped from Brazil. In the pictures he showed me she was a small girl with big bangs.

"If she wasn't such a good girl I'd be in jail now," Edwin said. Then he added, "that girl puts me through hell, though. She'll go out to the bars and not come home until two, three o'clock in the morning. Or she won't come at all, and I'll stay up all night

waiting. One night she did that and when she got in at breakfast I told her to pack her things. She came at me with a knife from the kitchen and I called the police. When they got there she beat the shit out of them. She's got long nails and she was slashing with them, and biting and kicking."

"Maine girls are tough," I said.

"No joke," he said.

As the weeks went by it got a warmer. As we shed layers it was surprising to see how thin most of the men were under their coveralls. Edwin could lift over 150 pounds but without six layers on he looked like he weighed only 130 himself. I tried to avoid the 150-pound barrels as I did not want my Massachusetts story to end like Wilmer's.

As the sun got stronger and the snow melted, everyone in the warehouse dared to be optimistic. Edwin had an interview at a warehouse where there'd be no lifting. Ron believed he'd found a recruiter who'd waive the age limit and his conviction. John stopped drinking. Chris and Teddy heard from their uncle in the union that things looked good. I called in sick to go to an interview at a publishing house. Jimmy was one of the few who was constant: constantly screaming, constantly hustling the guys out of the break room and back into the trailers. "This shit won't unload itself," he'd screech.

In its efficiency, the global economy does not always have room for happy endings, especially on its lower decks. Edwin missed his interview for the better job because his girlfriend was sick. He drove her to the hospital. She was pregnant. She drank even more. Ron was hit by a car while riding his bike home and paralyzed from the waist down. John was fired for drinking. Teddy and Chris both were fired for good

from Logan. Chris stayed at the warehouse and started drinking too. Teddy quit and went looking for other work.

I had my own problems. One day in April I was lifting 75-pound boxes of Playtex bras with Edwin. "These goddam brassieres are heavy," he said. I was strong enough now that I could lift them with one hand looped through the plastic strapping. During two months at the warehouse I had put on fifteen pounds of muscle. Near the end of the truck I twisted wrong, and something in my lower back snapped.

I spent the next three months going to doctors, filling out workers' comp paperwork, and lying on the couch in a haze of pain-killers and muscle relaxants. I inherited my family's bad back no less surely than the impulse to move to from Maine to the city. Like my uncle I lay on the floor of my parents' house wondering why I ever went south.

A few days after I got hurt I limped into the warehouse to clean out my locker and get my last paycheck. Chris had the locker next to mine. He kept a picture taped to it, a Polaroid of his boy looking up expectantly at the camera. It was his birthday and there were three candles on the cake. There were no presents in the picture. A woman knelt next to the boy. Her face had been inked out with ballpoint pen. He had used so much force the pen had torn through the photo. I couldn't make out her face at all.

Big Bucks Club

This morning is like all the others in camp. The wake-up call is silence, long before dawn. I ease one of my earplugs out and hear sleeping bags rustle. My Swedish grandfather handed down his gene for seismic snoring to all the Quist men. There is no correlation between size and volume. My 9-year-old cousin Cheney produces as thunderous a rumble as his 250-pound father. When I pack for camp I grab earplugs before my rifle.

My Uncle Wilmer never sleeps past 3am. A life in construction has left him with fused vertebrae in his back and stainless steel pins in his arms. He tips out of bed groaning and muttering in Swedish, waking the snorers. He has coffee on the woodstove by 3:30 and at four he is swatting any motionless sleeping bags with his big mitt.

My Uncle Howard lies in the bottom bunk waiting for his anti-tremor pills to dissolve under his tongue. His Parkinson's was diagnosed two days after he retired from 40 years on a Maine Highway Department road crew. His doctor told him camp was not good for him, that the trail in was too rough. The same doctor told Howard that he would soon not have the strength to shuffle across his living room. That was two years ago, and each fall since he has willed himself out of his truck and up the hill to camp.

I am the apprentice cook. Wilmer still handles the baked beans and moose roasts, but I am entrusted with breakfast. Kept up by the aches from his falls from roofs and accidents with three ton I-beams, Wilmer keeps the camp stove running all night. I only need to add a few small slats of birch to get the bacon sizzling. Once the two pounds are crisped I start cracking eggs into the hot fat. When the two dozen eggs are done I drop

pieces of white bread into the pan. Once the loaf is toasted and the bacon grease absorbed I break open two boxes of doughnuts and say, "It's ready."

We were up late last night playing poker for spare change, drinking vodka mixed with Half and Half soda and smoking White Owl cigars. If they drink enough vodka, my uncles start singing the Swedish drinking songs my grandfather taught them and telling old hunting stories. The boys in the bottom bunks stay up far past their bedtimes and when we cut them in for a hand they often win. It's after midnight before we fall asleep.

At 4:45 in the morning it takes two percs of Maxwell House to liven things up. We pull on wool pants and lace up oiled Bean boots, load our orange vests with cartridges and thread skinning knives onto our belts. Looking out the door I can see it snowed last night. The woodpile and the pan over the waterhole are white with three inches of heavy November snow. It's tracking snow. Everything setting down in the woods today, from the gray jay to the logger's boot, will leave a singular trail.

I only take three .30-30 rounds from the box on the table. I don't bother packing a lunch or putting on a second pair of socks. I've hunted these woods hard before and have never seen a deer. All of this is more ritual than real preparation. If we wanted to shoot deer we'd be down south. In the small wood lots of southern Maine the country is smaller and the density of deer higher. Up here you can walk for miles without cutting a single whitetail track. No one in my family has shot a deer around here in 20 years. I tell Wilmer I'll be back for another cup of coffee by nine and step onto the porch.

The camp sits in grove of cedars and their shade keeps the camp dark long after sunup. When I step out of the these woods and onto the nearby logging road the sky is just getting light. It's warmer than yesterday and the new snow is already thickening. A

wash of clouds is spreading up from the south and the rising sun flares red before disappearing into the overcast.

I follow a fresh set of moose tracks uphill on the division line road. Later in the day logging trucks will be running this hill loaded, their tire chains clanking and chrome stacks belching black. Now, though, it is silent and I stand for a minute, looking across to the potato fields of Stockholm and the low hills named for French farmers, Cyr, Daigle, Michaud and Ouellette. The snow scrubbed the air overnight and the pine-topped ridgelines are sharp as knife points against the sky.

Though it has been cut to bare stumps four times, and will soon be cut for pulp for a fifth, this forest is resurgent. It is not the great old growth fir-spruce forest that the French fur trappers wandered. But it is also not yet surveyed house lots or a gated private hobby wilderness. The alders along the road are red-tipped and slender. The shaggy bark of a silver birch flutters in a breeze I can't feel. Even the old skidder ruts are scenic this morning, holding panes of ice that mirror the sunrise.

As I come to a small rise in the road I am thinking about how most mornings I would still be asleep at this hour. I am thinking about how except for hunting I would not wander a marginal landscape like this, nor feel any sense of affection for it.

I pause for a moment before I crest the hill, hoping that if I move up slowly I'll see the two moose whose tracks I'm following. Moving slowly, one foot, then the other, I reach the top of the hill. I hold my breath. Almost as if I am imagining it into being I see movement in the logging slash along the roadside. There are legs, too slender for a moose, and a patch of white fur. A deer steps out onto the road and stands facing me.

It's a buck. Silhouetted against the snowy road he looks giant, and his antlers reach above the horizon.

I try to hold another breath and move the rifle to my shoulder. The deer stands stock still and stares down the road at me. My eyes water slightly in a gust of wind, and I know that he can't smell me. In the scope the deer fills the crosshairs. He's 100 yards away. It's a textbook shot. I pull the hammer back until it clicks.

With the crosshairs on the white blaze in the center of his chest I hold my own lungs half full of breath and make a slow fist with my trigger hand. The old lever action Winchester booms and the scope jumps up to sight at the sky. When I find the buck again in the scope I see him running up a steep bank and into a thick stand of hemlocks.

I missed. Somehow I have blown the perfect shot, and in five seconds I have ruined the whole hunting season. I wonder if they heard the shot back in camp, and how I much I will have to exaggerate to explain my mistake. I trudge up the road to look at his tracks. I just can't believe I missed.

The tracks are big, but I hardly look at them. Instead I kneel and pick up a clump of hair. It is attached to a small piece of hide. The snow is pink with a fine spray of bright blood. "Shit. Shit. Shit," I say through my teeth. I've made the worst possible shot, neither a clean miss nor a fatal hit.

With my head down I jog up the tracks into the hemlocks. As I get into the brush I hear the buck crashing away to the north and west, away from the road and towards the big timberland. The snow in the thicket is covered with more blood, but it isn't nearly enough to keep him down for good. I have done something I have always vowed not to- wounded a deer and put him to running.

Stalking his tracks I get close enough to see the buck standing still among a gray stand of beech trees. His right foreleg is hanging limp and crimson. The fur is dark and matted at his shoulder. My shot went wide left and the bullet pulverized his shoulder. He is running on three legs.

I inch closer to take a final shot, but the beech trunks shield him. Just as I find a shooting alley he limps off again, angling between more thick hardwoods, never giving me a shot.

I pause over the spot where he rested, looking at the blot of warm blood melting into the snow. I want to take the first shot again, or better yet, not take it at all. I wish I had stayed in camp drinking coffee or splitting firewood. I wish there were some other way to learn that every shot is terribly final, and there are mistakes that can't be undone.

As the deer runs west toward the Canadian border he shelters again and again behind trees and terrain. I occasionally catch a glimpse of his antlers, the flag of his tail, or the red of his useless leg. But when I raise the scope to my eye there is never enough to aim at. He knows how to disappear in his territory, melting into a stand of young spruces, dropping down into a doglegged ravine or fading behind a small hill.

For three hours I blunder along behind him, filled with regret and disgust. As the chase goes into its fourth hour I am in unfamiliar country and soaked with sweat and snowmelt. It begins to rain lightly. I haven't seen the buck in 20 minutes, only heard him crashing along ahead. I begin to worry that I won't be able to catch him, and that the rain will erase my prints back to camp. I brought no map, compass, or matches on my morning stroll. There is nothing but woods between here and the St. Lawrence seaway 200 miles to the west.

As I feel these twinges of self-pity I come to a chest-high pine blowdown and see it is covered with blood. Somehow he leapt it on three legs. As I wrestle my way through the snag I consider how much it must hurt to do this with a shattered joint and muscles grinding against shards of copper. The buck wants to live much more fiercely than I have wanted to kill him.

After the blowdown I focus only on killing. It's the only way to make things right. I don't want the buck limping off to die slowly or be pulled down by coyotes. As the rain changes back to a heavy sleet I trot after him into thick woods. I lose track of direction and the time, running and sliding down bare ledged hills and pushing through hemlock stands heavy with snow. Sometime in the late gray afternoon we emerge on the shore of a lake. There is a muddy road running along the shoreline, and telephone wires arcing back somewhere to a town.

Here the buck doubles back and lies down. He can't swim, and he can't run back towards me. Through the thin branches of some striped maples I can see his flank heaving as he pants for breath. I stand still and silent until his ears droop and he lays his head on the snow. I can see the back of his neck and shoulders.

The shot echoes off the hills on the far side of the lake. The buck kicks once as if to rise and then is finally still. I sit down on a wet log and let the ringing in my ears fade. The sleet has stopped and I listen to the meltwater dripping from the branch tips. I take my last round out of the rifle and put in my pocket. I lean the gun against the log and watch water run down the blued barrel.

The buck's eyes are still clear and liquid. They're webbed with a reflection of the birch branches lacing overhead. The tines of his antlers are perfect and polished like

ivory. He weighs more than I do and I struggle to roll him onto his back. His destroyed leg splays out grotesquely.

I gut the buck quickly and pack snow inside the basket of his ribs. My coat and arms are covered in his blood. I walk down the dirt road hoping to find an inhabited house, a phone, someone who can tell me where I am, someone I can tell what I've done.

A mile down the road I see a line of boarded-up summer camps but smell woodsmoke. The last camp in the line is still open and an old man is sweeping the snow off a big Cadillac. He tells me his name is Gerald. Despite the fact that I am soaked, unshaven, covered with blood and fur, and carrying a rifle, he immediately invites me into his living room. His wife Alice pours me coffee and we talk about the hunt. I tell them I wounded the deer and it suffered too much.

"Sometimes that happens," Gerald says.

Alice and Gerald know my uncles, my grandmother and my mother. We've been to all the same small towns in Alaska. We agree that Cadillacs are comfortable cars, as comfortable as sitting in your very own living room. I use their phone to call for help.

Lewis Petersen shows up in his pickup. The old Swede is a butcher and a horse logger and has hands like grappling hooks. He was once the best deer hunter in the town of Stockholm. He is practically doing a jig. He claps me on the back. "Ho boy, Mike," he says. "That is a nice buck. Yes sir, and you covered some country bringing him down. It must be eight or ten miles from here to the camp."

After I drag the deer out of the woods and collapse to rest he grabs it by the antlers and yanks it into the truck bed like a sack of flour.

“I bet he’ll go 200 pounds,” Lewis says. He turned 65 this year and tells me that you can work hard until 50. “After that,” he claims, “your body falls apart.”

On the way back to camp we stop at the tagging station which is also the town’s general store. Stan’s is a log building which is moldering back into the ground. The front door is hidden among school bus seats, rusting tire rims, coyote traps, and old vending machines. Inside men sit in the dim corners and sip styrofoam cups of coffee. Stan has charged 10 cents for coffee since he opened, and refuses to change the price. His daughter takes my hunting license and comes outside to attach the tag.

The old men file out behind her and we all blink at the sudden brightness. “Hell of a deer,” she says. She’s a sturdy gal stuffed into denim overalls and she laughs heartily when I tell her my first shot only wounded the buck. She pulls a knife from her pocket and says “I’ve got a story about that too. I was huntin’ down around Patten last weekend and I had at a big monster. I missed him the first shot, but I hunt with a semi-auto so then I let the lead fly. I saw fur flying in the scope, so I must have hit him. Never did find him. Probably made the coydogs happy though.” With that she slices through the skin behind the hind leg and threads the plastic tag through.

One of the old men hands me a coffee and looks at the buck's cloudy eyes. He calls me "young feller." “Big deer,” he says, “yes sir, that’s a big deer for a young feller. Beautiful critters aren’t they? It’s something to watch them run.”

Lewis and I drive the haul roads back and I walk up the camp trail with the liver and heart in a plastic shopping bag. Wilmer is napping and the rest are playing a pre-dinner game of cards. When I tell them there’s a deer down in the truck they leap up and

throw on boots and jackets. "Somebody slap me," Wilmer says, getting out of bed in his red union suit, "I must be dreaming. Somebody got a deer around here?"

Down at the truck Wilmer says, "He might be big enough to get you into the Big Bucks Club." If this is true, the State of Maine will send me a large red patch for my jacket embroidered with a buck leaping a log. We lean on the sides of the truck and the boys clamber around the bed poking at the deer, petting his fir, and avoiding his stare.

"My first shot should have been better," I say.

"It's not a good feeling, is it?" Lewis says. "But you got him. I've lost two deer in the brush and you never get over it."

Wilmer says, "I learned the hard way that until that deer is down you better keep that lead flying."

We take some pictures. We lift the deer out and place him in front of a stand of young white pines, a wooded scene. I hold his head and decide whether to smile or look solemn. I do one of each.

I miss the Big Bucks Club by seven pounds. Dressed and hanging in Lewis's slaughterhouse he weighs 193 pounds. We rinse the deer and hang him in the cooler with his hide still on. Lewis has half a dozen sides of beef hanging in there too. They are thick-bodied and heavy with white fat. Next to their great bulk the buck's outline is lean and delicate.

On the long drive back to western Maine I think about whether I'll hunt next fall, or any fall. I wonder how I became a hunter in the first place. I grew up with a bed full of stuffed animals and books about talking animals. I went on school trips to a farm for injured wildlife and fed orphaned fawns out of my hands.

But I also grew up around men who pull on wool pants and hunting boots in the fall in the same way that flocks fly south or Catholics head to Easter Mass. As one of my friends explained about growing up around hunting, "I didn't want to kill, but I wanted to be a hunter even more."

In college I read Aldo Leopold and Richard Nelson. I liked the idea that hunting could make you an environmentalist as much as spotting birds with binoculars. I liked that eating game offered a way of eating off land not yet under the plow or the irrigation hose. It was reassuring to find that hunting could be defended on reason as well as heredity.

As I trailed along the miles of blood on the snow, though, all these rationalizations for hunting seemed empty. It is easy to talk about hunting. It's as easy as talking about the weather or what we're having for dinner. It is easy to put crosshairs on a silhouette in a scope. It is not as hard as non-hunters imagine to pull the trigger. But after a bad shot I learned how different action is from thought and good intention. And how final.

That night the first deep snow of the winter fell across New England. I cleaned and oiled the rifle and put it deep in the closet. For the next three falls I shot only birds. They almost always die easy or fly away cleanly. There is little blood and wingshooting a rising bird requires no thinking, only reflex. For a few falls I hunted only as wolves or weasels do, without reflection, and without remorse.

Aroostook County, Maine, in four fragments

1.

"Thank you Jesus for keeping us safe in the woods today and also for this food in front of us and the warm shelter of this camp," is what the bull cook used to say to the seated men. Thirty lumberjacks in wet wool clothes, 30 below zero and dark at quitting time, in the winter of 1931. My grandfather was there, ten miles south of the Canadian border and the St. John river flowing slow and sluggish with slush.

"Those were some of the last days, and some of the best days boys," he'd say every summer as he rocked on the porch. "But did we know it? No sir... You never know the best days until they're behind you...."

So they cut like they always cut and drove the logs like they always had, 150 miles down the spring floods to the mill saws, bar stools and brothels of Bangor.

The shadows crept north while the jacks spent their summers on fishing boats or firetowers or farms. Log trucks and skidders decended on the North Woods like a flock of crows to a cut over cornfield. They rolled on big pneumatic radial tires and the straight roads rolled out before them. Big roads meant bigger mills. Their dark maws ate logs and men each morning. In the evening they spit out trucks of newsprint for the city editions. Those men who stayed in the woods now went home with lithium grease and gasoline in the creases of their hands. After dark they drove 100 miles home to prefab houses with aluminum trim.

The shade of cedars was replaced with the sun-baked plains of black spruce plantations. The Scandanavians and French-Canadians took indoor jobs and taught their children only English. Now the bent backs in the woods and sweat-stained shirts drying on lines belong to Guatamalans, Hondurans and Mexicans.

Up in Madawaska the Fraser mill is still running 24/7, 365. But the logs all come from Canada and the paper goes to Germany. After NAFTA a six-inch diameter pipe crossed the St. John River and the log trucks from Maine were turned away at the gate. The pipe carries a slurry of wood fiber and water across the border, occasionally slurping like a straw in a milkshake.

My uncles know a man named Albert Daigle who gives me a tour of the mill. He retired last year after 45 years on the main floor. "Where else can you graduate high school one day and go to work making $45,000 a year the next?" he asks. He worked 3rd shift, 1am-9am his whole career. He lost his hearing and two fingers on his right hand. "Accidents are bound to happen," he says.

His wife Jeanine understands. Her first husband fell asleep driving home from second shift on a snowy night. Romeo Doucette died on the way to the hospital and left her with five kids under 5. She was 22. "There wasn't a speck of blood," she says. "When they lifted him up the snow underneath was just as white...."

When I leave their house the Daigles give me a stack of paper. "It's Fraser paper!" Albert hollers. As I drive away I see Jeanine standing by him in the doorway. She waves until the road turns and the house disappears from the car mirrors.

Weeks later I find the paper under the passenger seat. I take it inside to write a letter. The sheets are crisp and white and unblemished. They could have come from anywhere.

2.

My parents both come from places considered too far north. My father grew up on the Puerto Rican streets at the top of Manhattan. According to the 2000 census in this county there are 66,000 people per square mile. My mother comes from the borderlands of northern Maine. Aroostook County has 10 people per square mile and is the largest county east of the Mississippi. It covers 20% of the total area of Maine yet has only 5% of its population. When my parents married they settled on middle ground in western Maine, eight hours from Washington Heights, eight hours from The County.

Aroostook is a Micmac word for "beautiful river." The rivers were long the only thoroughfares through the dense boreal forests. Their old names echo their rapids and the slip of sediment heading for the sea; Mattawamkeag, Allagash, Sebois, Penobscot, and Baskaheagan. The highway I've grown up travelling is named Interstate 95. It echoes with long haul trucks headed south and the wet splintering of bone when moose are too slow to move.

Every Thanksgiving my family made the reverse migration north, up Route 95. Growing up the trip had the feel of an ocean crossing. My parents loaded the car with food, water, warm clothes and our golden retriever Chuck. We left after school, as it got dark and the towns along the highway turned on their streetlights. The contrials of trans-

Atlantic jets caught the last of the sun. They would be landing in London before we finished the 400 mile drive.

At Bangor we stopped to fuel up for the long empty stretch to Houlton. The truckstop was filled with other cars filled with other families. The license plates were from Connecticuit, Massachusetts, even Florida.

"Why would those people come all this way just to eat turkey and pie?" my younger brother asked.

"Guilt," said my mom.

Back out on the highway there were no more lights off in the distance, just darkness beyond our breath condensing on the windows. Once or twice an hour the green glow of an exit sign would float past in the headlights, and an empty exit ramp would disappear into the dark. Long after my regular bedtime I'd fall asleep to the hum of the tires. I'd only wake when gravel rattled in the wheelwells and the roads had turned to dirt.

3.

Late in the morning my uncles came fishtailing up the blank, snow covered road, four men in the truck cab, including a state cop holding his big hat in his lap.

"Where is he?" the trooper asked me.

"In the camp. In a bunk."

He slipped up the trail in his shiny black police shoes and stood on the porch picking snow off his socks.

"It was just you and him here last night?"

"Yes" I said. "I drove up from downstate late, didn't get here until midnight. We played a few hands of poker. He was like this when I got up this morning."

"His name is Gunnar Sandstrom," my Uncle Howard said from the doorway. "When he was a logger back in the '30s they used to call him 'The Wrecking Ball' because when the log drive got to town he'd about tear it down."

"No kidding," the trooper said. He pulled an oven mitt from above the stove and walked over to the bunk. With his mittened hand he lifted Gunnar's thin arm, pulling it back and forth like a slot machine lever.

"He had the cancer," Howard said. "Had it going on 10 years, in various places. The doctor in Caribou was always telling him he had three months left. He figured it came from all the years working on the air base. He was a janitor, but he was around those big B-52's that were just loaded with nucular bombs."

"We'll let the coroner decide what it was," the trooper says.

We carried him out to the road wrapped in his sleeping bag. Only the top of his head showed and his scalp was as colorless as his thin hair. It was warming up and the snow on the ground was thick, melting back into the unfrozen November ground.

My Uncle Howard toed the muddy trail and said, "They might be able to get him in the ground yet." Uncle Lewis worked on the base with Gunnar, and hadn't said much. He pulled out a cigarette and clamped it in the corner of his mouth. "This county is empting out," he said finally. "Mostly just old men without women waiting for the end. The whole place has caught the cancer."

The tip of his cigarette flared red, the State Trooper looked at his watch and we picked up the body again. At the road we lifted Gunnar easily into the back of his own pickup truck. The trooper made a few more notes on a piece of scrap paper and put it into his pocket. We had to jumpstart Gunnar's truck so the trooper could drive it out. The road ran straight and white between the dark woods shedding snow. The spinning tires left muddy ruts down the clean white line of the road. We watched until the tracks merged and the truck disappeared, leaving dark lines pointing south.

4.

This summer while I climbed mountains in Montana and went on a safari in the Serengetti my grandmother had surgery. They couldn't get all of it. She's 89 now, and fighting the same thing that killed her sister, the same thing that nearly killed my mother at age 40 and again at 50.

But when I drive north at the end of the summer to stay with her we don't talk about that. We don't talk about the long phone conversations her grown children are having far away in the south of the state. Who's going come home to live in their old bedroom? She's kept them dusted all these years and ready for just this thing, just not this way. The two small rooms are still decorated as they were their senior years of high school. We don't talk about the doctor's appointment I'll drive her to the next day or about her thin shoulders and certainly not about the decision she faces.

"Let's have a game of Scrabble," she says instead.

My grandmother spoke French until she started first grade and she left after 6th grade. I've been to 18 years of school and I've beat her only once.

"I don't think it's your night" she says when I spell CAT followed by IS and NO. It is not my night.

Afterwards we sit at the kitchen table with the evening sound of crickets coming through the screen door. We talk about how short summer is, and how expensive heating oil will be this winter. We talk about her two new great-grandchildren and the death of her last brother. She tells me about her discovery of the Swifter dustmop while on a trip to Wal-Mart and I tell her how lions sound at night. There's only one thing we don't talk about; we don't talk about it because it's a story everyone here knows by heart.