

I Can't See the Wind

Kayak Journals from the Inside Passage

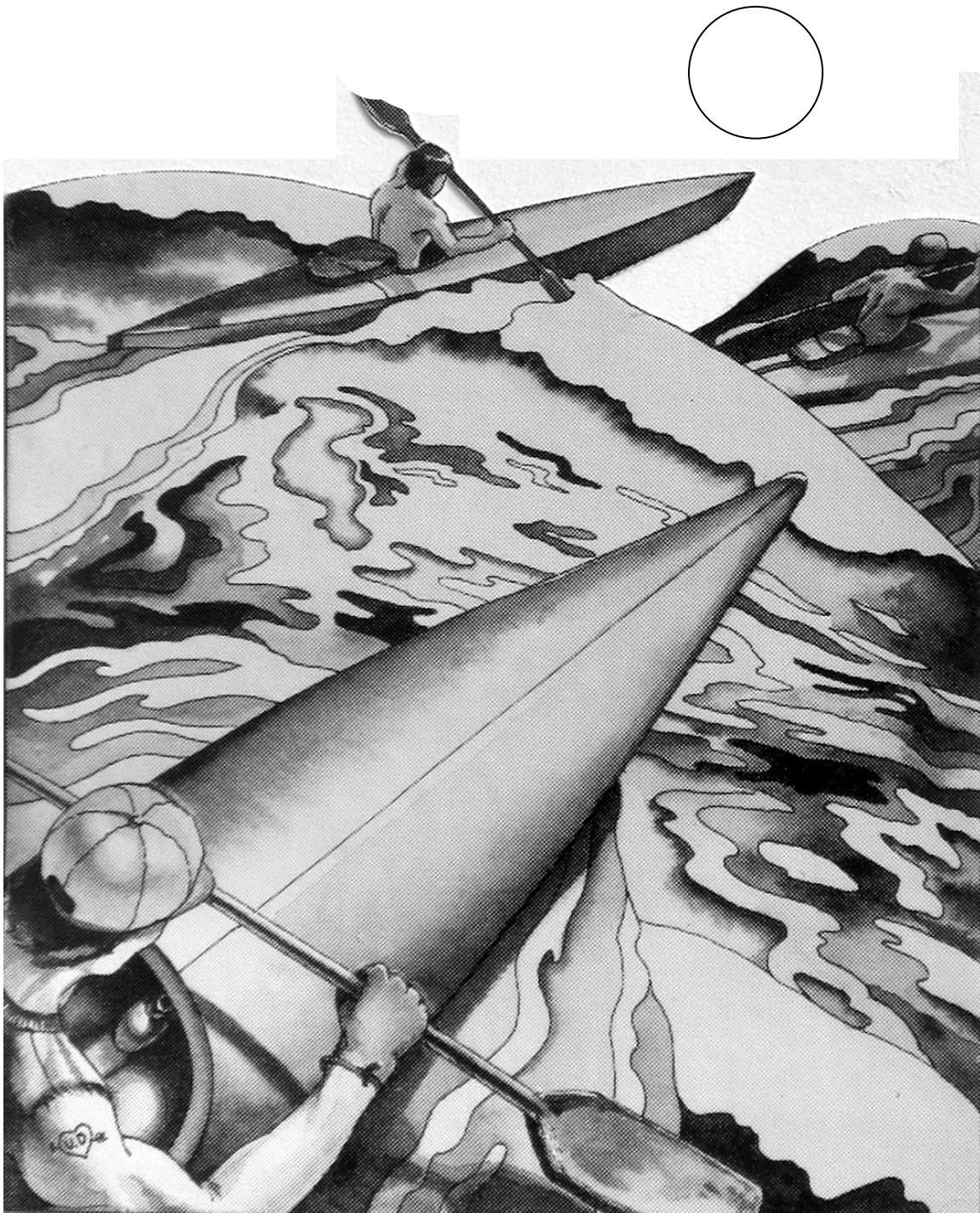


**Kayak between Alaska and Seattle
Casa Omega 2025**

Mark C Billington

I Can't See the Wind

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Mark C Billington

illustrations by Kim Drew

Casa Omega 2025

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from the Inside Passage

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This book is dedicated to
the quest for freedom of spirit



Map of the Inside Passage.
This kayak journal covers waters between
Seattle, Washington and Ketchikan, Alaska.

The map was photographed by the author from
Reader's Digest, *Atlas of the World*, Rand McNally Maps, 1990

"consciousness raising: a technique whereby one learns to analyze one's own life situation and then to transform it so as to achieve liberation from oppression"

American Heritage Dictionary

Animal genders in the book are not necessarily accurate.
Any inaccurate facts in the book were not the intention of the author,
just a display of his ignorance and lack of care.

This book is non-fiction.

Though the sequence of events is the author's perspective,
each member of this story saw the unfolding of 1981 time
from their own point of view.

One name in the book has been changed by request.

People involved in this story
are mostly alive and well and living private lives.

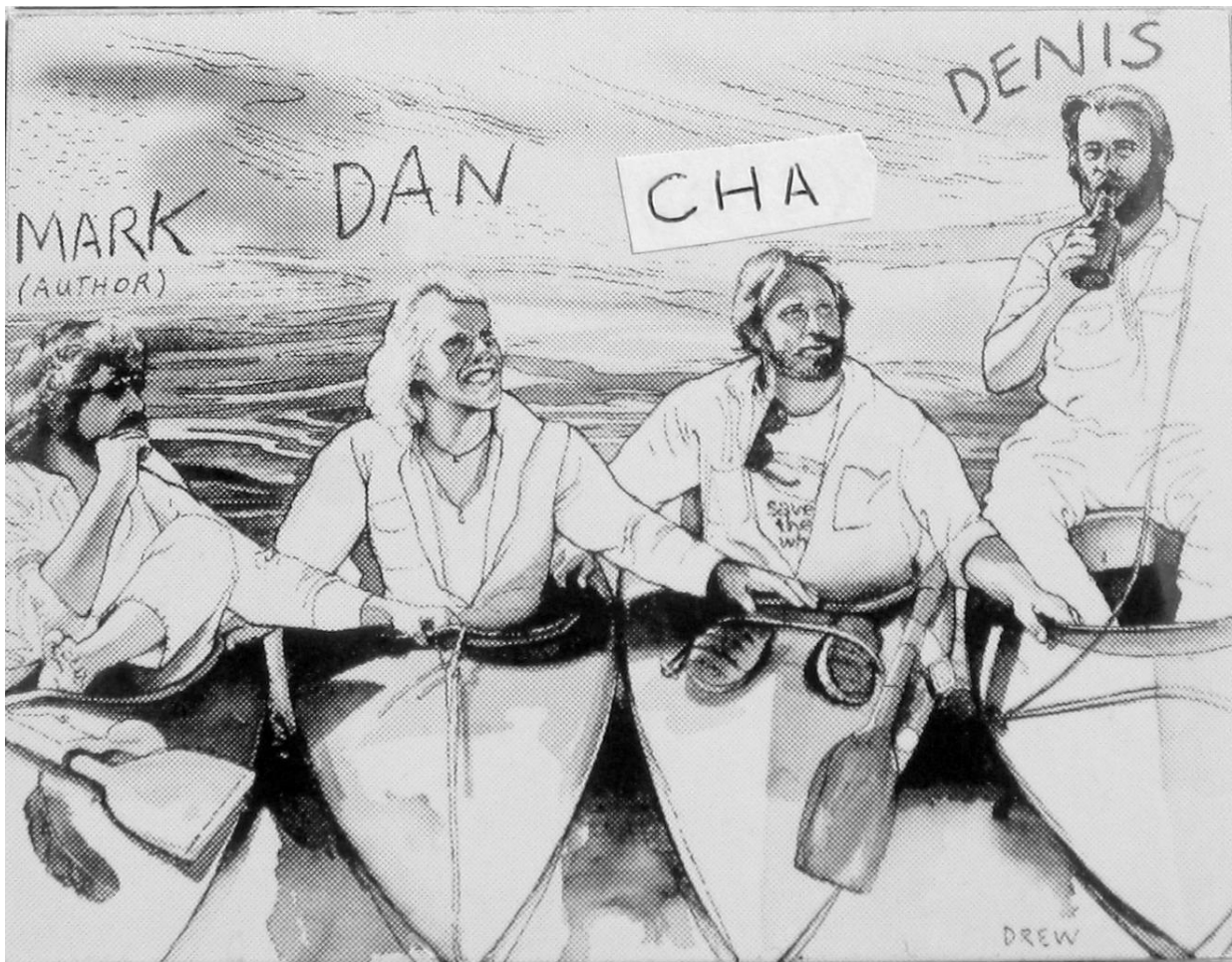
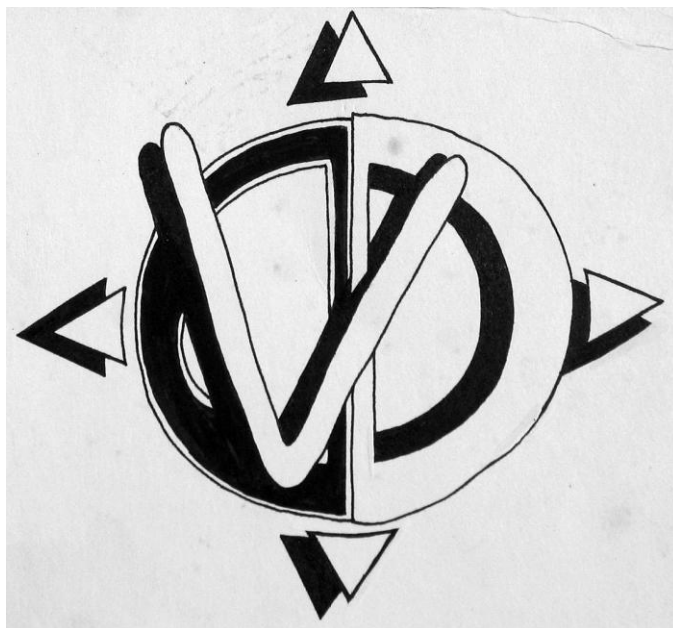


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Chapter 1

"What is, Mr. Eagle?"

"Home; the place where something is discovered, founded, developed or promoted; traditional centrum; source." *American Heritage Dictionary*

March 29, 1981 Fairweather Point, Lake Washington

I can't see the wind.

A tall evergreen tree dances. Each branch moves in circles, yielding to an unseen power. Waves topple with whipped cream; white, rolling water separating and spraying. A sailboat speeds, heeled over by the force. A bird catches an updraft and floats out of sight.

I hear the hollow whir of the wind as it seeps inside, under the door, blowing dirt up from the baseboard. A fly at the picture window buzzes louder than the raven's song from outside. A faint hum of a boat engine murmurs from the bay. I sit on the floor, a sleeping bag around my legs. Only the gear we will pack into the kayaks lies around. I feel sheltered. The wind doesn't find me here behind the glass and walls.

The beaver swims across the water. Brown fur slicks back on his head. I watch his journey as I have many nights this past winter from my kayak, pursuing the animal under docks, around pilings, paddling as quietly as I could, tracking his sounds, the loud warning slaps of his flat tail on the water. Only occasionally have I seen him passing between my boat and a shore light. Today the beaver swims unafraid and unaware of my presence. I sit in awe of his.

The layers of clouds look like watercolors; bright in the sun light, gray puffs in shadows, and dark, almost black, cumulus clouds loaded with rain.

Are those yellow leaves the first sign of fall? In March? Red apple blossoms flap in the wind, fighting to survive the early, cold spring. "Tree," I say, "hang in there."

On the lawn our three kayaks lie ready. Today is Cha's last day working at his uncle's chain saw shop. His Camaro car is in the hands of a friend to sell and his final test for Emergency Medical Technicians class is April Fool's day. Last week I finally graduated from the University of Washington.

April 2, 1981

"You don't belong out of the lake in those things," the old voice grumbles.

I look up from my kayak, up above the walls of the ship canal locks to the old man in his green uniform waving a pencil at us. He continues grinding something about policy and thirty-foot bowlines that none of our four kayaks have.

"You can't go through the government locks without that line!" he yells, intent on keeping us from the salt water of Puget Sound.

Cha laughs. Under his breath he says, "The water is already draining." Cha's face is flushed red with excitement and champagne, his eyes even more blue in contrast. His dark hair is still wet from the last rain and his beard is thick and black.

The water gates open out and Cha slips through first, a bouquet of balloons tied to the rear of his beige kayak. He paddles fast with the rush of water and the crowd cheers. I paddle through second, over the threshold, Denis and Rob right behind. Ahead, beyond Shilshole Bay, a southeast wind blows. The water is rough. Rain again begins to fall.

It has been raining most of the morning since we left Fairweather Point at eight. Rob joined us early as we packed our kayaks, mine weighing 142 pounds. Rob's empty fourteen foot nine inch kayak only weighed thirty-five pounds, as mine would empty. Crossing Lake Washington the waves pounded us. We paddled those three miles to Discovery Bay before opening the first bottle of champagne in a University of Washington boathouse. Paddling on in the storm we reached the locks by noon to meet friends and family for our Bon Voyage. I met Denis's mom for the first time and Cha's mom scolded us for drinking and seemed sad to see her son off to sea in a toy boat. Cookie, my brother's wife, came to give me a hug. Laura snuck down from the U.W. between classes to share some personal moments. She gave me a couple of greeting cards and tied a leather strip around my wrist. "Here's your bear bracelet. No bears can get you now." That's when the old man interrupted us, saying if we didn't get in the kayaks he'd empty the locks without us.

Waving our goodbyes, we paddle out to Shilshole Bay and head north with the following seas. Just before reaching the marina Cha slides over to a man and woman standing on a cement outcrop.

Cha yells, "Hi Dad. Thanks for coming..." They talk. We wait.

"Too bad you won't join us," I tell Rob, swirling the water with my paddle.

"I'm a light weight," he says. "I'll just paint all summer and pay off my kayak. The winter was a disaster to my finances. You did the right thing by moving off the mountain in January."

"I only had one quarter of school left. Since the snow decided not to fall I had no real excuse to hang out at Alpentel. You guys mostly shoveled anyways, once the snow did come," I say, rocking side to side slowly in my boat.

"The only dynamite I threw all winter was with you in December," Rob says. "Denis actually had the better job stuffing butts on the chair lifts. We were the shovel patrol this year. Let's go for some beer at the marina."

Denis sits staring quietly at the bow of his kayak. I hear Cha yell goodbye to his dad. Denis says to me, "Yah, I want to get on the Pro Patrol next winter. Starting avalanches would be more fun than loading chairs."

The four of us paddle to Golden Gardens Park and pull our pods up on the sand. Rob passes around the Heineken Darks and says, "Hack up." We face each other in a circle and kick around the hackysack, a leather golf ball size bag.

"Come on, Rob," says Cha. "You can kayak with us to Alaska. Work's for jerks and school's for fools and Jill doesn't love you anyway." He slams the hackysack with his left foot and flings it into the parking lot.

"I don't think I'm tough enough," says Rob, the tallest of us. "I'd never get ahead if I stuck with you guys."

"Ahead of what?" I ask.

"Lightweight," says Cha.

We bid our farewells to Rob and watch him paddle back towards the locks. "Don't forget your bowline," I yell to the southbound kayaker, shaking my finger at him.

Puget Sound waves roll steadily northward. Hammering paper, scissors, and rocks, Cha, Denis and I decide who will launch the other kayaks into the surf for the dry entrances. I lose, so off they go. Stepping into my blue kayak's cockpit, one foot in and one on the sand for the shove off, like a skateboard or a scooter, I push into the waves. Sliding into the molded fiberglass seat, I quickly stretch my spray cover over the cockpit. But I'm too slow and the first wave splashes in, dampening my clothes even more.

Wind and waves to our backs, we paddle several miles, passing North Seattle homes which peer down at us from cliffs. Off Spring Beach a tendon in my right elbow begins to ache. We watch a windsurfer dressed in a wet suit flying over waves, sailing at high speed a couple of miles off shore. We wave. I widen my grip on the double-headed paddle, stroking slowly left, right, left, and the tendon relaxes with the changed grip.

Tired from our festive departure day, Cha, Denis and I land at Richmond Beach next to a factory. We unload the boats in the rain, carrying the clear wedge-shaped storage bags up above the kelp of the last high tide. My sleeping bag is the first item I remove and I note from now on I must arrange for my tent to be most easily accessible. My gore-tex tent pops up quickly and I stash all my gear; Frisbee, books, swim mask, hammock; only essentials, of course. Cha and Denis still assemble tent poles. I cap my kayak with the nylon cover Denis sewed for me, then slide into my home and arrange my gear.

In the early evening we cook up a dinner of macaroni and eat it with smoked salmon, pears, nuts, celery and carrots. Cha and I are the big eaters. Denis claims he never eats much.

The boys sleep in their tents. I sit by the fire. Clouds shift in their strata, the lower moving swiftest. Blue evening sky peaks through. A brightly lit ferryboat floats north from Kingston. The southerly wind pushes the water and clouds north, but the fire blows south, into my face. The factory stinks now, the waft is right. Denis' tent flops in the night, loose and old and probably insufficient for six months of hard use.

Tomorrow we will try to paddle to Kevin Pearson's home inside Camano Island. He is another Alpentel Pro Patrol and he expected us today. Such is. Plans do change. As of now we plan to paddle north through the San Juan Islands, into Canada as far as Desolation Sound. Around July first we'll somehow hitch a ride on a boat with all our gear, up to Ketchikan, Alaska. Of the three of us, only I have seen the Inside Passage north of Washington.

Climbing into my tent and dry sleeping bag comforts me. I hear noises outside but the directions are hard to distinguish. It could be just the crackling of the fire. I also hear a low rumble getting louder. Louder. It's a train and it passes above our beach like a monster in the night.

April 3, 1981

I carry the only watch. It now reads 3:28 a.m. Outside in the darkness the tide is rising very close. My tide book says twenty minutes until high tide. My tent will be safe but Denis is awake and watching too. His tent is threatened. I feel like paddling right now

as the tide is about to flow towards Pearson's. I hope nobody gets wet in the next twenty minutes. Well, we'll learn from our mistakes.

It sounds like a plunger... small waves folding and rolling on the sand a couple feet from my bed gives me the feeling of floating. I hope I don't. Sleep.

Now sunrise, the water lies without a ripple. We chip a quarter inch of ice from our boats and load our stuffed bags. Snow hangs low on the Cascades, maybe lower than any other time this winter. Strange how much control the weather has on my life; if the snow had fallen this past winter I would have worked the season at the ski area and now be enrolled in spring quarter at the University.

We paddle north with our shirts off, crossing Possession Sound to Whidbey Island, averaging a couple of knots. The smooth fiberglass kayaks shine in the sun. We remain quiet, each of us in our own thoughts. I feel like I am in the midst of a dream, finally in control of my time. In this large body of water the current is almost negligible until we reach the shore currents under the treed cliffs of Possession Point.

At the Clinton Ferry landing, thirteen miles from our camp at Richmond Beach, we land and walk up to the store to buy some fresh produce, cheese, bread, and cottage cheese. Our kayaks are already stuffed with rice, beans, peas, lentils, dried fruits, powdered milk, and cereals from a Seattle food co-op.

By our kayaks, three little kids watch a scuba diver disappear under water. "He's getting crab," says the smiling girl with tangled hair and a second skin of sand. The kids watch us load groceries into our little boats. They wander over. "What are you doing?" the girl asks.

"We're kayaking to Alaska," answers Cha with the same child manners.

"Can you get crabs?" asks the girl.

I point to what looks like a grate tied to the cleats on the rear of my boat and say, "We hope to with this crab trap."

"Will you give me some?" Her friends stand smiling silently.

"Well," I say, "we're going away now and won't be back for many a day..."

Onward we paddle. "Those kids sure were cute," says Cha. "I sure enjoyed teaching children to ski this winter at Stevens Pass." Cha had also worked for Pro Patrol at Alpentel two winters ago, but he hadn't skied the same line as the management. Last season he lived in the lake house with me, driving weekends up to a different ski area to teach. "Next year I want to get on the Patrol at Mammoth Mountain in California," he says.

The water along the east side of Whidbey now starts to flow against us. We paddle along the shore, watching the houses and the people out enjoying the sunshine. Wind picks up a little from the south. Suddenly a crash jolts me in my seat, interrupting my humming. A dump truck just dropped a load of boulders on the beach, apparently building a bulkhead. The workman yells to Cha, "Put on a shirt if you're going to Alaska," and laughs jokingly.

Cha says, "That's where were going."

I eye down the centerline of my kayak and try to paddle symmetrically. With my right hand gripped tightly I stroke right, then cock my right wrist, allowing the paddle shaft to slip in my left hand. I dip on the left. My paddle blades are feathered so the blades face ninety degrees from each other. My right hand always grips tightly, my left variable. The water continues to gain force and as we turn a bend with the shore we run

smack into a full current. Water streams rapids over a red buoy anchored next to me. After minutes of paddling we still haven't passed the buoy. "Let's blow this popsicle stand," says Denis. About face, and a free ride. We float south past a few houses and stop at the first of many vacant lots. A cliff shoots up from the rocky beach.

We hoist the kayaks up to the grass and the three of us scramble to clear nice tent spots. Again my tent pops up first, the green gore-tex not needing the rain fly like the others. A car passes by on the road near camp. The driver and a lady watch us a second then pull into a driveway.

All of our eyes focus on the lady at the fence, on her wiry gray hair. She doesn't look pleased. "You can't camp here. You have to move." We look silently at one another. She says, "The Health Department wouldn't allow you to stay. You have to leave."

I walk over to the lady and say, "Hi. We've been kayaking up from Seattle and didn't plan on being here but the current is too strong to paddle against. Do you think..."

"I'm sorry... you have to leave. The Health Department wouldn't like this."

"But do you know where we could camp down the beach?" I ask, pointing down towards the ferry dock, all the land looking equally private.

"You can go down a few beaches, I don't care. But there are no lavatories here and the Health Department won't let you stay." She turns her wires and brushes away with her quick bristle.

Cha, Denis and I join in the middle of the lot and burst into laughter. Cha whines out, "But the Health Department wouldn't like that..."

"That's a bunch of noise," says Denis.

"We could just drag our gear down to that raised bulkhead. Not even pack the boats," I suggest.

Plenty of space at the new camp allows each tent a view of Everett, four miles away. The building windows reflect the setting sun and beam the red glare across Possession Sound.

As Denis and Cha start a fire among the driftwood below the high tide line, I hack with my machete, clearing brush away from the steps leading up the steep cliff to a house above. Cleaning away the tall weeds I uncover a faded sign, "NO TRESPASSING". I stop swinging my blade. What are we supposed to do? I could assume the sign only means stay off the steps, but I doubt it. We are not invited to stay. I hack away more weeds, cleaning the stairway free of debris, hoping my maintenance work can contribute to the property, hoping to leave the camp better than when we arrived. But what if the people prefer the land a little less manicured, more rugged? What if my good intentions actually don't add, but destroy what the owners consider beauty? How do I recognize long-term effects of my actions today?

I sit, watching the twinkling red sun reflections, watching the campfire now ablaze. A bald eagle flies overhead. He looks right down at me, his keen eye focused on my pupils. I look for a solution in the eagle's confident path. He lives his intuition, his senses. Sometimes I feel my reasoning obstructs my proper flow of actions.

I stand again, confident as the eagle. I clear away the steps. I line the base with rocks, setting the "NO TRESPASSING" sign high and visible. I join my buddies on the beach.

After feasting on a cheese, rice, and vegetable casserole, Denis pulls out his harmonica and harps a nice beat in the twilight. The fire glows. I gather a couple of sticks

and drum on a hollow sounding log, tapping to Denis' beat. Cha follows the idea with his own drum. We chant, feeling ancient rhythm, joining together our music in a three-piece band. Denis joins us on drums. I grab my new plastic recorder from my tent and attempt to make sounds on the wind instrument, never having taken the time to learn. This trip I'll find whatever musical ability hides in me. Denis leads the beat as my fingers stumble over the eight holes in the plastic tube. I rejoin the percussion and we pound the logs harder, louder, together on the beat, separate on rolls and runs. We pound until our hands turn raw and our wrists ache.

Quietly by the red embers, we fall into our own spaces and times; good ones for me, about leaving for the summer in a kayak, about new places and people, about a new perspective of the Pacific Northwest. Life on the water, in a tent, a life of energy. "Sure a nice place to be," I say to the fire, to the night lights from Everett, to the stars in the northern sky. To Cassiopeia.

"Night guys," says Denis in his soft voice, gathering his dinner pot, fork, and harmonica.

"Catch ya," answers Cha.

"Adios amigo," I add, starting again on my recorder. I play soft and slow, moving my fingers on and off the instrument holes. I produce sounds of various pitches, good to my ear but Cha picks up his things and bids me goodnight.

I stay up and watch the night for another hour, then retire, wondering if we can arrive at Pearson's the next day, forty-eight hours late.

April 4, 1981

We awaken to sparse rain and munch a pot of hot cereal. The wind blows from the southeast, from the large area of open water where I see white splotches on the dark surface. With respect for our task, we dress warmly; a couple layers of wool and raincoats. Denis and I have the breathable gore-tex coats and Cha wears a rubber yellow shell. Gloves on, spray decks tight around the kayak cockpits and over our bellies, we launch quickly from the rocky beach. We plan to cross over to Gedney Island, then to the mainland, north along the shore and to our friend's cabin at Kayak Point. The first leg to Gedney will be two miles, the second about seven.

Paddling in small swells, the strong wind blows on our backs and right sides.

"This could be kind of wild," I comment. "I'm not sure if we're tough or just stupid."

"Let's stay together crossing, for sure," says Cha.

At only two miles, Gedney looks real close, but I say, "Maybe aim a little inside of the island in case the wind blows us too far."

"Piece of cake," says Denis, sitting straight in his boat. An older design of unknown origin to us, Denis' kayak forms to hold his back straight, the seat being against the rear of the cockpit. I watch Cha paddle, feeling myself do the same, bent forward, our spines arched, shoulders cocked.

The wind and small waves push us fast. We approach the northern tip of Gedney after only a half hour, an average of four knots. Already wet from rain and splashes, we paddle to the beach on this lee side of the island, a semi-circle of smooth water

surrounding us. A sailboat sits anchored in this protected wind shadow. Another boat with fishing rods floats also.

Dripping wet, we waddle up the sandy beach to a flat area spread over with drift logs. Denis and I wear army green, multi-pocketed, tight ankled, baggy legged, wool britches. Cha wears his thirteen button black wool navy pants. Above us, a hill rises vegetated with only alder and smaller brush. Charred stumps represent the bigger trees. We each carry a knapsack, our "party bags", containing maps, compasses, snacks, brews, pen and pad for me, and Cha's camera for him. The watch is tied to the top of my pack. I also carry a pad of waterproof paper so I can always jot notes.

Cha scans the hill and notices a big eagle on one of the stumps. He zooms in on the bird with his new 35 mm Olympus OM1 camera and takes his first shots of a bald eagle. Eating a nut and dried fruit mix and sipping on snowflake juice, I comment, "Sure seems like there'd be a lot of mice running this log maze. Tasty morsels for a big bird."

After our rest and map check we paddle past the sleepy anchored boats, waving to the relaxed fishermen, and head north paralleling the mainland. We estimate the point we head for to be four miles. "Looks kind of rough," I mention as we enter white capped waves, rain now heavy. We paddle together, surfing straight down the channel in waves bigger than I'd ever kayaked. A strong gust whips from behind and catches my paddle blade, pushing it around. The wind is seeping underneath my kayak and rocking it. Denis' boat, riding low, has a lip hanging out all around the top of the hull, like eaves on a house, offering the wind something to grab.

Heading more towards shore, Cha starts to pull away from Denis and me at a much faster pace. He heads sideways to the waves in a direct line to the closest land. We continue surfing, sliding down waves, sometimes riding several kayak lengths, but usually turning out sideways, unable to control our boats with the rolling energy under the water's surface. My kayak rides fast until the turn out, then the wave passes under, leaving me in the trough until the next wave. Atop one crest, I ride high. Ahead Denis paddles unaided in a trough, sitting four feet below me. I speed up from behind on his starboard side. He turns his head, recognizing collision, and sticks up his hand for protection. I brake my kayak with a backstroke and settle down gently next to him.

"Tiger Rose," the name of his kayak, "about got squished," he says.

"Great action."

"We're covering some ground," he says.

"Or water. Cha sure flew off in a hurry. He must have spooked... and after he said we have to stick together. Oh well."

We angle a bit east, more towards the point, but also more sideways and vulnerable to the spilling waves. To avoid getting drenched I tip my butt to each wave that seems ready to break over my kayak. But one big wave starts to roll me, the curl pushing on the boat bottom. With a brace slap I avoid flipping, but I am left confused. During the winter I had joined the U.W. white water club to learn about kayaking. I discovered that in a river the bottom of the kayak should be banked to hit the force of the river from upstream, the paddle extended and braced downstream. So now on the salt water, a wave coming at my boat, isn't that the force of water? But I put my butt to the wave and almost flipped. Maybe the calm water is the real force and the wave only pushes the kayak against it.

I practice my new theory against what seems a vertical wall of water, just letting the wave crash over me as I lean into it torso first. With my paddle braced on the far side of the approaching wave, I control my boat much easier. Raindrops bounce off the water like pearls on jello. Twenty feet to my left, Denis paddles relaxed with easy strokes, as he has for several years, mostly in inlets near Ocean Shores on the Washington Coast. Cha and I began paddling only six months ago on Lake Washington. Dan, the fellow who had originally planned this trip, motivated us into buying new kayaks so we could go. In March Dan broke his leg at Alpentel, jumping fifty feet through the air off the Widow Maker and landing in mashed potato thick snow, thus missing out. Such is.

A couple of miles away, Cha cruises up the wind-sheltered shoreline. He slows up for awhile, caught in a shore eddy, until he rounds the point and speeds up again. We rendezvous about a mile from the cabin of Kevin Pearson.

"Boy, I almost flipped twice," Cha expresses as we slide together again. "I was scared. I can't wait to get to Kevin's to get a hot shower and dry clothes."

"You have to wait," I say. "We're not there yet. Did you see all those geese flying south? They think it's winter, those dummies."

"They know what they're doing," says Denis.

We travel on past what my chart calls Sunny Shores. "Shore enough, you sunny beaches," I say. Onward past McKee's Beach and into a cove with buoys, red ones looking like maraschino cherries in the world's biggest cocktail. We beach at the yellow house next to the bulkhead with "Dickie" written on it.

Rising from the kayaks, dripping like saturated sponges, we drag our boats up the sand and stream to the door of the unlit house. No smoke rises from the chimney. I knock at the door and spot a note through the glass on the table. Straining, I read;

Grandma,

Thanks again for the use of the cabin.

Love, Kevin

"We are two days late," I say.

"How long would he stay here?" asks Cha.

"I don't know."

"You talked to him, what did he say?"

"I don't know," I answer Cha. My sleeves hanging, I walk out to the patio. Water drips from under my coat, running down my legs under the heavy pants. Out front a car drives up and a man and lady approach, both elderly. I explain ourselves to Kevin's grandmother. She dials the phone to Kevin's folk's home.

I talk to him and hear he's just totaled his car. He sounds lost and says goodbye after very few words.

Grandma sends us to the campground at Kayak Point, telling us we can camp there. We paddle north and beach but are soon disappointed in the lack of warmth when the ranger explains no camping and no showers available.

We paddle on, the sky clearing some, the wind still strong. Passing homes continually, we search for a camp spot and find nothing. I feel very worn and am tempted to ask a homeowner if we can sleep in their yard. But we keep moving. After two more

miles, paddling over what appears to be tide flats if the tide were out, we find vacant land, set up the three tents, and dress in dry clothes.

A group of horses pass. Cha follows them, trodding up the hill on a dirt road. He soon returns with news of a Christian Camp where the director gave us permission to camp and shower. Cha tells, "First he said no, but when I told him we'd paddled kayaks from Seattle, he said he would break the rules since we came by water."

Clean and tired, we build our night fire under a big stump below the high tide line. The mud flats run out a half-mile at least, inhabited by birds and a few stranded logs and some swamp grass. I watch a prehistoric looking blue heron step slowly over a pool of water, a black cap on his crown and a small bald spot on the very apex. His long neck is cocked in an "S" turn, ready to snap at a fish with his six inch wedge shaped orange beak. White hairs hang down, dangling over the water surface. Did those evolve to attract fish like a fly? He steps slowly and deliberately, an intent eye scanning the pool.

The heron jabs quickly, extending his neck to full length. He swallows the fish whole. Legs set in a wide stance, he stretches his neck in search of further prey. He wears a white beard, trimmed close. Flexing his long grayish feathers, he flies, wings spread to six feet.

The night darkens, wind blowing and changing directions constantly. Clouds move from the south. Our clothes wave in the breeze on a line. A sliver of the moon follows the sun's path toward the horizon. Whether the moon is waxing or waning, I guess it must be the first; a new moon. Soon I'll understand these things better.

Four glows show in the dark. The brightest is from our big red burning stump, tendrils of flame dashing up from the coals. We guess the other glows in the sky to be Oak Harbor to the west, Mount Vernon to the north, and Anacortes, tomorrow's direction of paddle, to the north/northwest.

After fresh fruit, veggies, bread, cheese and some dried salmon, we climb into our beds and fall into deep sleep.

April 5, 1981

Wind blew hard all night. Now rain falls hard. Denis' tent flapped steadily. I must tie my own tent down tighter next time. Now it's still dark. I pull Denis' kayak higher, safe from the wind and waves. The boat blew off the stump where he had left it last night. We must be more careful. I don't know if we'll paddle today. We got very wet yesterday.

Now, later, it's nine o'clock. We eat a lot and sleep hard, probably from burning so many calories. Maybe the weather will change when we reach the San Juan Islands.

Now, at eleven this morning, the tide is too far out and we can't leave till it returns. I see white caps beyond the flats. Southwest winds predominate.

We've been hanging out in our tents. Tent hopping; each of us visiting the others... mix and match. I tell Denis I heard a bug or something, a zzzz in my ear or in my pillow last night. He says him too. We both searched with flashlights for a bug, rubbed our ears thinking the creature already inside, maybe. We lifted our heads and the sound faded. Maybe the sound was an affect of the wind on the ground or trees or marsh or???

The wind gusts may keep us here tonight but we can try an early departure tomorrow, about 5:30 or 6:00. Time now to explore this place called Warm Beach, on foot. The power of the wind through the trees above us is intense, almost as loud as the

train behind our camp the first night out; that low rumble, much more powerful than a man... or three men.

I watch three eagles soaring in one place above the treetops, above a blue tipped evergreen dancing to Mother Nature's tune. She's making the calls. Is it necessary to ask, "Mother, may I?" The eagles glide out of sight and the tree remains, swaying and bowing. A duck plays overhead in the gusts. He banks on a pillow of air, soaring it seems at forty or fifty miles per hour. He starts flapping his wings, belly pushed forward, trying to slow down or stop in the wind. Finally he banks sharply and quickly stops on the pond.

Sunshine is nice but wind makes the day cold. I wear wool pants and polypropylene long underwear, three wool shirts and wool socks under my tennis shoes.

I walk out to a pond surrounded by a dike, separated from a swamp. Rivulets run through. I hike out the dirt road to the point where the Stillaguamish River joins the salt water. A couple of abandoned sheds lie toppled with age. Around the sheds I go and out to the swampy tide flats, following some dog prints, probably of the wolfish dog I had already seen. Crossing the mud, I sink almost up to my knees in places. I head all the way back to camp this way, the short way, as the raven flies, but quite a journey as the bozo goes. Cha sits on a stump near the tents laughing at my efforts.

Near camp I talk to a man on the beach who gathers soft-shelled clams. He tells me he heard about our venture in the morning service at the church on the hill. The congregation had wished us Alaska bound kayakers a safe journey in their prayers. Looking at the mud on my shoes, holding up a clam, the man tells me the marsh flats were once pumped with water so clams would float to the surface for commercial exploitation. "But we stopped 'em," he says with a grin, walking away with his bucket full of clams.

I return to my tent to read one of my many books, picking up the pocket *Bible* a Christian had given me in Pike Place Market in Seattle. Feeling thankful to the morning congregation for wishing us well, I attempt to read the Bible which I carry along since I have never read it. Every time I ever started to peruse the book I felt like a finger reached out and stabbed me in my xiphoid process. One goal during this kayak trip is to overcome the finger jab and read some of the famous writings, to interpret the book into my own life.

April 6, 1981

This morning we launch at about seven and proceed over the flooded flats towards Stanwood. Hundreds of small birds fly together off Warm Beach, turning in unison, chirping loudly, acting as a single organism with a single brain. The birds accelerate at once, wings drumming together. I mention to Denis, "I bet the pilots of the Blue Angles learned a bit from these birds." Trying to get photographs, Cha becomes grounded on the flats as the tide rapidly recedes. He poles off the sand with his paddle. We all paddle full speed which isn't very fast since we can't dig our paddles deep enough into the water. We need more resistance to power the kayaks. Does the power of something or someone always depend upon the resistance?

Pointing up, Cha yells, "Snow Geese!" Hundreds of white birds, black tips on their wings, fly north. "They aren't supposed to be here now," says Cha the duck hunter.

We paddle into South Pass, against the flow of the Stillaguamish River's northern tributary, along the mud banks. The narrow passage of water separates Camano Island from the mainland. At a three-way intersection of water routes, we veer into West Pass, gaining speed, now with the flow of the Stillaguamish. Emptying into Skagit Bay, which is also very shallow, we head north towards Goat Island with a wet northwest wind beginning to blow hard.

"The chart shows this as just mud," I comment. "Maybe we should head over to the main shipping channel." My paddle dips down to the mud bottom only a foot below the water surface.

"Yah, but we're in kaydalacs," responds Cha.

"Piece of cake," shares Denis.

Current runs against our progress, as does the wind. After about three miles of shallow paddling we begin to drag on the bottom. Goat Island looks so close yet so unreachable.

"We've got to head towards Whidbey, guys. The channel will be deep enough just off shore," I say.

We push our kayaks along the mud with our paddles, hoping we won't have to climb out and drag the boats. With much sweat and time, we work west. I reach the deep channel first. A trolling boat coasts along in the current, revealing the high speed of the southbound water. I hit land, exhausted, and step out on the rocky beach, wet from the day's waves. Cha heads towards this shore, the current carrying his boat a little further downstream from mine. He looks mad at me.

He growls, "You asshole."

Denis paddles a bit against the current to beach near us. We each strip off our wet clothes and lay them on the rocks to dry.

Denis and I sit on the same rock. Cha paces by the woods. I wonder if he got mad at me because I beached so far up in the current, making him and Denis paddle against the force to land. Tired, I feel whipped from his cross words. "Cha is mad at me," I tell Denis.

"Why?" he asks.

"I'm not sure. Sometimes I feel like he doesn't even like me, yet he doesn't go away. At times I've thought he throws out his anger for his dad at me. I don't really know." We sit quietly.

Cha returns, his words now directed to Denis, and says, "There's a knoll a little ways north where we can camp."

We gather our drying clothes and paddle to the spot, into a lagoon, the front door to camp. Behind where we pitch our tents, in the trees, among baby nettles lies an old shack, wood siding hanging from the studs. Rusted machinery of some kind scatters around. To the east, the snow level on the Cascade Mountains looks to be about 2000 feet above sea level. Wind buzzes high overhead, missing us in this lee shadow, except for the occasional varied gusts.

Cha paddles his kayak out to fish. Denis organizes gear in his tent. I find a suitable stick and begin to chip away at the wood, trying to find a dolphin. I alternate between the carving and my recorder, trying to make sense of the musical tube.

After no success with fishing, Cha joins me. We hike up the bluff to a housing development and fill our water jugs from a house, not trusting any of the creeks spilling

onto the beach. I use a couple of plastic bladders from boxed wine for my containers. The other guys use collapsible jugs of three and five gallon capacities. A fellow roofing the new house where we find water says he's paddled his Klepper kayak up the Swinomish Slough before, our next day's route. He describes it as "mellow".

"Good," I reply. "That's just the kind of paddling we're ready for. We did a lot of work today for the amount of progress...not too efficient."

Back at camp the tide in the waterway is rising fast. We eat rice and macaroni with eggs and vegetables by the fire. Afterwards we beat on logs with sticks, a jungle rhythm jam. The stars shine on our bluff. The wind blows. Rain drops for a few minutes, then stars come out again. I play my recorder, Denis his harmonica. The tide rises right to the fire, sizzling it to sleep as we wander off to our tents.

Cha's last words to me as we crawl into our separate homes are, "Sorry I got so pissed at you today."

"It's okay Cha. We were all bushed. Goodnight."

April 7, 1981

Today we paddle with the wind to Goat Island, entering a channel towards Swinomish Slough, the alternate route to avoid the swift waters of Deception Pass. Our right sides to the wind, we head into the channel against a strong current which is soon scheduled to change. We stop to sit on logs, and float, waiting, bundled up in wool and rain clothes. The day is chilly. Flowing like a river, the channel moves three to five knots. Our boats rest on the logjam. Denis says, "I wonder how a ride to Alaska would be on these logs. Maybe set up a tent on plywood or something. A storm would be tough though."

One large bald eagle and two golden eagles, or they might be immature balds, play on the winds. An abandoned shack stands off Goat Island under a large Marine Repair sign with the phone number faded away. Nice houses to the northeast line the cliffs, overlooking this channel. We wait for sun. The days have been hard on us... the wind, the rain and cold; but fun, making life interesting. I'm glad I'm noticing weather and not whether or not my office window is clean. A jet from Whidbey Naval Station flies over. A sign I read once near the Oak Harbor base said, "Pardon our noise, it's a Sound of Freedom."

"Let's blow this popsicle stand," says Denis, the current finally slowing.

As we load back into the boats, Cha stands on a log, spray deck around his waist, hanging low in front like a big jock strap. I say, "You've got elephantiasis, and don't even need a wheelbarrow."

With the current, past the run down New England Fish Cannery, under the orange arched bridge, we approach the slough town of La Conner. Old buildings sit on pilings above the low tide mud. A boat lies moored, appropriately named Lazy Bones. A lady hangs her laundry on the deck of another old fishing boat, children playing at her feet. Above on houses are the widow walks where the wives of sailors used to pace, watching and waiting for their men to return. A sea gull chases a bald eagle, both flying in circles, around and around. A duck, long beaked and with a white necktie, returns from a dive, surfacing next to my sliding boat. He spots me and immediately dives again.

In the La Conner store we buy a bit of fruit and some beer, the lady behind the counter asking Cha about our trip. "The last guy, like you boys, came through here on roller skates. He said he was skating to California," she tells.

A schoolteacher in line comments, "I heard about some fellow rolling his wheel chair to California." She asks about how we spent Saturday and Sunday. "The news said winds blew fifty knots."

Denis walks up and the cashier asks me, "He's with you, isn't he? I can tell, you all have the same beards and weathered faces. And you guys don't really need that beer."

Within ten minutes, we're in our kayaks drinking beer, drifting. "The roofer was right yesterday, this is pretty mellow," I say.

Denis says, "We're drifting to Alaska. Let's throw away our paddles and see if we make it."

A sign by the slough reads, "View Site for Sale."

"I wonder what the view's of," I say, opening another beer.

Cha says, "I don't know, but it just looks like a bunch of trees to me." He begins to sing, "Oh, we're off to see the wizard..."

"Check out that pavement," I point to the street winding down a hill. "Probably the world's best skateboard run. Hey, how come there's all those rocks on this beach and none over there?"

"You're asking the wrong person," says Denis. "We didn't fill our water in town. We should top off our jugs at one of these houses. Sit up straight and smile so we can use their taps." He leans back and sips his beer.

Off in the distance a bridge spans the slough, linking Fidalgo Island to the mainland, appearing much closer than we had anticipated. After being invited into some people's home, after a beer with them, and a water fill-up, we paddle on to find a camp, checking out side coves cut off the slough. We climb on land in one cove and walk over a bank and down to a field where a man drives a tractor. Cha goes over to talk to him. He asks if we can camp. I am called over, Cha looking confused. I climb up the machine and talk to the man, in Spanish. He speaks no English and couldn't care where we camp, saying he only drives the tractor for a rich man and that the patron hardly ever visits the field.

Leaving that cove, drinking fresh beers, we paddle into the next, a half a mile further, almost to the bridge at the end of the slough. Under the crescent moon, which is now larger than the other night and dragging further behind the sun, we set up camp. I hear mice scurry in the field.

April 8, 1981

I awaken to wind and rain, thinking about the plans for the day. We will enter into the San Juans, weather permitting. After eating, we pack and leave, paddling under a highway bridge and railroad turnpike. Once outside the confines of the slough we flow quickly with wind and tide, along an oil refinery, around a pier thrusting a mile out, and around Anacortes into Guemes Channel. From Guemes Island we cross Bellingham Channel to Cypress Island. Thinking we can still benefit from the currents, we charge from Reef Point into Rosario Strait. My current book seems a bit vague, giving only one reading. The infamous channel draws us into the crossing. Choosing a point on the north

end of Blakely, we stroke into big waves which roll our direction. After an hour paddling full speed we seem to have traveled a mile at the most. We ride the waves but we don't move. We must be bucking a strong current. For two more hours we paddle, fighting the forces pulling us south.

We finally reach Blakely Island, camping on a hill overlooking the small, guano covered Pointer Island. Assembling his tent, Cha discovers he lost some crucial tent poles which hold on his rain fly. He is so tired he doesn't bother to make adjustments. He throws his rain fly in his tent. I sit watching a big eagle nest on a tall stump. Trying to take notes, my hands are still too cold from the paddle to write.

Several hours later the sun shines through and the rain stops. I lie on this beach, sheltered from the wind behind a rock ridge. We are now in Washington's "banana belt", a six-day paddle from Seattle. The Olympic Mountains along Washington's coast shelters the San Juan Islands from much of the rain that the rest of the western half of the state receives. I have just returned from a walk around to the south end of Blakely, above the cliffs on moss, over fresh water creeks. This island is a paradise. I walked with my recorder. I saw no people. I found old shacks lying ruined and a nice rustic home. Lucky owners. They live on the most beautiful bay.

Today, crossing Rosario Straits, we encountered some of the wildest water we have so far. Exciting. Makes the blood run, and adrenalin too. Paddling for hours we made no headway, only moving sideways. At those times, if we don't continue paddling, we lose water, go backwards.

Denis has trotted off somewhere. I passed Cha on my way back from the south end. I can see him now jumping rope on a cliff a hundred feet above the water. Nice. Sun is the best!

The eagle won't land in the nest because we are camping here. Maybe with time we can be friends.

A seal's shining head pops up and peers towards me with round eyes. He slides slowly back under water. We seem so alien to one another. The seal has nothing to gain by trusting me, and possibly, in his thoughts, has everything to lose. I wonder how conscious the seal really is. What realizations of its relationships with man does he have? Are seals "intelligent" enough to have passed on, through generations, a horror of man, a horror from being hunted for centuries for their skins, oils and meat. Seals are trained for circus acts, so could seals, each individual I encounter, have some training in the avoidance of man? Good chance no. Seals could be just naturally shy creatures. Has nature coded their genes to know man is enemy? Did only the fearful survive? Is the feeling in the air? Or maybe, like people, the shyness is only upon the initial contact and with time, after acquaintance is established, warmth and understanding can be shared. I would like to attain that level of coexistence with seals. And dolphins. And whales. And lesser beings too... maybe frogs. But are they really "lesser"?

The north wind is chilly but my white bottom is enjoying the sun.

Cha climbs down the cliff to the beach, scaring those long billed ducks into diving frantically under water. I guess that's why they are called ducks. But then they could be called chickens too.

We have caught zero fish, dug no clams, harvested no mussels, nor used any other natural foods of the land, except we did eat some raw limpets. Cha calls them China Hats.

I should carve some more. My first dolphin worked out, but do they have fins on their sides? Mine doesn't.

Laura meets us Friday or Saturday with her brother Dave in Friday Harbor. He dives for the U.W. laboratories for a Ling Cod study. They will be in one of the cabins on the island campus. We plan on ferrying back to Whidbey Island the weekend after this for Dave's and my joint birthday at their family cabin.

This is sweet isolation. Each of us three are off doing separate things, yet later we'll join for feast.

Wind is still out of the south even though gusts come from elsewhere. My hair is still weathered and greased. Tomorrow we will bathe in salt water and be naked all day...if it's sunny. I see several eagles soaring miles away. They are so easy to spot.

For days we've been seeing the red sunsets and knowing the sky had to be clear over the San Juans. Now, here, in the sun, we can see clouds towards mainland east and south. To the west and north all I see is this island.

Cha says his Peruvian war helmet, an alpaca hat with earflaps, blew from his head while jumping rope. "Maybe an eagle will find it to use in his nest."

Denis returns and slices his finger cutting a carrot. Kayakers must protect their hands. He reports, as did Cha and I, lots of deer shit, and bigger shit too, with scratching next to it, like a wild cat's. Or do they bury their feces?

The bald eagle won't land in his nest. The sticks and branches of his home look very heavy hanging in the tree. The eagle maneuvers his white tail, playing in the wind, flying with agility, speed. He circles the tree and the surrounding land. Is he afraid of man... of our tents, our smells, our appearance. He passes the nest again. We've been here four hours and not once have we seen him land. Did he learn his fright, or is it instinct? Is there a difference?

The eagle almost landed, talons out, lowering himself to the tree... but no. He wants the nest. We should leave tomorrow for the eagle's sake. We are trespassing. Will violators be prosecuted? Aquiline style?

He landed!

He sits, waits, watches. "What is, Mr. Eagle?" I ask. The clouds are soft and piled.

A golden eagle, bigger than the bald, flies over the nest. We three sit on the sand beach, tide coming in, sun setting behind the island. Maybe the eagle has already found Cha's Peruvian war helmet and will make a nice blanket of it. A second bald eagle, maybe the mate, now circles the nest.

Today we guessed wrong about the current. This morning all of our estimates, taken from the tide tables, worked great. Continuing our assumptions, we charged on into Rosario Straits. But we were wrong. How do we know what is right or not, making as educated guesses as we can? Sitting on this beach, how do I really know the tide is coming in? What if the island is going out? Water or rock? I guess I just have to rely on what I think I know, to do what I must. Some decisions have to be made.

Decisions?!? Shall we build a fire at camp in the trees on the bluff or on the beach in the sand by the driftwood...? On the beach... no, on the bluff... no...

Okay, okay. I know. Let's build two fires so the three of us can have two parties and go from one to the other and mingle.

A conifer tree drops one of its fruits at my feet. The tree groans, creaks, and almost buzzes in the wind. Denis walks up from the water's edge with a grapefruit in his hand, which he found, and says, "Now we're living off the land."

Cha replies, "Yah, and this really is the banana belt. Tropical, man."

The bald eagle flies over the nest and warns out a loud screech.

At camp we build a fire. I hand Denis a book of matches with only one left but he won't light it. "I can't light a last match," he says.

April 9, 1981

I lie in my sleeping bag on top of my wool blanket which I use instead of an insulated pad. Wet clothes surround me. Wind blows hard and rain falls steadily.

Cha has a bad attitude now, with a physical basis: water. He just yelled, "I'm all wet. This sucks. I'm just going to stand out in the rain... it's dryer." He forgot his tent poles and didn't put up the rain fly. He adds, "I thought we were in the banana belt."

Rain blows horizontally over water where yesterday all was blue. I like the rain now, but I'm in a dry tent. When I get homesick, this tent, here in the woods, even in this rain, is the home I often long for. It feels good. I stare through the fabric at a clinging drop of water, dark around the edge and a prism of light in the center. Other drops are different shapes.

Above the trees a flock of geese fly, honking. I hear the eagle screech, a raven rave, more geese, and another bird whistling a spring melody. I hear rain falling hard through the woods and then a third flock of geese. I wonder if they fly from a storm.

I sing and play my recorder. The other guys lie quietly. I talk aloud to the woods and yell out, "Insanity in tent number three, and coming your way soon."

The rain lets up for us to pack and catch the noon current, leaving the eagle his own domain. Around the south end of the island, then northwest, we paddle with our spray decks off, taking advantage of no rain. We follow the route used by the ferryboats. Off Frost Island, between Lopez and Blakely Islands, Denis paddles way out front. Suddenly I see him waving at Cha and I, excited, as if we are supposed to see something. Then we see it; a black triangle, like a small sail, surfaces slowly from the depths, revealing below a black back with a white saddle. It spouts a spray of water into the air. Killer whale... orca. I saw orcas in Alaska the one summer I commercially fished, but the thrill of being so close to the whale, sitting only inches off the water in a kayak, shoots life juices through my body, excitement. Cha yells loud, "Yahoo," and the three of us chase the whale in the direction we see him submerge. Denis, only five kayak lengths away from the next surfacing, witnesses the markings for later identification.

The whale disappears and we paddle on towards the Lopez ferry landing, only to look straight into the bow of a charging ferryboat. We yield to the big guy. Rounding Upright Head into Upright Channel, we run into a blast of wind and buck a strong current. On we paddle, intent on reaching Friday Harbor. Cha claims he has to have a roof over his head for the night, as his sleeping bag is too wet to sleep in. After fighting the forces against our kayak progress for half an hour we decide to about face, flow back to the ferry dock to catch a ride with all of our gear to San Juan Island. I suggest the idea and Cha is so thankful. It seems lucky we decided to test our skills in this southern part of

the Inside Passage before throwing ourselves into a similar predicament in the wilds of Alaska waters. I just hope Cha will get back to Swinomish Slough and find his tent poles.

We all feel silly and laugh as we load our kayaks on the ferry. A seventy year old man who drives the grocery truck on and off the ferry at Lopez Island talks to us. He's strong, bright, and says he still rows his boat most everyday. He talks of Ginger, a girl who graduated from my high school in Issaquah and rowed her boat with another girl north to Ketchikan two summers ago.

On San Juan Island, in Friday Harbor, we carry our boats, three persons to a rig, down to the water and climb back in the cockpits. The water in the harbor lies protected behind Brown Island. We paddle to the north side of the harbor to the U.W. facilities, leaving Cha there with his sleeping bag in the library. Denis and I sneak off on the reserve and camp behind some trees.

Leaving our tents and gear behind, Denis and I paddle into town to visit Cafe Harry's and his Thursday night open microphone. The talent is very good, with lots of energy. At the finale the locals all join together on stage and jam, performing wonderful blue grass music on banjos and guitars, spoons and harmonicas.

Energized from the music and Harry's high octane coffee, we paddle into the night. The phosphorescence is amazing. It sparkles from our moving bows. Quietly, slowly, we paddle under and over the night stars up to a waterfall bubbling in a corner of the bay. The base of the falls glitters with the activated water organisms.

Back at camp Denis and I notice Cha's kayak under a tree, his tent set up, the rain fly draped over it and Cha's voice inside. "Some man came to the library and told me I was crazy and to get out."

"Your sleeping bag dry yet?" I ask.

"Dry enough."

I find the big dipper through the trees and follow the bucket to the north star. Tonight's paddle made me feel really good. The glow in the water, off the paddle, off to the side of my boat, the glow showed me how lucky I am to be doing this trip. Now I feel really good about the rough weather we kayaked in this week; Saturday in the waves, Monday bucking current in shallow water. Those lent times of physical exertion, the repetition of paddling which led my mind from stress, a self hypnosis, a relaxing calm within the storm. Tonight, paddling up to the waterfall, I had the calm beauty in my presence, the calm I had thrived for in the storm. Sometimes, even in the physical presence of calm, I must force myself to look, to feel that presence, the life in the phosphorescent glitter, or in a lone star, or in a smile. Is that all there is to living? This is much of the reason why I chose to live in a kayak for six months, just to pass the time of day. What is my life but passing time? And I should be able to appreciate every valuable moment, the contrasts of fifty knot winds and some good banjo picking'. Moments I must feel, and not suppress. Life I must expose myself to. I want to grow with the world with only a tent between me and the rain, to float a paddle length away from a killer whale, to fill my lungs with fresh sea air.

Looking up at the earth's focus, at Polaris, the North Star, I feel ignorant and naive. I want to learn about the weather and the tides, more about my recorder and how to carve. And how to write, and fish, and gather foods. My body is learning to live in a tent, and outside, in my true living room.

We are heading to the wild country where we must make do with what we will have. When something breaks, a paddle or a tent pole, we must fix it. Anything ripped or worn gets a patch or a mend. We must create and re-create rather than buy. It seems to me I have been brought up in a disposable society and I must teach myself to refurbish old values, and to cherish new ones, not abuse them, whether my kayak or fishing gear, clothes or a friend.

Fears which made us wonder before leaving on this trip are now easing themselves out. We didn't know about the stability of our loaded boats, which prove more stable full than empty, or how to carry loaded boats out of the water. Fears are overcome. Cha must go back for his tent pole tomorrow so we can be self contained again. What's ahead? Will we be able to catch a ride to Alaska as planned?

We'll work it out, as we must on a trip like this. And we must treat each other as equals, each partner, each person we meet along the way, every animal. We all share the breath of life so we must all be very special.

Now in my tent my candle burns low. I wish to rise early tomorrow and break camp from this private land.

A very good night.

Chapter 2

"Tweet Tweet Blah Blah"

April 10, 1981

We break camp early and paddle away from the University of Washington property in light rain. Leaving the loaded kayaks at the city float in Friday Harbor, we spread out around town, each taking care of personal needs; showers, washing clothes and shopping. Cha leaves to Anacortes to retrieve his tent pole. Denis and I rendezvous at Cafe Harry's for more high octane pep. Outside the storm progresses; wild winds, heavy rain, and cold, the snow level in the Cascades down to 1500 feet. Inside we while away the hours writing and talking with some of the locals. Denis describes the orca we paddled with to one fellow from the Whale Museum who identifies it as a lone male which had been frequenting the San Juan Islands for the last couple of years. The man informs us that killer whales have never been known to attack humans. The name can be misleading but they have been known to hunt in packs, being referred to as "the wolf of the sea." With organized tactics, killer whales will attack larger whales, holding them underwater until drowned. The adult males with the big dorsal fin, like the one we saw, have been accused, like humans, of killing for fun, playing with the victim, tossing the prey into the air. Orcas have even been observed playing dead, apparently just to entice birds and seals closer. The whale museum man tells us of thirty killer whales that assaulted a young sixty foot blue whale, ate a substantial chunk of its hide and tongue, then left the blue whale swimming, mortally wounded. Orcas in Argentina attack sea lions with such force they swim aground with the wave surge in an attempt to reach sea lion pups, which when captured are thrown back into deeper surf to be eaten by baby and female whales.

The whale museum man also mentions the gray whales in the vicinity which migrate north and south between the Bering Sea and the Sea of Cortez. The gray whale calves nurse a hundred pounds of milk daily and their fathers have five foot penises.

Our museum friend thinks our kayak trip very exciting and says, "Hey, I've got this fifty gallon drum of formaldehyde I need taken to Ketchikan. For a whale museum T-shirt, would you, could you maybe tow the drum north behind your boats?" He laughs and adds, "No really, you'll be paddling some fantastic waters and see lots of orcas. Namu, in Canada, is where Namu the whale was captured."

Denis and I hang around Friday Harbor the entire day. Between breaks in the rain we hit the streets for some hackysack. We kick the leather foot bag like a soccer ball, though it is very small, trying to keep it in the air. We pass the hackysack with a foot tap, whack it behind our backs, on the sides, with the top of a foot, or the inside arch. Hackysack, the way we play, has almost no rules, except if you say your sorry, you have to drink, as sorry people drink. We do say if it's close enough to hit it with a hand, it can be kicked instead. To start the hack we serve it to someone else instead of kicking it first ourselves. Hackysack keeps our kayak legs limber.

In the evening we kick the hackysack under a billboard light as our beers wait on a table inside the Electric Company. Other folks join us kicking the hack. At times a dozen or so gather in a circle, all energy focused on the one little bag. "Kicken hacken

sack," yells Dan the postman, one of the many people we meet through the leather bag. Perry the cop sees the crowd in the alley, and not sure if the group energy is positive or negative, he reprimands us. "What the hell you guys up to?"

"Hacken sack," yells Dan the postman.

"Wanna play?" I ask the not real pleased policeman. He drives away.

Inside the Electric Company, as the band plays and people dance, I walk up to a giant fellow, six four maybe, six five, well over two hundred pounds. He wears a fishing cap with a king crab emblem sewed on. "Hey buddy," I say, "you got crabs?"

"What?"

"You got crabs. I see one on your hat," I say laughing. Cha, back after a successful tent pole retrieval mission, stands next to me thinking I'm crazy. "Don't get mad," I say to the giant. "I'm just playing. Besides, big guys never hit little guys."

"Maybe not where you're from," he growls like a grizzly bear and turns away.

Denis and Cha return to the bar after watching the ferry land. They report Dave and Laura have arrived and are at the U.W. cabins. We paddle our kayaks over to the facilities, laughing in the night, splashing and joking. Cha says, "You're going to see your wife. You owe me bitty bucks." He refers to a bet we made in the lake house with a third friend of ours that each of us would not be the first to marry. "Your wife is waiting for you right now."

"I don't think so Cha," I say. "You'll find a lady you can't resist and you'll pay me bitty bucks."

"No I won't."

"Yes you will."

"No I won't. You'll owe me bitty bucks," he says.

"No I won't."

Denis laughs. Phosphorescence glitters up from his paddle's every stroke. "Some guy came up while I hacked with some folks tonight and he thought the game wasn't funny. He wanted to fight us, to beat us all up for having fun."

"Nice guy," I say.

"He probably has a wife and works too much," says Cha.

Paddling up to the U.W. dock we see Laura waiting, standing alone in the night. Since sound travels so easily over calm, quiet water, I wonder if she heard every word we spoke in the kayaks.

April 11, 1981

In a cabin allocated to Dave for the weekends during his ling cod studies, we wake early to sounds of Dave leaving for his scuba dive. Denis, Laura, Cha and I relax, eating and sleeping, talking and playing hackysack. We watch the tame animals roam the University grounds. Deer walk and graze close to our hacky game and the rabbits trust me enough to eat from my hands. Later, I sit on a rock eating a carrot and say to a rabbit, "If I were a rabbit I'd want nothing different; just sit here in the rain eating this root. You probably think, 'dumb human', don't you rabbit?"

The hare doesn't answer me. It just bounces away with his white tail arching up and down. "Silly runny babbit."

We wander down to the labs to greet Dave who returns with plenty of abalone. He shows us through the lab and Cha sees the man who kicked him out of the library two nights ago. Dave shows us the salt water eco-system, the pump system which constantly brings in fresh sea water. Ling cod swim about the snails, crabs and limpets. We find abalone, sand sharks, seaweed and Dave points out a beer bottle which crabs have made into a home.

For dinner we pound the abalone until it is tender and serve with a mushroom sauce over rice. Yum!

April 12, 1981

Dave drives us to the west side of San Juan Island. Seeing False Bay at low tide, we find it miles of mud. Dave shows us Limekiln Bay, which lies as a fine photograph, the abandoned cannery on one side surrounded with trees and bathed in sun streaks beaming down through dark clouds. We drive further south to Eagle Point and walk through desert terrain, over rocks and dried grass. Not a single tree is in sight, only thistles. A rabbit dashes out of the brush and scurries in front of our path.

"That must be why this is called Eagle Point," I say. "Because of all the rabbits."

At the water's edge we peer into tide pools. Dave points out some sea anemone, touching one. "Look at these tentacles shrink back. He's got some little microscopic syringes with poisonous sting cells for paralyzing prey. One sea anemone was watched for sixty-three years, but it died of pollution. Some scientists say sea anemones could live forever."

"We should cross breed with them for longevity," I comment.

Dave asks, "Mate with those?"

We all laugh except Laura. She just says, "You guys..."

The waves coming in from the Straits of Juan de Fuca slam the tide pools, water forcing its way up a curved rock, spraying high into the air. "Juan's mom should be proud of him for having such a powerful place named after him," I say. Nobody gets what I mean. "Praise the Mother Fuca," I say.

Laura picks up a pheasant feather and sticks it in her hair. Her autumn colored eyes shine. Dave talks, "Someday I'd like to start fish farming. I'd even like to go to third world countries with grants to set up the cultures with a self contained fish farm. After college I might join the peace corp. and try to help poor people feed themselves."

Driving back to the ferry terminal, six wild turkeys dart across the road. We stop for Cha to photograph them.

In town, waiting for the ferry to arrive for Dave and Laura's departure, we kick the hacksack in the street. A little girl approaches Laura and I with a puppy. With the pooch in her arms, cradled like a baby, Laura and dog both look up at me with their big eyes. Laura says, "AW, puppy..."

The ferry comes and leaves and we buy groceries and pack the kayaks. Paddling south through Friday Harbor, we feel clean, dry, self contained. The sky glows red from the setting sun.

Slowly we kayak around Brown Island, the water calm, the sky clear, the moon half full. In the dark we sit, floating just off Turn Island. The sky starts glowing strangely. Red lights streak from the center sky south. Splashes of green light slice through. I write

on my wet notes pad by moon light. We guess the colored lights to be aurora borealis, the northern lights. They're so bright! Jupiter and Saturn travel together also. Denis comments, "This is far better than any laser light show." Lights roll in waves across the sky, streaking from the north up over our zenith. Soon the light bands increase quantity and intensity, rolling... A seal slivers past our quiet boats only a kayak length away, breathing heavily. I don't think he is aware of us.

The colors spread. Red and green cover half the sky. The bands glow, throbbing. We paddle on.

We land on an islet separated from Turn Island by fifty feet of water and set up the tents. The sky is again normal; stars, planets and the moon.

April 13, 1981

"Ouch, ooch, eeesh." I walk barefoot on the sharp rocks. My feet ache from their winter tenderness. Our islet is now part of Turn Island, the tide out enough to reveal the land. The morning sky is completely clear for the first time since we started our trip. I slept with my tent door open, my head hanging out under the stars. We are sheltered by Turn Island from any breeze. In San Juan Channel the water appears to have a bit of a wind ripple, but nothing like we've been used to.

Denis treated us last night after we set camp with Schnapps and coco. Mmmm. I played my recorder, then Denis did. He plays very well. He has a feel to make impromptu music. The echoes bounced off the main part of Turn Island and the total effect returns to me as I lie here on my blanket.

I watch little clams getting stoned on a rock. A sea gull flies them high and drops them, cracking the shell and exposing the food. Sloping green pasture with a barn and cows grazing sits across the channel towards San Juan Island.

A cormorant drifts by on a log in the current. His wings spread out to dry in the sun. Cormorants lack the oil in their feathers which normally keeps water fowl dry; the cost they pay for being such good divers. With excess water weight, the bird jumps from the log, flaps wildly and runs on the water before taking to the air. Orientals used to tie ropes to cormorants and have them dive under the water for the evening meal.

On Turn Island I see a back packer standing on the beach in the shade... No, wait... I look more carefully and see the man is only driftwood sticking out of the sand behind a stump. Strange. What I saw wasn't real.

Yesterday we heard of porpoise cruising the area. I'm excited to paddle with them. Will they play with our kayaks the way they play with the bows of faster boats? When I fished in Alaska the sea mammals would dive and roll for hours off the bow of the moving craft. Kayaks must be too slow for their fun.

The weekend at the U.W. cabin with Dave and Laura was easy. We kept dry. But the walls and windows blocked us from the wildlife. The animals we did see were tame. Inside I felt way overheated. The cabin was fine, but this camping is a full bonus. The sun is about to shine over the top of Turn Island onto our camp. Ravens screech. I hear the raspy voice of a blue heron. Somewhere a frog croaks and something repeats an eerie hooting. Now a slight breeze blows my tent. A motor boat heads this way from Friday Harbor and many song birds repeat different sounds and whistles. There seem to be notes the birds hit over and over as if that sound is more pleasing or means something.

Everything is wet from last night's dew. We grow alfalfa sprouts in jars and mine are ready now. That's twelve days to grow my kayak garden by the sea. I need sunglasses. Denis and Cha still sleep.

We paddle in our shorts with spray decks off, fishing along the way, catching zero, with no bites, bringing our total catch for the kayak trip to nil. Our egos aren't hurt as fishermen because we can't even consider ourselves fishermen. We paddle north by Neck Point on Shaw Island, by McConnell and Reef Islands, and over to Jones Island, a state park. We beach our kayaks in the south cove by a huge field which appears mowed. There are trees and picnic tables, fire pits with grates, water faucets and outhouses. A perfect place to rough it for some days. We plan on slowing down to a stop. "Hey, they even have sani-cans here," says Cha. "Bring out the can-can girls."

With camp set up, we three spread out in separate directions over the island. I wander out to the cliffs on the west side and scrounge in tide pools, gathering limpets and chitin, also called gumboots. I find some sea urchins, which I've heard could be scraped for a caviar-like egg gel. I pick up a couple of sea cucumbers from shallow water with a stick. Carrying these goodies in my shirt, I continue around the west half of the island, finding deer and eagles in abundance. When I run into Cha in camp, he too has gathered a jumbo portion of limpets. We feel better now. We're food gatherers.

A catamaran sailboat motors into our harbor, three kids and a mother and father on deck; our private island no longer.

One boy from the sailboat launches a wooden kayak and joins Cha who kayaks around the point. A little girl, a boy, and the father row for the beach. Jonah is the sandy haired nine year old boy. His little sister carries a kitty ashore. The father jumps from the row boat, securing a bow line to a stump. "Gotta clean the barnacles off when the tide goes out," says Gary, standing and looking at Puff, his magic sailboat.

"Where's the boat been?" I ask.

"Oh, Hawaii, Alaska. We've been over in Friday Harbor lately."

"The kids go too?"

"Mine do. Greg, out in the kayak, doesn't," Gary answers.

I look at Nika, maybe three years old, playing with the kitty on the beach. She sings, "We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine..." She picks up the kitty and walks over to a pool and lowers it towards the water. The kitty kicks and whines, scaring Nika. She drops the kitty into the water. Immediately rebounding, the puss runs away, past a deer and fawn which also scare and run. Nika just watches, eyes wide, and says, "Oh!"

I hear her mother laughing from on deck, as we all laugh. Nika looks around at each of us.

The boys set up their tent by ours and bring up their hot dogs, a fish carcass for our crab trap, and some lemon juice Joanne sent up for our seafood. We scrape the sea urchin into the lemon juice and let it sit before pasting the delicacy on crackers. Goo. I strip the thin muscles from inside the sea cucumbers and fry them in pancake batter. Cleaning the limpets, I scrape the meat from each with my thumb nail. I boil the gumboots, then peel and dice them. I mix all the seafood with rice and carrots and onion and garlic for a super goulash. The kids pick us some young spring nettles, which I consider tasty but can't eat too much of.

After dinner, by the fire, Cha tells the kids about the whale we saw.

Jonah looks up and asks, "Are you into that 'Save the Whale' stuff? My mom is. I don't really get why they kill whales just to make that junk to make girls smell funny. I wish they wouldn't wear that stuff."

Cha shares, "Yah, it wrecks their skin. I told a girl once, who had on mass face junk and pu-fume, that I hated girls that wore the stuff. She was gross she wore so much."

"She must have liked the compliment too," I say.

Denis says, "The most beautiful girls are the ones that don't use make-up."

We watch the fire, the night quiet except for a sound of rushing water, sounding like it's coming from miles away.

"Look at the flames deep inside," whispers Cha.

"Looks like an egg yolk," says Denis, no louder.

"Must be hot," I speculate. The ashes whither and dance, appearing alive in their red world below the logs.

Five deer graze inside the firelight circle with us five kids. I pick up my recorder and attempt a tune. Lying on my back I play. My eyes focus on the queen Cassiopeia. She sits high in the night. She travels around as I do, and along the way we meet, two paths joining in time and space.

"Goodnight," says Jonah. Greg follows him and bids the same.

"Goodnight," we wish them. A bat buzzes low in our firelight.

April 14, 1981

By six a.m. I paddle out to set the collapsible crab trap in which I have tied the fish carcass. While the trap lies open on the bottom, fifteen feet under water, I paddle next to the rocks and drop a bright orange rubber squid from my hand line. Jerking on the string, I bob the jig up and down on the bay's bottom. After no fish success, I paddle over to the buoy for the crab trap and pull the rope up quickly, closing the trap on three nice crabs, all male dungeness. Yum.

First the crab boil alive over a fire, then I clean all the meat from the shells. I divide the meat into three piles and deliver portions to Cha and Denis in their tents.

"Treats. Treats," I chirp like a spring bird.

"Yum," they respond.

I decide to eat a whole breakfast so I melt a cheese sauce, add the crab, and pour the mixture over some whole wheat pancakes.

The day warms nicely under the blue sky. Gary pulls Puff onto the beach with high tide. As the water recedes, the sailboat is left stranded for scraping. Joanne, Nika, and us five boys sit in the sand and talk.

"When she sails," says Joanne, "her brown sails fly out to either side. They look like wings on a dragon."

"I caught some raccoons dragging some cereal away from my tent last night. The rascals," I say.

"Watch your water bottles, too," says Joanne sifting sand through her hands.

"Because those critters need fresh water and will chew right through plastic."

"Yechhh," cries out Jonah. "Here come one of them stink machines." He points to a yacht heading for the harbor.

Greg mumbles out, "Those rich people don't got the time for nut'n 'cept gotten all screwed up. They snort too much coke."

"How old are you, Greg?" I ask.

"Eleven."

Joanne comments, watching the yacht in the bay, its motor running, "In the summer we wouldn't have this place to ourselves like this. There might be thirty boats anchored here and the same in the north cove, with people running all over the island."

"I like it when we sail a long way," says Jonah. "I don't like to just go out from port for the day and then return. Like when we sailed to Alaska, every night we landed someplace new."

Cha says, "I like that too, in my kayak. It's a lot better to leave and know we don't have to be back right away."

"Besides," I add, "that way we don't give people time to get tired of us."

"Did you see the northern lights a couple of nights ago?" asks Cha.

Joanne says they didn't but she read about them. "I guess people in Louisiana and California saw them. That's so rare that far south that people were calling into the sheriffs thinking the end of the world was near, that the Martians were landing."

"When is Gary going to start scraping the barnacles off Puff, Joanne?" asks Jonah.

"As soon as he can," she answers.

"You call your folks by their first names?" I ask Jonah.

"Sure, why not?"

I have no answer. Two flying bugs, joined by their rear ends, land on my bare leg. I run to my tent for my leather jump rope and find a big drift log to skip on. Cha grabs his rope too. We jump in shorts and tennis shoes for about half an hour, both sweating, breathing hard. Throwing my rope down, I take off running through the woods. "Come on Cha."

We run across the island, north, then back to where we started. We drip and yell. Cha looks at me and I take off again, back to the north side, changing my jog to a skip, like skiing down the trail. Cha follows directly behind, turning where I do like we've done so many times on skis. We ski out to the pier in the north cove and I climb on the railing. Cha watches as I kick off my shoes, then he does the same.

Splash. Splash.

Burrr. We climb the fifteen feet up the ladder then jump off the pier again. Ahh.

Walking back into camp, dripping wet, carrying our shoes, Greg asks us, "Did you guys go swimming?"

"Sure," I say, "why not?"

"You guys are crazy. You gotta be tough men to live in kayaks."

"Your tough enough, Greg," I say.

"No way."

"Let's go swimming, Greg," says Cha. "It's not too tough."

"Really?"

"Yah, let's go," Cha says, bouncing off to the water. Greg and I follow. We run straight into the cove at full speed, Nika cheering us on. Denis looks up from his book from behind his Vuarnet glasses. We swim out to a rock and all climb up. Greg stands stiff, holding his breath, staring wide eyed at us.

"Let's go back," Cha yells. We all dive in again.

I drag my kayak from the weeds, climb in with my spray skirt on, and paddle thirty feet from shore. Looking over the side, I see a starfish through the water. Closer and closer I peer until everything blurs. Underwater in a kayak is hard to tell which way is up or down, except for the water running in the nose. I lean forward on the bow of my overturned kayak and look at the head of my paddle through the liquid world. My paddle sweeps out to the side, I twist my hips in unison with the kayak, leaving my head in the water until last, and end up the maneuver sitting back upright, staring at everybody on the beach.

Enough, now I'm cold. So I beach and run around more to warm up.

Denis sits reading, Cha works on fishing gear, and I play a tune on the recorder. Looking serious, Greg asks, "How come you guys always do different things?"

"Yah, we do different things," says Denis, piling pea gravel on his bare feet.

"The things we do are different," answers Cha, pretending to be serious.

"Yah, we never do the same things," I throw in. "Nope, nothing is the same."

"It's all different," adds Cha.

"Not the same at all," says Denis, finally confusing Greg. Denis points to his feet covered with gravel. "Like my new shoes, Greg?"

Jonah walks over with a smooth rock and shows it to me. "See the single white line?" he says, pointing to the vein dividing the dark stone in two. "This is a wishing rock. You make a wish then hide the stone where nobody can ever find it."

Greg picks up a hand full of rocks and throws them into the bay, saying, "I don't believe that stuff. I don't believe in wishing stones."

"I wish for a good stone," laughs Denis, now standing at the water's edge skipping flat rocks over the calm bay.

"Yah," I add, "we skip rocks, but we never skip a good stone."

We walk around to the point for a view of the setting sun. A white headed bird dives from a tree into the water with a splash, returning to flight with a herring or something in his mouth. I watch the splash catch the sun just right and radiate light. I throw a rock in the same spot, a high lob which penetrates the water with a "booweett". Greg, watching with interest, asks what I did.

"Didn't you see that?" I ask, aware Greg maybe only saw the splash. "That upward fling of water, the upside down drip, the prism, clear and colorful in a setting sun on calm water. And the concentric rings radiating out from the origin; expansion, evolution..." Greg only looks confused, so I continue. "Ah, but the splash is the answer to life, the essence of all creation. Ah. I can die relaxed."

I climb up to the choice rock where Denis and Cha sit watching the world go by. "Gees..." says Greg, disgusted with the nonsense. He joins Jonah, who studies crabs in a tide pool.

Greg picks up a crab, stares at it for a second, spits on it, then flings it into the air.

"'Whooah, what a rush', I bet that crab is saying," comments Denis. "First a nice, relaxing evening around the pool, then WOWWY, a spit in the eye and a ride in space."

"How'd you like it if we did that to you, Greg?" asks Cha.

Greg looks at us three, then down at Jonah who is still engrossed in watching the tide pool. "Is this all you guys do? Just tweet tweet blah blah?" He flings his arms in the air.

I begin a snap of my fingers for the beat, chanting, "Tweet tweet blah blah..."

Denis and Cha join in, "Tweet tweet blah blah... tweet tweet blah blah..." We join in the beat, clapping our hands and stomping our feet, "Tweet tweet blah blah..."

Greg gives up, walking back towards camp. "Gees, you guys really are crazy."

"Tweet tweet blah blah..." we continue.

I yell after him, "What's the matter, Greg? That's all there really is. You're a genius for recognizing it. Tweet tweet blah blah."

Greg yells, "You guys are too high."

The sun settles over San Juan Island. Jonah, Cha, Denis and I sit on the rock until dark, appreciating the tweetest blahs we can.

Back on the beach we find Nika playing with the discarded sea urchin shell from the previous night's feast. Even though we had scraped the guts, the animal still lives, its prickly shell waving with life. "You gonna come join our fire tonight, Nika?" I ask.

"No. I already have one."

In my tent as I'm ready to fall asleep, Greg comes over and sits by my door. "Hey Mark. I've got to tell you something. It's all right with me if you guys smoke pot. No really. I had to tell you it's okay."

Wondering what prompted this personal touch I say, "Gosh Greg, thanks. That makes me feel better."

"I just had to tell you. Goodnight."

April 15, 1981

Five feet from my tent door three deer quietly chew. High clouds sit above with no wind. I'm sun burnt and relaxed. Jonah comes early for some matches and dry paper to start a fire and soon returns for more matches and paper. "The fire just won't light. It won't stay lit," he says.

"Use one match this time. Light the paper with kindling on top. It's not the fire, it's the fire maker, said the cave man," I tell him.

A robin heads straight at my tent door but turns an arm's length from my face, circles around and flies at me again. Jonah lights a crackling fire. I admire Jonah and Nika. Growing up on a sailboat they learn about sea shells from the sea itself, as well as from a book. Seems a good way for a child to grow up. I like the idea of Jonah calling his mom and dad by their first names. Seems like it would promote equality between parent and child, a mutual respect, a mode for reminding that everyone on board is responsible for themselves. Gary and Joanne are parents, the teachers and supporters of Nika and Jonah through childhood, but a first name basis grants kids a sense of friendship. Jonah, Nika, Gary and Joanne must each respect the others' rights on the boat the same as in camp or at home. And the teacher can always learn from the student.

Something is happening right for Jonah and Nika; they're independent. Yesterday, from a distance I watched Nika at the fire, nettles cooking over a flame in hot water. As the pot began to boil over, Nika looked around worried, then turned and removed the pot from the flame. That seemed well focused for a three year old.

The robin charges my tent again, maybe on her twentieth circle. Do I smell good?

Gary and Joanne seem to enjoy their kids, but I'm sure they must have their tweets and blahs. Do I want to have children? A wave of wind rolls over the grass, the green blades shake and rustle. Then the air is still.

I have been claustrophobic before, my mind, my soul, my intelligence caught up in my physical being, trying to reach out beyond, my spirit seeking release. Searching, my thoughts circled around and around at the question, "WHY?" "WHY?" Over and over I'd become trapped on the one word question, trying to find the universal purpose for my existence. One answer is reproduction. Is that the essence? But I live on an over populated planet. The privacy I find in my kayak is not available to everyone all the time. Earth is flooded with beings. Humans. If I don't have to reproduce, the "WHY?" changes to a "WHY NOT?"

What about my soul? Why not? Is Jonah, sitting by his fire, just an extension of his father and mother in time? People talk of reincarnation and I have no experience I know of to base an opinion on. Does my spirit pass on beyond my body's life? I can't plan on it. To have a child, to pass on half of my genes with half of my mate's, I am acting on my genetic selfishness... my "meat" is passed down in time. And to further raise that child, my philosophies are carried down, and changed accordingly with time's changes, much as a snowflake grows according to its path. To reproduce is to claim control over a type of reincarnation.

But how can I reason against empty questions, like "WHY"? The deer outside my tent this morning don't have to be conscious of mating, nor do the seals or eagles... nor nettles, nor alder trees. To reproduce is to perpetuate life. When Laura held the puppy at the ferry landing, and their eyes peered deep into mine... we didn't have to be thinking of nature's rules. For some insects, like the fruit fly, life is born, bred, then dead. They don't think about it as far as I know. But I am human, not an insect. I can think! At least I think I can think.

I am Mark. A human. I live in a kayak as the natives of the Inside Passage once did. My ancestors have already defined to me the master plan. They defined marriage, they defined the nuclear family, and they defined these as the core of existence of man... of woman. But to "define" something is to limit the possibilities. I am Mark and Choice is my savior. And I choose NOT to define my life so stringently yet.

But are Joanne and Gary really that limited? Maybe to define themselves as family they've relieved themselves of obsolete definitions such as "single"?

What's right and how do I know?

Jonah still stares off into the fire, light years away. Deer wander, munching on grass. I am amazed watching deer. They are such amazing, efficient animals; solid, strong, quick. They can eat anywhere, the weeds and grass, tree bark, whatever, then they play and sleep. Do they act with purpose, or are they blindly subjected to nature's design? Do I? Eat, sleep, play. Seems intelligent to me.

A deflating balloon floats down from the sky in front of my tent. I always wondered where those went, the ones that floated away free. And here the balloon lies, among kayakers and sailors on Jones Island.

Now is the time for me to rise, to walk down to the beach, to find a seal to enjoy a reef with.

Denis meets me on the sand. He wears a t-shirt with the words, "Drosophilae Melangaster." Two flies are pictured, each in their own circle yet the faces touch. One circle has an arrow pointing up to the right. The other bears a cross pointing down from the bottom. The words mean fruit fly.

Puff sails off in the afternoon, her wings to the side like a Chinese junk, Gary at the helm. He built the boat with Greg's father from stings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff. He also built the wooden kayak and their skiff, both lashed to Puff's deck.

Soon after the family's departure, another Easy Rider kayak paddles in, a two person model with Scott and Nancy aboard. Cha and I jump in the two man rig while its owners paddle our single kayaks. We kayak to Deer Harbor on Orcas Island, while Denis naps. I paddle the rear position on the way and enjoy the idea of two people in a boat. But returning, after Deer Harbor beers and hackysack, I stroke in the front position with Cha paddling behind. He constantly criticizes my paddling so by the time we return to camp from the ordeal, I decide to stay single in my solo rig. So does Cha.

April 16, 1981

With a Tarzan call, I wake Cha and we take off running again, this time cross country through the woods, over logs and above rock cliffs. We sprint back to camp, jump rope for half an hour, then we are off running in the woods some more. Out of breath, we end up on a high point of Jones Island, at a chapel someone has constructed in the woods, with a wooden cross and log benches. Neatly laid white rocks circle the holy spot. After sitting quietly awhile, Cha and I stroll back to camp for freezing faucet showers, soap and all, then a brisk salt water swim... clean hair, clean pores, clean minds.

Some divers surface as I sit in North Cove. They report a huge octopus asleep in a cave. The supposedly intelligent creature lives surrounded by shells and remains of prey, like a witch in her lair.. the octopus's garden.

Denis joins Cha and me for hackysack. We arouse the interest of deer. They stand watching our kicking from twenty feet.

Now I sit alone under the almost full moon. The water lies calm yet lops lightly on the sandy beach. Some animal rustles the grass just feet from the log I sit on. It yelps constantly. Maybe a case of animal rape.

The sand and gravel sounds alive with the movements of tiny things, whether the pea size rocks just settle or small creatures, such as crabs or insects, walk and shift their mobile earth. I don't know. Tomorrow, after high tide, the creatures' surroundings will have changed completely again, like those of a traveler.

The moon shines brightly enough to show the world in a different way, with shadows only slightly darker than their real objects. The moon, its face unchanging as far I can tell from the near quarter century I've been alive, instigates nostalgia of friends and places in my past, like the full moon over Lake Washington, paddling this past winter in my kayak, dreaming of this night in the San Juans. Or Alpental, with no snow on the ground, the ski area dark, unable to operate. Or the beach in Mexico, the magic from the constant beating of surf waves under voluptuous lunar light. Full moon reflects back on my memory sitting in the night glow in Sun Valley's Warm Springs. And the hot sulfur pools on the hills above Steamboat Springs, and the moonlight ski to Yellowstone's hot baths. These are the places where people shed their clothes and open their hearts. The full moon passes over my life, and will continue to do so, regardless of my actions. And within a month of my death, it will pass again. Or so I believe.

The sounds on this beach tonight are reassuring. My fellow creatures also pass under the full moon, regardless of me, though they may be side-tracked a bit. I may even squish some without knowing, my foot being so big compared to their heads.

We haven't seen the Jones Island raccoons yet, though they nightly leave signs; cottage cheese found dragged to the bushes, plastic jugs found opened or chewed through. Even spices have been tested. The coons don't seem to eat much, but they sure enjoy destroying containers. I assume they are very much into the tourist industry and have their night game maneuvers carefully practiced. They are lucky nature provided them with masks to hide their individual identities, like cat burglars. Maybe they have tricked us and they are really cats with masks on, or maybe they are really spooks playing with our food and I'm just too realistic to see the truth. What's real? The raccoon reality is simple... Don't Get Caught!

I hear a "woo woo woo", I guess to be a hoot owl. What else would I guess? "Erragh" some bird cries out in the night like a baby.

It sounds like tons of rushing water off in the distance, like a tidal wave. But the bay is as peaceful as the moon. Maybe waves are crashing on Yellow Island and the sound just arrives here first. What's that? A low earth rumble? No. Not Mt. Saint Helens. Maybe a Sound of Freedom from Whidbey Island. Or is a big wave coming, a rush of water so big that...

April 17, 1981

After our nice four day rest, we pack and head straight across San Juan Channel, overriding the superstition of Friday being a bad luck day to set out on a journey. Wasn't Eve overcome with her temptation enough to bite that apple on Friday? Was Christ crucified on a Friday? I don't know. But this morning the sun is hot and the water is smooth and inviting to paddle. We go to Mark and Kammy LaRivieres' home on San Juan Island's east side. Mark dives with Dave in the U.W. ling cod study. Mark's neighbor, John Bell, allows us to store our boats for a few days while we ferry to meet Dave and Laura at Anacortes.

On foot, party packs on our backs, we hitchhike into Friday Harbor with several hours still to wait for the ferry boat.

Beers in hand, we hack up in a parking lot by the water, people watching us from their condominiums in the warm sun. We set goals with the hackysack, using a numbering system. "Three three," I call, meaning each person must pass the hack three times, the first number, then one person, any one, must hit the hack three consecutive times to end the goal, like the curlicue on top of a soft ice cream cone. We decide that until the goal is reached, without the hackysack touching the ground, no beer.

Popping the sack around the circle, our three minds focused on the hacky, an elder man walks over from the condominium wondering what game we play. With a martini slur he asks, "How's the game transfer?"

None of us really catch his question, so he asks again. "How's the game translate?"

"To bear across," I say. "Do you mean, are we practicing this to learn something else, like soccer?"

"Exactly," he says, spraying a breath of gin and olive. "I used to practice karate and earned a brown belt and that looks like it could loosen you up good for a fight."

"Hackysack," says Denis, "made my golf game better. You know, eye/ball coordination."

The man's belly hangs low over his belt. Blood vessels string mazes in his eyes. He says, "Looks like a bunch of offensive maneuvers to me. I don't know why anyone would kick that little thing around." He walks back towards his martini haven.

"Why ski or drink martinis or live?" I comment aloud, but mostly to myself. "It's just tweet tweet blah blah, I guess. Okay fellahs. Nobody drinks a beer or takes a leak until we do twenty hacks each. On our own... without dropping the hack."

Cha attains twenty right away. Then Denis soon follows, leaving me kicking the hackysack by myself. The boys sit on a log and cheer me on as I reach seventeen, then nineteen, then eighteen, and nineteen again. They drink my share of beer too, as my bladder just gets fuller... and fuller, sweat running down my face. "Twenty," I finally yell, running for the bathroom.

The ferry boat docks us in Anacortes. Laura, Dave and his girlfriend, Diane, and two other buddies, Rob and Dave Lee, all wait for us in a green station wagon. "Yahoo. Off to another island," yells Cha.

"Would be nice," I follow.

Dave says, greeting us, "Whidbey's nice. Let's go."

April 18, 1981

We set out early for a scuba dive near Deception Pass in the underwater preserve park. Dave picked up gear at my folks home and brings an extra suit for a third person, which both Cha and Laura think to be themselves. They must decide.

Dave, Cha and I dive below the water surface. The colors flow. Mostly oranges and browns. Chitins lie a foot long, like I'd never seen. Gliding over their sectioned, armored shell, I remember being told chitins haven't changed since prehistoric times. Living fossils preserved in sea water. Fish swim. I wish I could swim with orca. Burgundy red rock crabs. And to hear whales underwater... whistles, gargles. Dave signals me. I watch his bubbles flow slowly to the surface. The sky is fluid now. A preserve park; no abalones for us.

Dried and warm, we pack into the green station wagon and charge off to Oak Harbor, the home of a Sound of Freedom, to hit holiday cheers at Safeway. Sunday, being Easter, and more people coming, ching, ching, \$98.39 please.

At the beach cabin, seven bags of groceries, and several cases of beer, together we cheer, "hooray, hurrah" to Safeway, Anycity, the store where we all feel at home in the numbered aisles, with the beer displays, "hooray", Florida grapefruit and California oranges, Idaho potatoes and even Washington state apples. Chinese foods, Mexican foods, papayas and mangos. "Hooray" we all cheer to Safeway, singing, "Since we're neighbors let's be friends..."

Laura yells out, "Hey, look," pointing past the beach towards the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

I say, "Hello to the Mother Fuca. What do I see? It's not an aircraft carrier. It's... it's a Safeway barge."

"Yah, yahoo," we cheer.

As we move into the evening, the eight of us eat a Mexican feast. Our mouths burn, and our red eyes drip from dried peppers.

Dave and I receive birthday gifts. A book about edibles in the wild, for me, and a hacksack for Dave. Laura gives me a photo book that revives thought about Vango, the truck I can park on a beach somewhere sometime to write this book. Two bottles of tequila sit on the table, bows tied around their necks. From the Cuervo Oro I twist and toss the cap into a trash can.

My brother Paul and his wife, Cookie, in Deano and Pam's van, also carrying Dean and Debbie, and two kayaks on the roof, pulls up to our beach fire just about dark... and of course, two more bottles of tequila in hand, one of them Mescal with the worm. After all the introductions, all fourteen people instantly longtime friends, Deano pulls out his flute and the Lee brothers gather their guitars. Denis unpockets his harmonica, I toss my recorder to my brother.

The moon rises higher, clear in the night, full as can be, synergistic to our group. Gathering some sticks, I choose each for strength and balance. I pass the sticks around, two to whoever wants them. Tequila passes around. Music plays. Log percussionists join beat, flute floats and we full tilt boogie into a genuine log jam. All musicians switch to the log jam, beating hollow logs and solid stumps; beedely beedely boody bop. The tequila releases primate characters under the full moon. The log jam continues a long while, giving blisters to the tequila apes.

Cha and I play fight in the sand, swinging, rolling, growling, flipping from air punches. "Aargh," we growl and decide to swim. We strip off all our clothes and run down to the Mother Fuca. Saturday night, Easter eve, the eve of my birthday, Cha and I both Tarzan call to the full moon and dive into the cold water, swimming straight out from shore. But not far. A sprint back to solid ground, then a sprint run down the beach under the lighted night. We run, pumping our hearts, warming our bodies.

By the fire I quickly dress, leaving off my dirty underwear. I drink a shot of Mescal from the bottle and toss my shorts into the fire as a final purging. Nobody else admits they believe Cha and I actually swam, so we go swim again.

As the Lee brothers play some excellent guitar and sing, Deano gets riled to swim. He grabs me and we repeat the swim/run sequence.

Cha and my brother pile trees on the fire. Laura and I take them off. At sometime I am handed the last swig of the Mescal, the worm still soaking in the bottom. "The Worm," they yell. Cha and Paul pile more trees to the blaze. "The Worm. Drink it!" As I take the first bite the worm squirts oily juices down my throat and my brother Paul yells, "Don't BITE the worm!"

April 19, 1981

"The air inside just hangs in illusion"
Crosby, Stills and Nash

The full moon passes the zenith, the midnight hour. Soon people start tequilaing off to bed. Laura, Deano and I sit talking and throwing sticks on the fire until the sun

begins to bring light in the east. The moon hangs an hour away from setting over glass calm water.

"Let's take Paul and Cookie's kayaks, Mark, and go paddling," says Deano.

"Yah," I jump. Laura sits quietly, watching the glowing sky.

Deano runs to the can and I ask Laura if she minds if I kayak. "No. It's fine," she says. "Go ahead. Happy Birthday." She kisses me and I leave to prepare gear.

On the way to the water I stop by the fire and tell Laura, who sits quietly, "I feel kind of guilty for taking off."

"Why be sorry if you're just going to go anyways?" she asks me.

We paddle empty kayaks, the same dolphin designs Cha and I own, north towards Deception Pass. This narrow channel squeezes a huge amount of water through to the inside of Whidbey Island. Then the water rushes past Goat Island, by the Swinomish Slough where we ran against its power a week ago.

The morning light is eerie. Neither Deano nor I want to paddle into Deception Pass itself as the whirlpools and rip tides, so early in the morning with tequila mentalities, would tend to bend us. We stop paddling and hold the boats together. We sit quietly. Two pintail ducks fly past at high speed, one foot off the water. They turn in unison, whistling in flight, their own sound of freedom.

"You know, Mark," Deano says in a quiet voice, "it's your quarter century birthday right now." We float pointing north. The full moon lies on the port horizon. The Easter sun rises over the land.

"I'm just a little older than you, Mark. And I've already been married to Pam for over four years. I mean house and the works." We sit quietly for awhile.

"You got any plans after this trip? With Laura, or anybody?"

"Who knows what?" I answer. "Laura goes off to Europe for school for a full year. I kayak now. I don't have any plans like that." I squint, looking off miles over the water to the southeast. "Was that a whale?"

"I didn't see anything," says Deano. "You guys sure have a great trip going. I wish I could do something like this. I don't think Pam would go for it. We couldn't afford to get away for six months anyway."

I think aloud, "Denis has to go to Seattle next week for a wedding, and Cha and I are going so we can shift some gear around. Maybe you want to borrow Paul's kayak and come up for a week. That might be good for you and Pam."

We paddle on. The long hours awake and the consumed tequila seems to blend with the morning. Gray shades of the water and sky run together. The world seems one shadow. Transition from night to day is coming so gradual, the moon gets replaced by the sun on the opposite horizon. With the sun and the moon each lying half exposed on either side of us, Deano yells, "Look. Whale."

I don't know if Deano hallucinates or if he sees a whale, but we both watch and wait.

Then it rises. Not a small killer whale, like before, but a large round, gray back with a great spout. Slow and smooth it flips its fluke, the kayak size tail. Then the whale is gone. Rings circle out on the water a quarter mile away. The whale swims our direction.

I paddle and guess a position to capture the next rise as close as possible. Deano sits along the same path, only closer to the last sighting.

Poosch... she rises again, the other side of Deano, closer. We wait knowing at one moment the huge mammal has to be passing just feet below Deano's kayak.

Poosch... only two kayaks lengths from me. She rolls her fluke high above my boat. From my rear shot I see a rope as thick as my thumb, manila colored, hanging over her tail and down into the water, apparently tangled. The whale is bound. All is gray; sky, water, whale.

The whale submerges and we chase it towards Deception Pass. From Deception Island we see her surface again, now half a mile away.

We sit. No words pass. The drift carries us into some churning water near the mouth of Deception Pass and I suggest we head back. Never had I seen boiling water such as this. Deano's time in a kayak being less than a few hours, I don't care to introduce him to any wild water.

Paddling back to the cabin, the morning sun warming us, Deano mentions, "I think I'd better join you guys for a week or so in the boats. This morning is too awesome."

I awaken around noon, next to Laura in her dome tent on the beach. After returning from the whale, speechless, I had showered and fallen fast asleep. The other folks had left in the morning to another beach where Dave knew of clams. Now we will have a Sunday feast.

The wind blows up in the afternoon, three foot waves breaking on the beach. My bro and Deano decide to try the waves in kayaks. The group gathers to applaud Deano as he tumbles into the water, flipping under a wave sideways. He drags the sinking kayak to shore.

Paul doesn't do so bad. He stays upright, but he grinds the nose of the kayak into the sand while riding a wave. These are good sights for Cha, Denis and I to see vulnerability. Deano flipped for the reason I figured on the day the waves almost got Cha and me, crossing to Kayak Point. Deano put his butt to the wave and the force of the still water against the deck flipped him instantly. Calm power.

After cabin and beach clean up, and a round of hackysack, we drive to the top of Mt. Erie. We climb a relay tower, in high winds, to satisfy our acrophilia (a word I make up for the love of heights). The wind blows so hard that we hang to the tower for life and watch the 360 degree view of Whidbey, the San Juans, Anacortes and Bellingham.

We three are driven to the ferry dock, everybody tired. We thank Laura and Dave and the rest and wander into the ferry station, knowing the last ferry for the day has already departed. We explain our situation to the departing attendant and he locks us in the terminal building. Cha is deputized as night watchman.

We all pass out on the benches while the storm blows outside on an Easter birthday I can never forget.

Chapter 3

"...Do Re Mi...?... OH!"

"Now children, Do Re Mi Fa So and so on are only the tools we use to build a song. Once you have these notes in your head you can sing a million different tunes just by mixing them up." Sound of Music

April 20, 1981

The noise of the man unlocking the terminal doors awakens me. He's the same fellow who appointed Cha the job of night watchman. I slept long. The memories of my dreams fade when I open my eyes. I focus on the stack of real estate company brochures on the wall. The words read "Stop dreaming, make it a reality."

What? I rub my eyes and look around. All our gear is scattered over the length of this bench. Denis sleeps curled up on the floor against the window in his bag. I notice Cha on the bench, stretching, on top of his bag in his boxers.

"So..." he says, quickly turning over and looking at me. "How'd I do at my job, man? Hey, I got some sex for your book. I had a wet dream last night."

"All right," I say. "We could materialize the dream and say a beautiful blonde sneaks through the locked door and walks up to the sleeping watchman and then, she...he...they..." I look over the bench to see who puts coins into the vending machine. "Cha, look..."

We both laugh, lying in underwear in the waiting room as a blonde woman, very attractive, takes some coffee from the machine.

"Here, Cha," I laugh and throw him a Stop Dreaming Reality brochure.

On the ferry boat, among kids running around laughing and bumping into people, Denis and I watch a sea gull flying ten feet above the deck. He keeps pace, riding over the flow of people below, just observing in hopes of gaining some tidbit from the crowd.

Denis laughs at the sea gull, saying, "On the charter boat I worked on out of Westport, the fellahs would say if you fed a sea gull an Alka Seltzer, like in a wad of bread, what they swallow they aren't able to regurgitate, so they blow up, but I don't know of anybody that's done it. I've seen sea gulls flying with fish leader hanging out their butt. They eat bait on a hook and shit it all out, except the hook stays."

"Ooohh," I gag.

We ferry over Rosario Strait, stop at Lopez, Shaw and Orcas Islands, then reach Friday Harbor. I stop at the whale museum in town to report my sighting of the whale. We conclude it to be a gray whale which had been reported a week earlier in Port Townsend, the rope as identification. The whale museum man tells me they want to send divers to help the whale, to untangle the rope, if they can swim close enough. Gray whales usually don't swim off by themselves like the whale Deano and I paddled with.

We hitchhike to our boats at John Bell's beach and check to see if Mark and Kammy are home. We find a note that they went to Alaska to find a house for Mark's new job in Juneau. The note says if the weather is "creepy", we should stay in their home till we head for Seattle.

Cha, Denis and I decide to camp. So in the rain we paddle our kayaks along the San Juan Island shoreline, south to a clear water cove with soft round gravel on a steep beach. Up on the rocky point, tucked into a few trees, someone has built a canvas cabin on a raised wood deck. We duck in out of the rain, and decide to stay. We set up tents, but I fall asleep in the canvas shelter.

April 21, 1981

I lie inside the canvas cabin with three walls rolled to the ceiling's alder beams. Tables and empty jars show some people, one or more, have lived here at one time, maybe only temporarily.

A bald eagle swoops from the trees above and glides over the water, soon followed by a blue heron.

The islands shade with distance, the close land a rich, dark green. Further away, more white adds to the hue, giving a layered effect. The furthest island I see, probably Lopez to the southeast, fades so white that the hills blend into the clouds, a continuum.

All is wet and the rain still falls. But no biggy.

The eagle now perches high in a tree, solo and silent. The blue heron rests on a bed of kelp. The eagle eyes the land. I whistle at him. He sits. I hoot the call from "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." He waits.

The eagle falls forward, flapping those great wings, one, two, three slow strokes. He glides across San Juan Island towards Turn Island. A big nick shows, several feathers missing from his right wing. From birth? A fight? Man?... The bird strokes no more, he just soars out of sight.

A seal surfaces, his head white. Is that his color, or is that salt, or light reflection? It is his silver crown.

A slug, splotted with black, crawls over leaves. Slime covers him. His antennae slant forward, sensing. He seems knowing, maybe superior. Why not? Maybe slugs are really beings from another planet. A slug would be a good disguise.

Cha's in his rain gear on the beach turning over rocks and scraping for clams. The ferry to Sidney, B.C. passes, telling the approximate time, 11:10, same time it passed each day we stayed on Jones Island.

A man just arrived and is talking to Denis' tent. I'm going to pull my sleeping bag over my head. I hear him ask Denis, "What are you doing?" Good question.

Denis answers, "Oh, you must own this land. We're kayaking north from Seattle. We'll leave if you want..."

"Whatever," the man says in a monotone, walking away.

I think maybe we should pack now, and head back to Mark and Kammy's home. The weather is creepy.

"That's a bunch of noise," says Denis, climbing naked out of his tent. We go to work and start packing, a one hour project.

The slug has progressed sixteen inches... a space traveler.

April 22, 1981

Cha wants to hitchhike from Mark and Kammy's to town to drink beer, but Denis boasts of his own will power. I laugh because I know he means he will have a beer. It's "will not" power that he lacks.

Along the road towards Roche Harbor we hunt down a "magic tree" I know of. A green road grows to the side of a driveway and its cul-de-sac circles the tree. We guess the large cedar is cut off half way to its potential height by lightning. The bark under the new growth is burnt. On the top sits a nest, a large nest of an osprey, supposedly the only hawk that fishes, and this is, I was told, the only osprey nest on the island. Approaching the tree, we see the huge bird flying away, his underside white. He returns, but won't land. Maybe, like the eagle, he could adjust to us. Now we notice a huge, dark tail sticking up from the nest, probably the mate. Three loud, powerful tweets sound from the bird in flight. I would like to see the bird snatch a fish from the water, scooping up the prey in his talons. Tweet tweet for the bird, blah blah for the fish.

We hitchhike to Roche Harbor and watch swans with orange beaks. One has blue eyes.

"Bird shit everywhere," I yell, walking past the tennis courts, the resort mostly quiet in this off season.

"I wonder why these bugs just hang around my head," says Denis.

"To bug you," helps Cha.

We buy a six pack from the harbor store and sit in a muddy bay in an old wooden fishing boat, the oar type with a crow's nest for fish watching.

"Get a job," says Cha. "I worked for the ferry company."

"Man, we work hard," I say.

"I'm ready to paddle some more," says Denis. "We've been citying it too much. And we still have to hit Seattle tomorrow."

"Yah," says Cha, drinking his beer. "And I'm going to get a job."

"We can paddle Deano up to the May Fest on Stuart," figures Denis.

Cha and I agree. "Then we can go to Orcas and Sucia, and then maybe to the Gulf Islands," says Cha.

I say, "I need some hard core paddling again too. I need the rush."

One duck in the water begins to pick on a smaller duck, grabbing its neck in his beak, shoving the head under water. A third duck waddles in and beaks the aggressor's head. The three release one another and grumble off in three directions.

"Hey, duck, get a job," says Cha.

"You really want a job, huh Cha?" I ask.

"No way, work's for jerks. I never want to work at a shit job again."

"Kayaking is work at times," I say, climbing up the tilted crow's nest.

"Yah, but that's different."

"Cause you don't get paid?" I ask.

"No, 'cause work's for jerks."

"I've always enjoyed my jobs," says Denis. "I like carpentry and charter fishing."

I say, "I usually burn out on a job after awhile and want to be someplace else. Not here, but there type thing. Those are the hard days to work. I need to get where I want to

be most, then let my energies build from there. Alpentel is good work, good for a season every year."

"Yah, ski patrol is a good job," says Cha. "Dynamiting snow is fun."

"I gotta' get on the patrol this year," says Denis. "Then I'll go to school spring quarter."

I say, "When we kayak we talk about skiing, when we ski we talk about kayaking. What did you say you're taking in school, Denis?"

"Architecture."

"I don't know if I could make a career of my life," I ponder.

"At least part of my life, anyway," says Denis. The rain begins and we walk and hitchhike back to Mark and Kammy's to baby ourselves under a roof.

April 23 through 27, 1981

We hitchhike to Seattle and return hammocks, Frisbees, swim masks, and extra clothes. I visit Laura and give her the finless dolphin I had carved. She gives me a T-shirt which reads, "He who dies with the most toys wins." We say our goodbyes, she leaving for Europe for the year before I return from kayaking. I buy some ten dollar sunglasses and sew Velcro into my wool pants, to replace the many buttons the military supplied. Maybe someday the army will switch to Velcro, advertised as "the leisure product." I stay at Paul and Cookie's home for the three days in Seattle.

We return to Anacortes with Deano and my brother's kayak. Denis has a new camera, a Minolta waterproof instamatic.

In Friday Harbor, as Deano, Cha, Denis and I carry the loaded kayak onshore, we meet the Island Sounder news reporter. He drives the boat and us to John Bell's beach, where our kayaks wait safely, and photographs us loading the boats.

The wind blows chops in the San Juan channel but the ground proves too hard to drive in tent stakes. We decide to paddle away, all anxious to move again. We leave, waving to Mark and Kammy, paddling with the southeast wind to our backs, surfing waves easily. We kayak at a very fast pace. On one wave I surf, my bow almost dives under a long strand of kelp which would have stopped my momentum. Deano and I paddle out front, aiming for the southeast end of Spieden.

We surf past O'Neal Island and Rocky Cove, where the osprey lives in the Magic Tree. The waves roll past us, fast and smooth across Spieden Channel. A couple miles off Green Point we notice the white water. As Deano and I near, we see the waves just bouncing up and down, not rolling. I start turning away from the point. Deano follows my maneuver without words. I continue the turn until we head into the wind, directly away from the point. The water sucks us towards the rocks, towards the bouncing waves. Deano notices my concern, the speed I paddle, and he too exerts full effort. Looking behind, I notice Cha and Denis making the same mistake. Deano and I paddle hard, but we are still sucked into the bouncing water. Our kayaks bob like corks, dropping to the water as waves disappear from underneath. We paddle full strength, watching as we get closer to the rocks. The waves bounce up five and six feet. I guess and turn my boat and ride with the waves towards the final rock on the point, paddling full strength to avoid being sucked in sideways. As Deano reaches the place I turned, he also turns. We speed past the last rock, a paddle's reach away, and round the corner, riding the current. Cha and

Denis fall out of sight, last seen in the midst of the quaking waves. Deano and I paddle on, looking for a beach to duck into, but only rocks appear. The island now shelters us from the wind and the current takes us fast. I see one feasible beach, check it, then paddle away from the beach to view further down the shore. Only seeing cliff, I back up to the first choice, Cha and Denis just now rounding the point.

Deano, having followed me away from shore, gets sucked down the beach with the current. He now fights his way back. He paddles full strength and barely moves, with still a hundred feet more to go. I can see concern on Deano's face. He looks stressed, but suddenly he exerts a burst of energy against the current, the result of panic and adrenaline, and works his way back to the beach. I step in the water and pull his bow on shore.

"We probably looked like a pair of tennis shoes in a washing machine paddling around that point," I say to Deano. Denis and Cha paddle in.

High on the cliff above, we set camp. The four of us trot down to the end of the island to view the waves. Grassy fields slope down to an old waterfront building. Deano says, "I heard a man bought this island once and imported wild African game for hunting. They stalked baboons because that was most like hunting humans. And ancient sheep, the kind without wool that the Bible talked about, they imported those here too."

We pass under a fence held in the air with a leaning stick, its wires stretched so to be a spring. Cha guesses the setup to be a deer trap, so the animals walk under the raised fence, scrape their backs, knocking down the stick, and the wire fence springs closed. Many deer graze within the area and we wonder if maybe the animals are exported from here.

We look down on the now calmed rip tides and return to camp. We see new rip tides gaining strength off the north end of the island, where we would have headed if we hadn't stopped, on towards Cactus and John's Islands.

We all climb into Denis' new tent he purchased in Seattle, a half dome, yellow walls inside, our biggest party tent. We each bring our two beers we brought from Friday Harbor and with Deano's flute, three harmonicas and my recorder, we play music together. With eyes closed, we play random notes, high pitches. We find resonations. The sounds lift the tent.

"Today was like having an avalanche going off under your feet," Cha says.

Denis adds, "Those waves just dropped out from below. My boat kept crashing on the water. I'm sure glad fiberglass is so strong."

I sit with a chart open in my lap. "We were stupid," I say, pointing to Brown Point. "Says right here, 'Dangerous Rip Tides.' Next time we should read the chart for the day's paddle first. We learn by doing."

"Those waves were like ocean breakers," says Deano.

"Deano, you sure passed the test today, paddling under stress. If you weren't in good shape you would have lost it," I say.

"I saw when you got worried and figured I'd better follow you," he says.

"The boats, even loaded, had a lot of buoyancy," says Denis.

"Boy and sea?" I ask.

"But they plowed through the heavy water," Denis adds.

"We needed that after being so lazy and out of the boats so long," says Cha. "That water had all the force of an avalanche, too."

"Sure instills humility," I say. Rain pelts the half dome.

Cha says, "I respect the San Juans a lot more now, that's for sure. I know what the man meant when he told me a month ago that if we can paddle the San Juans that we can paddle any of the Inside Passage, all the way to Glacier Bay."

I say, looking at the charts, "The current just rushes through the Straits of Juan de Fuca and hits these islands. That current ripped today. It was nice having four of us so we could pair off."

"I'm going to be sore tomorrow," says Deano, picking up his flute and playing a Jethro Tull tune.

When he finishes, I mention, "I sure haven't clued in on the pattern of this recorder yet."

"Can you play the whole octave?" he asks.

"A what?"

"You know, do, re, mi..." he says, taking the recorder and finding the notes. I count, do through do, finding eight notes and understanding the word "octave."

I play the eight notes and feel a flash of insight.

Deano explains, the tent walls stretching against the wind, "Much of modern music is combinations of those eight notes. That major octave, in C, runs into higher and lower octaves too." He plays "Somewhere Over the Rainbow". I try it and find it quite easy.

"Play with that and we'll do more later." Lights flash in my head. Deano stretches and continues, "I don't think I ever got this sore working construction."

"So you're laid off now, huh Deano?" asks Cha.

"Yah. I'm lucky Pam is working."

"Work's for jerks," I say.

"Gotta do it though," says Deano.

"Good day of work today, guys," I say, gathering my things and slipping out of the tent. "Goodnight."

April 28, 1981

Early, Deano and I wander into the field next to camp and kick the hackysack. The grass, wet from the rain, soaks our tennis shoes and lower pants. When the rain begins to fall again, we don't care. After the sack kick, I grab my recorder. We leave Cha and Denis sleeping and walk the dirt road north. A cliff overhanging a nice pool draws our attention so we climb down to a spot which feels powerful, and we sit. Deano plays my recorder. A seal watches us. When Deano stops playing, the seal starts to leave. "Play more," I say. The music starts again and the seal turns to watch. Curiosity or coincidence? Or an understanding of harmony? He swims away, then returns for more.

Trees rise tall and skinny above this rock, the tops obscured in the fog. We hear the low rumble of the ferry heading towards Sidney. The seal eyes remain, watching. Whirlpools spin behind him towards Cactus Island forming eddies, centers of clear, calm water. A fishing boat tootles by. A starfish clings to the rocks at our feet. Rain falls.

In camp, after breakfast, Cha, Deano and I leave Denis sleeping and walk down to the beach with towels, jump ropes and hackysack. We each jump on a log or rock for awhile then take to sprinting on the sandy stretch. A few kicks of the sack and we strip

our clothes. Under clouds, the day cool, us sweating, we dive under the cold water and immediately spring back out. My heart pumps fast from the exercise. A sailboat offshore can be heard clearly, a voice saying, "Better get the camera, hurry."

Deano says, "You know, if we all ran around naked all the time, I'd bet we'd grow hairs. And you know what else? If we never wore shoes, we'd never get colds."

I start to chill, so I dress and put on shoes.

We build our campfire as night comes on. A tree, maybe one hundred and twenty-five feet tall, hangs, slanted over camp. I suggest to Cha, "Climb that tree to the top and see if you can get it to fall."

"That would be dumb."

The fire burns into the dark. I sit after the others go to bed to read, their tents glowing from the candles inside, tiny domes of green, yellow, and brown. Deano's yellow tent is by far the brightest because he burns his stove and five candles, trying to dry some clothes. The lights from Bellingham glow through the trees from the distant horizon.

I think of Deano paddling so hard yesterday to fight the current.

What a workout. And what about Cha's idea that work is for jerks? Deano worked to overcome the force of the current. He exerted to control. Next to the glowing fire, I thumb through my dictionary, looking up the two words, "stress" and "exertion." Stress comes from Middle English, meaning "hardship." Physics defines stress as, "An applied force or system of forces that tends to strain or deform a body." Another applicable definition says, "A mentally or emotionally disruptive or disquieting influence..."

For exertion, I read, "To put into vigorous action, to bring to bear, as exert influence."

I look up "influence," common to both definitions, "A power indirectly or intangibly affecting a person or course of events," from the roots "to flow in."

The fire pops, sparks fly onto my wool pants. I put them out. Seems to me the work Cha keeps classifying for jerks, like his job at the chain saw shop before he sold his Camaro, must be the job which causes stress continuously, as to strain or deform a body, maybe appearing to Cha as spasmodic jerks. But exertion seems to be the control of events through choice. The person exerting, putting into vigorous action, thus is in control, can influence, can flow, where the stressed worker is controlled by exterior forces. And I bet exertion without rest can turn into stress.

Yesterday when Deano became scared, the forces of nature stressed him, but that immediate stress of emergency triggered him to exert all his energies into the paddle, into the fight against the current. The threat gave him motivation. So motivation must be the key to enjoying work. I must choose a life in which I can exert myself, to maintain control over my own life, as Deano maintained control over his kayak. I must choose and exert myself. The exertion itself should supply motivation, thus making continued exertion easier. To begin, that's the real step. The choice, like of a spouse, a job, or a sport, is the crucial step.

I exert my energies and learn the "Billy Jack" song on my recorder. Tired, I smother the fire with water and dirt, my influence drowning the flames. All other tents are now dark and I follow the example.

Chapter 4

"Forty-two, Underwear, and VD"

"radical; arising from or going to a root or source; fundamental; basic"

American Heritage Dictionary

April 29, 1981

We pack for travel this morning. I use a dozen or so nylon stuff bags, which I sewed prior to the trip, to organize my items. These nylon bags are then stuffed into the two wedge-shaped plastic float bags, one for the bow of the kayak and one for the stern. These plastic float bags were originally designed each with two separate, airtight compartments, one for gear and one for air, but I carry so much gear that space for air just isn't. Besides, the seams already show rips, which I think I will mend, but the bags will no longer be airtight. Only convenient. As I carry my loaded float bags down towards the beach, I smell Dr. Bronner's peppermint soap. Looking through the clear plastic I see the liquid biodegradable suds floating freely among all my gear. I yell, "My float bag is full of soap." Soap saturates the inner nylon stuff bags. "Aaaaaahhhhh," I scream, feeling that to be a proper response.

Deano walks over and says, "Ah, Dr. Bronner's, of the Universal Life Church." Deano once sent away something like three dollars and received papers as an ordained minister of the Universal Life Church. The words of Dr. Bronner's, written all over his soap container, spell out much of the church's philosophy. Deano has actually put to use his ministry. He married Paul, my brother, to Cookie (her maiden name was Fortune).

We four paddle away from Spieden Island, freshened with a splash of peppermint. The sun's heat seeps through the overcast sky and we paddle with shirts off. Off Cactus Island two black birds with orange beaks and orange eyes sit on a rock bravely, unafraid of us. We guess the birds to be black oyster catchers. The rocks and sandstone are rounded and smooth forms; porous, pocketed, and caverned from past wave action. Black feathers shining silver, a huge raven, almost as big as an eagle, flies over, spooking into flight the two oyster catchers which cheep loud and repetitive, like a siren. Caves pit the rocks in places so much that it appears like honeycomb, only not so uniform. Roots grow out and gnarl up the cliff.

A seal follows our kayaks. Then five more surface, all curious and watching. I see through the clear water, limpets and sea urchins lining the bottom. Deano points out a native idol carved into a rock, of the sea's own design, and Cha sees what he calls brain patterns in the arches and tunnels of sandstone. The earth's brain. A blue heron settles on a huge mushroom rock. Now maybe a dozen seals gather and swim towards us, puffing loudly as they exhale, the flaps on their noses opening and closing. Deano approaches a dead fish floating in the water, and as he reaches to pick it up for seal food, a seal rises from below, snatching it inches from Deano's hand. The creatures' big red eyes cautiously watch through two-inch white eye lashes. One seal sticks his nose straight in the air for a minute, then rolls his spotted back over the surface, flipping his tail. "He's pretending to be a whale," I comment.

"Sure beats the zoo," says Denis as we paddle away toward John's Island.



"Seal ya later," says Cha to the seals which still follow.

Nearing John's Island, we notice an old sign reading "Clam Beds Closed. Contaminated."

"That's a bunch of noise," says Denis.

"I've never slept in the same bed with a clam," I say.

"Yes you have," says Cha.

I say, "Seems like a good way for the locals to keep tourists from removing all the shell fish." We paddle past the first home on this island, a beautiful cedar house with a barrel outside set up for a shower, and an outhouse tucked back in the woods. Looking back towards Spieden, I now see a home on the N.W. end of that island, a home we didn't know existed while we camped there.

We stop for lunch on a sand beach with a standing totem pole. A goat wanders up to our picnic, asking, "What's to eat?"

"Nothing," I tell him, moving my sandwich and trail nuts away. The goat backs up to me and squirts runny pea green shit all over my back. Gag!

I wash off and add a bit of Dr. Bronner's peppermint soap to make the goat pea soup smell split. Denis pulls out some tiger balm which we all rub on our foreheads for third eyes.

We embark again and kayak into Reid Harbor of Stuart Island. At a community dock, owned by five families, we talk to a woman about the forthcoming May Fest. She informs us on where we can camp. A barrage of boats anchor and tie to the dock which we learn to be one of the community member's idea of a hobby collection. We paddle around to the State Park, then back out to Spring Cove, the sight of May Fest in two days. From the beach a field leads up a gentle sloping hill to the woods. We set camp high above the cove on a wind-swept rock exposure, looking down over huge squares of rocks which have apparently broken and fallen from this cliff. Looking the other direction from

camp, to the mouth of Reid Harbor, the direction of sunrise, the hill slopes gently down to the water, rocks interspersed over grassy spots.

"Let's ski, guys," I yell to motivate us. Starting at the top, we hold our arms as if we carry ski poles, then we skip down the slope, jumping from one inside edge of an outside foot the other. We bounce off rocks into the air, make quick turns over the grass. Cha leads us in front, Denis follows, then me, and Deano tails. All having skied much of our lives in the thick, steep snows of Washington, we feel at home skiing this rock and grass in tennis shoes. At the hill's bottom, the water's edge, we pair and load two imaginary double chairs for a lift ride back to the top. Cha and I talk about the run and look over the turf for good jumps and nice banked turns. I tell Cha, "Big Ed, a ski buddy, once told me as we skateboarded new pavement, that to him the meaning of life was 'terrain.' To rain or not to rain, that's the question."

Our imaginary ski lift reaches the top and Cha says, "Could be, but let's jump this train and ski the terrain."

"For that," I return, "we are well trained."

We eventually strip down to our shorts and tennis shoes after skiing a few runs, then we hack up and top off the afternoon with a brisk swim.

Our tents lie scattered over the hillside, set up on grassy spots between rocks like Tijuana cardboard homes. We build our fire three feet from the edge of the forty foot cliff which drops down into Spring Cove. During dinner preparation, a singing dark haired woman rows out of Reid Harbor, around the corner and into Spring Cove. She yells to us, "Welcome. It's been years since anybody has camped on The Hill. May Fest isn't for a couple of days. How'd you get here?"

We point out the kayaks and she seems pleased we didn't drive in on a stink machine. She rows on, singing in the night, her echoes returning as beautiful as the song's origin.

Tonight I write by the fire. Through my telescope I can barely make out the rings of Saturn and two moons of Jupiter. Over Betelgeuse, one of Orion's shoulders, flies a shooting star with a green tracer. It shoots over Gemini's two heads. My traveling lady, Cassiopeia, sits by my fire also, twinkling, satisfied in her throne. Crickets share their song and the lights of Victoria in Canada glow bright beyond the fire. We have been careful tonight not to venture too far past the fire in that direction as the third step would be over the cliff. We even joked earlier about nature deciding to drop another rock cube from this cliff... the one we sit on.

The fire stirs my memories. Some piece together as I remember, but others just come in flashes of vague scenes, almost like I never participated. I've heard mention that the brain contains memories of before my own life, back in time to ancestors and the dawn of man, even to the creation of life as we believe we know it. But for me to tap such recollections would seem quite a trick, to be able to focus on and interpret thought waves foreign to my "life". Sounds like fun whether it is true or not. Just imagining such histories would be like imagining we skied today.

It has been so nice having all this play time. I'm excited to join the May Fest activities and play with the island people. We will be here on Stuart Island for a few days. The sun shone fully today by four o'clock and tomorrow should be perfect. Goodnight to the wa wa's in the night, to the crickets, to Cassiopeia and Victoria, and to my paddling partners, who already sleep.

April 30, 1981

I rise early with the sun, the other boys still in bed. With my bowels ready to explode, I climb down into Spring Cove and hike up the grassy field to an outhouse where I sit a spell. Soon I hear a flute. From our camp on the cliff, the music of Deano floats down, through and up the valley, like a tubular Carnegie Hall. The melody sounds so nice in this outhouse. It sets a good feeling in me for tomorrow's May Fest. I envision a hundred people playing in the field with the same melody floating in the air.

After breakfast and some hack time, Cha and Deano set off in empty kayaks to cross two miles to Roche Harbor. The water lies glassy, seeming so fragile that the slightest storm would break the reflection, a storm which could blow up from the south and bring big waves off Haro Straits and from the Mother Fuca. They need to shop, Deano having burned up all his candles drying clothes on Spieden, and Cha having eaten all his food in one sitting. "All I do is eat and sleep," Cha says, "eat and sleep, eat and sleep."

Denis and I ski a few runs and decide to hike to the center of the island, to go explore Tip Top, the island's tallest hill, 640 feet above sea level. That's about 600 feet above my tent.

On the trail around the southwest side of Stuart we come upon a few nice beach homes, simple with plants placed around. We discover a bathtub. Next to it trickles a fresh spring with which to fill the tub. The water could be heated with a fire underneath. A stovepipe would draw the smoke away from the bathers. Two black puppies play, rolling over each other and nipping and yelping. We scrabble with the pups and promise ourselves to return for a bath, then continue on towards the island apex. Next to a driftwood fort somebody has built, we watch a sparrow catch updrafts against a cliff, flying up the rock face without a flap of the wings, then diving down for another wind ride. Through the woods, over millions of potato bugs and past smooth green and red leafed plants growing everywhere, we start to ascend. Scrambling over rocks and the unnamed bushes, a trail appears before us, which we guess to be used mostly by sheep from the wads of raw wool scattered about. We jog up, breathing hard. Denis first notices the sheep, a couple dozen climbing the rocks and grazing the short grass. In the warm sun of this south side, we climb and find a cactus growing, a desert plant thriving in this far northwest corner of the United States. The land is dry.

On the summit we climb the tallest tree we can find, leaving two shaved sheep below wondering about the games of crazy humans. The view scans 360 degrees; north to the Canadian Pender Islands, east to Orcas, west to Vancouver Island, and south towards Roche Harbor. The wind blows a bit and the big tree sways. I sing, "Rock a bye baby, in the tree top, when the wind blows..."

A golden eagle soars twenty feet below us, his wings spread as wide as I am tall. Not flapping his wings, he holds one position. Never before have I looked down on an eagle flying and I don't think he is even aware of us above him. Two more goldens show. The three circle Tip Top, splotched saddles draping their backs, gold, brown, and white, immature balds or golden eagles, I don't really know which. They search for mice among the maze of sheep trails. We climb down from our tree and sit on a rock quietly.

Now we can hear the boys. "Ahh ahh aaahh," the familiar Tarzan yells skip over the water from some miles away. We don't spot them, but I return the call, "Ahh ahh aaahh," the noise echoing among the trees below. The islanders probably wonder if the great apes have finally arrived.

For the walk home, clouds move in for ten minutes of rain. The sky clears for the sunset which we four watch from the cliff above Spring Cove.

Jumping into our kayaks we paddle the four pods into Reid Harbor, the sky now purple and red, the clouds on fire, Spieden and Orcas Islands bathed in the red hot sauce. A lone tree, the fittest to survive, grows on a rock in the mouth of the harbor, like a giant broccoli. A "runny babbit" dashes to hide behind the tree.

We paddle home slow in the dark and hit the tents early, everybody to their own books.

May 1, 1981

"Underwear, like fine wine, takes years to reach full maturity."
Tom Janisch

I join Denis early in his tent, the only one facing west. Two otters swim by. They arch forward on a dive, their brown bodies rolling over the surface and finishing up with tails pointing to the sky. Denis tells me how it's lucky to throw a penny in the ocean on May Day, so he does, then I do, then he throws one for Deano, one for Cha, and a few more for some other people. Then he tosses a handful of coins, at least a couple beers worth, into Spring Cove below.

"Let's go to Roche Harbor for a paddle and showers and beers," he suggests. I'm all for it. We tell the other two guys and they are up for the trip. The water is calm. We travel with spray decks off. I teach the boys a song I had once learned on a bus traveling through Mexico, like this, "Oh, we're going to the wild west show-oh-oh, with the animals and the kangaroos. No matter what the weather, we'll always be together, we're going to the wild west show." After the verse, I chant out a few silly words about the Oh No Birds with balls hanging lower than their feet and every time they land, they would yell, "Oh no, oh no..."

"Oh, we're going to the wild west show-oh-oh..." Soon everybody knows the words and tune of the verse. I point at somebody between the choruses and put them on the spot to say something; anything. It doesn't really matter what is said. We sing and paddle and I imagine our voices travel a long way, cheap thrills to people on shore.

Deano paddles over to some floating trash and says, "Let's clean up this Puget Sound."

"This isn't the Sound anymore," says Denis.

"What?" I ask. "Is the sea a bunch of noise? Do you hear the Sound? Do you see or hear that ring around the sun?"

"Ya boss," says Cha. "The clouds are behind the sun."

"He must have a proud father. What?" I say.

A few Tarzan calls gets us into Roche Harbor where we see several motor boats heading off towards Stuart, the people carrying trays of food. We do our resort things and head back over the two mile crossing again. Back at Spring Cove, several boats float tied

together and anchored. People sit around the little cabin in the field, eat around the long banquet table, play volleyball, and drink from a keg of beer. We stash our kayaks and gear at The Hill camp and walk down the trail to join the festivities.

A musical jam session is in progress, several of the people being familiar from Cafe Harry's open microphone that Denis and I attended. Banjos and guitars join with spoons and singing and drumming on cans. Some people run through the field hanging onto the perimeter of a parachute. All ages run around, kids giggling, adults giggling, and the May Pole stands erect, colored streamers blowing, picking up with the rising afternoon wind. On the food table there is baked salmon, roasted salmon, and pickled salmon. One of Stuart Island's sheep slowly roasts over the fire. We gobble salads and fruits and cakes and beer.

"All we do is eat and sleep, eat and sleep," says Cha, folding his hands behind his head, laying back in the grass after stuffing himself. A happy face sticker smiles on his shirt.

Denis pulls out his hackysack and all sorts of people play, some experienced, but mostly beginners. The children love the game. One fellow even plays barefoot which seems a lot harder than with shoes.

I notice some people worried and overhear them talking about someone's head and rocks and blood. Grabbing Cha, we follow a lady out to a beach near the community dock where a fellow had slipped off a rock and landed several feet below on his head. Cha, with his recent E.M.T. training, and between us having patched many heads from our winter ski patrol jobs, bandage up the fellow and send him off to San Juan Island for stitches. We return to the party.

Clouds keep moving in. The wind blows stronger, blowing the streamers on the May Pole so high that nobody can reach them. Many people begin leaving, afraid the channel crossing to Roche Harbor could get too rough.

Finally we stand on each other's shoulders and pull the streamers away from the wind, handing them down to kids and parents and friends around the May Pole. Everybody energizes, running around the pole, each holding one streamer, half the folks running one way and the rest countering that, weaving in and out of each other. The colors cross and wrap and mix until the streamers are snug tight against the pole and we tie them secure. Now everybody grabs the parachute and we run in circles, catching the strong wind, some kids just hanging on with their feet off the ground. On to our next play, we pick up the two inch diameter rope, a couple hundred feet long, and pull and pull in a ferocious tug of war. Everybody laughs and radiates so much energy and we share smiles and twinkling eyes with one another. I hardly know anybody's names, nor their jobs, nor origins, but we share so much in this moment. What anybody did the day before or will do the next doesn't matter. We energize, all ages, together. I show a small group a game where six people join hands with any two people except the person on either side, then by stepping over heads, under legs, or whatever, we untangle ourselves to form the true circle, everyone holding hands with the persons next to them. One time, we end up with two interlocking circles of three people each.

More people leave with nightfall. About twelve of us remain for the beach fire. We munch some more food, mostly salad with some great mushrooms on it. A couple who had played at Cafe Harry's, Mark and Carroll, begin playing some soft music for us by the firelight, Mark on guitar and Carroll on an instrument like my recorder, only

skinnier, metal, and the notes higher. She calls it a tin whistle. Denis starts quietly picking up the beat with sticks on a log and soon more people do the same. The log jam picks up energy. Mark and Carroll put down their instruments and join in on the beat with sticks too. Suddenly, the tempo reaching higher levels, Cha jumps up, full of energy and starts singing "The Wild West Show." Of course we back him so he won't lose energy to feeling foolish, and with Deano, Denis and I singing too, Cha becomes more excited. After the first verse, he points at me first. I'm on the spot.

I chant, "And here we are tonight, folks, members of the Fuh-chowwy tribe, the fierce natives who run barefoot in the sun all day." The crowd helps my story along with "OOOooohh's" and "Aahhh's." "But the Fuh-chowwy tribe has the problem of being only three wands high." "Aawww," responds the crowd. "And the grass in the field is four wands high." "Ooohh." "And when we run through the field we can be heard yelling, 'We're the Fuh-chowwy, we're the fuh-chowwy, where the fuh-chowwy?'"

Cha screams and kicks his feet in the air and dances on the driftwood and starts the chorus again, "Oh, we're going to the wild west show-oh-oh, the animals and the kangaroos. No matter what the weather, we'll always be together..."

Cha moves through the crowd for several verses, putting everybody on the spot to say something or nothing, as they choose. And so on.

After a moment of silence, I pick up my recorder and Carroll picks up her tin whistle. She plays so well and notices that no way can I coordinate to her music, so she starts playing a group of notes at a time and I try to repeat the sequence. I watch her fingers work the instrument the way a spider's legs work a web. I stare until my eyes flush with water in the firelight and smoke.

People focus on the fire. Deano starts to chant the OM.

Om.

Aaaahhhooommmmm.

Aaaahhhooommmmm.

Around the fire we chant together. We melt and fuse into one entity, like ants do or the flock of birds turning in unison on Skagit Flats. Individual thoughts relax and group feeling takes over and I find it easy to merge as one atom in an organism.

We power together, fuse into one. Everybody focuses on the single note trailing the Om... the mmmmmmmmmmm.

I have no idea how long we join together souls. I know time passes. It always has before, hasn't it?

As the circle settles into silence, I break the silence with the obvious thing to say after mutual orgasm, "Ah, give me a cigarette."

"Yah," yells the tall red haired man named Mac. He is the Stuart Island school teacher. "Cigarettes on the house for that orgasm." I'm glad someone in the circle caught my humor, though I doubt anyone even smokes cigarettes that is present.

Mac grabs his chin, standing straight up in front of the circle, and points valiantly to the southern sky. He quotes some scene, maybe something like from Mutiny on the Bounty.

I roll with laughter, tears in my eyes, and others giggle. Mac shares craziness with us which makes me feel at home and comfortable to be silly also.

Insanity feedbacks.

Then Mac puts the question to the crowd, "Okay, Folks, this is tonight's big bonus question. One answer, please. What is the meaning of Life?"

Nobody answers until the girl who welcomed us the first day singing from her rowboat, answers "It's... forty-two!"

This pleases the circle and we all decide we can save the world with the solution. "Here's to forty-two," somebody offers.

"Fortitude," I say.

We start singing, "Hey ho nobody home, eat no, drink no, money have we none, but still we will be merr-er-er-er-errry."

I hear a different version somewhere in the circle at the same time, "...eat some, drink some, money have we some, but still we will be merr-er-er-er-errry."

As we finish singing the song, the girl who had introduced forty-two returns from the Spring Cove beach, hair hanging wet, her clothes clinging to her. She carries her underwear.

"Now we're getting down to it," I comment, the only sound from the circle.

"Down to what?" asks Mac, stimulating more spontaneity.

"To It. That which lies under, of course. Underwear," I answer.

"That's it," Mac screams with profound reality.

"What's it, Mac?" I ask.

"Underwear. That's the true meaning of life," he says.

"Yah," the crowd approves.

The crowd falls back into silence. I start to feel as if I had been at the fire circle for a long, long time. It seems almost as if we sit in a time and space capsule, including the fire and everything its light engulfs; the people, the wood, part of the picnic table and part of the tree trunk. "Okay, folks," I relate out loud, "We are now on a beach in Mexico, down near Playa Azul, and we picked coconuts and limes from the edge of the jungle today. Look out for that scorpion." I point at a beetle.

"Pass me a mango, will you, Pancho. And man, fill the margueritas again, will you," says Mac, already aware of our space-time capsule.

"Si, Senior. And manana we surf and play all day," I say.

"Uh,uh," says Mac. "We're going again, here we go..." He squats low in an alert stance, arms out and his head looking around in all directions. "I think we're in Guatemala. Look out, an earthquake."

I scream a shriek, "Aaaaahhh."

The singing rowboat lady with wet hair says, "Oh, we're in Tibet, and there's a Panda." She points at Cha.

We travel to Hawaii, to a luau, and to New York for a cocktail, and to Australia.

People now start thinking of bed, of sleep. Mark and Carroll walk off, bidding goodnight, and I wonder if our craziness crowded any of their plans for a night of music. I drop the thought, figuring if they wanted to play more, they would have. The locals wander off to their homes in the dark, stormy night. Two women, ready to wander off to the trees where their kids sleep and sleeping bags wait, warn us that if it rains they will bring all the kids to our tents. One of the ladies pulls Cha's happy face sticker off his shirt and says, "Nobody is happy all the time."

Cha says, everybody gone except us kayakers, "I'm off to bed too, I'm a dead player."

Denis complains of not feeling too well and I say, "What's the matter, got the fungus fun gas?" Denis and Cha climb the trail up to the tents.

Only Deano and I remain in the field. We begin to sing some impromptu blues, a song we make up as we sing about Harry Truman whose ass got ashed under Mt. St. Helens. We sing on for a long time, then Deano plays his flute softly.

I concentrate on the fire's burning embers, the heat and flame, the power of the universe. Standing, I walk from the heated nucleus, out of the fire's circle of light for the first time all evening. I feel, as I walk up to a tree in the dark and place both open hands on the bark, the tree's presence powerful in my hands, as if the fire light circle sheltered me all night from the world outside that ring. I feel almost as I had felt sitting in the empty room prior to the April second departure when the wind blew and the creatures wandered, with me walled away from their touch. I have never before considered light as being a confining atmosphere. The fire obscured my senses with its soothing warmth and glow, a security almost too addicting.

I wander down the trail towards the beach, sharing paths with the water trickling down with me, the water which brought Spring Cove its name. Through the dark in front of me I perceive white stripes, horizontal, stretching across my path. I just stand watching, concentrating on the stripes but totally unaware of what they actually are. I just allow them to be stripes, white, floating in space. I feel good not knowing what they could be. Maybe some things are just better left undefined.

For a long time I stand in the trail, focused, the darkness getting darker, the floating white stripes becoming lighter. Deano hops down the trail and I stop him, pointing out the white in space and ask him to watch them for awhile. But he keeps on walking and kicks the white. "Nice fence," he says, and jumps down to the beach.

The world falls back into perspective and I follow, touching the fence, sorry to lose that wonderful sense of ambiguity.

Tiny waves lap at the gravel and glitter, each speck glowing for a second or two. We splash the water with our hands. The phosphorescence explodes into aqueous galactic events, millions of starlets activating under water. We toss rocks for variety and watch the splashes dance in organic light.

"Have you ever been lonely?" I ask Deano.

"Yes. It's kind of nice," he says. "It's a different kind of pain."

"I have to go off by myself sometime," I say. "I don't think I've ever really been alone."

"I'm sometimes more lonely in a crowd of people," Deano says.

We walk up by the fire and proceed to clean the whole field, sorting the food and trash and toys and dishes, burning what we can.

Deano says, "You know, Mark, I've only been out with you guys a few days and I hope my life hasn't changed too much already. This is really living. I've been so aware of the weather and what I really need to survive."

"That doesn't sound like a problem."

"Yah, but when I go back home with Pam I'll just think about you guys still out here playing on the islands. I don't know, Mark. Pam and I have it really good out there, living on the river and all. I'm just really searching hard."

"Does it seem like this is the life you are searching for?" I ask, throwing trash on the fire, the flames blazing higher.

"I don't know. I think I lack the self discipline. My wife and my house are maintenance and I do well, but I want a goal or something to work for."

"I don't know either, Deano. At least when times are tough, we can remember back to the fun we had today. Maybe to attain this comfort, this happiness all the time, or at least a good portion of the time, maybe that can be a goal in itself."

"I don't know," says Deano. Rain starts to drizzle a little and Deano suggests, "Let's go check on those ladies and their kids to see if they're fine."

The wind howls one of its better gusts. Rain slams us. We don't know it, but Denis is still awake, above on the cliff, photographing his tent bowing sideways.

Deano and I walk into the woods to the family camp, our arms around each other. We chant, "Where do we go, how do we know? Where do we go? How do we know where do we go?."

The families lie happily suffering and desire no assistance. Back on The Hill Deano's tent blows out of its staked position. After reinserting it, we nod off to sleep, each in our own life support unit.

May 2, 1981

I leave the others asleep and walk to the community dock to explore. The people already bustle around, pancake smells wafting from the boats. They have a hot tub built into the maintenance shop and a couple soak in it. Piles of usable junk, old wheels, machines and tractors are scattered about. A fellow drives away in an old pickup, followed by two kids on a three-wheel motorcycle. I follow trails further around the island, but after several No Trespassing signs, I turn back towards camp.

We ski some morning runs down The Hill, then Denis and Cha take off for the school house. Deano and I walk around to the west side of the island for a hot bath. Mac sits in one of the homes facing towards Victoria, lumber in the yard, siding on the house only half finished. The black puppies see us and chase.

Traversing under hanging branches, over drift logs, we reach the bathtub and find a note from Mac and his wife, builders of the bath. The instructions say welcome, how to set up the tub and clean up. They left soap and towels too.

Deano gathers kindling and builds a fire under the metal bathtub. I bucket in spring water. Soon we soak in hot water, sitting on sticks so as not to burn our buns on the heating metal. The puppies become bored and trounce off. To wash, we soap on the rocks and dive in the ocean, then jump back in the tub. Ah.

We walk lazily around part of the island and return to camp, joining Cha and Denis for a rice dish and eagle watch. Two birds trick us. First we notice a bald eagle soar up The Hill towards us, scoot over our heads, then drop over the cliff into Spring Cove. But when we run up to see his flight down, a larger, golden eagle returns, the bald now nowhere in sight. Below in the field the locals are gathering the goodies we cleaned up last night. The golden eagle soars over us, casting down his shadow on our group.

After a slow day, Cha and I embark on a night paddle into Reid Harbor to watch the phosphorescence glitter off our bows. Cha shines his flashlight close to the water, then turns it off, leaving the organisms much brighter. Quietly we slither our kayaks into the harbor, weaving among moored boats in front of the State Park. Frogs croak loudly, thousands of them. All of a sudden, on some silent cue, all the frogs quit their croaking,

like they too focus with one mind, rather than many. Cha and I float, watching the lights on boats, hearing people laugh and party. The frogs start and stop in unison several times.

From one of the boats, someone begins playing an instrument, sounding like a recorder. The notes echo across the bay with acoustical perfection, by my standards at least. I answer his tune with my recorder, then he answers mine. We take turns playing sequences, each attempting to copy the other's. After several tunes, Cha paddles over to a sailboat and I hear a lady exclaim, "Oh, look, someone on a log."

The night player now flutes "Row, row, row your boat..." which I try to play and goof up, so I paddle on over. The couple came from Vancouver and say that in all the years they have sailed and played music in the night, never before have they been answered. They tell us of the pod of killer whales they sailed with today near Roche Harbor. They also mention some islands north of Desolation Sound, along our summer route, called the Harmony Islands, that we definitely shouldn't miss.

Back in camp we check Cha's charts and find nothing by the name of Harmony Islands inside Vancouver Island. If the islands exist, we'll find them.

May 3, 1981

The rain falls and the wind blows from the southeast, the direction which usually brings wetness.

Gathering food, stoves and playing cards, this being the cards' first time out of storage, we walk down to the cabin by Spring Cove which has a porch and no inhabitants. We sit the day through, shuffling and dealing poker and gin and eating casseroles and hot sandwiches.

Cha says, "We eat and sleep and eat and sleep, that's all we do."

Deano says, "It is sure nice to not worry about what I put my hands in out here. It's all out here. Even shit isn't too bad."

"Yah, go sit under the John's Island goat's poop shoot for a pea soup shower and then report back on your findings," I joke him.

"Ah," Denis says, sitting back and watching the rain through his Vuarnet sunglasses, "Just another VD day."

"Vacation Dynamics," I say.

Cha leaves, saying "Goodnight, I'm going to bed."

"But it's only the afternoon," Deano says.

"All I do is eat and sleep and eat and sleep," says Cha.

Rain and wind continue the rest of the day. Oh well, as any Mexican would tell, chili today, hot tamale. Goodnight Juan, goodnight two. Sleep well Jose, you too Hose B.

May 4, 1981

Cha and I leave for the schoolhouse, Mac having invited us to sit in on a class. We agree with Deano and Denis to pack up later and meet them on Satellite Island, around the north side of Stuart. They want to visit folks today on John's Island.

The school has only eight students attending. The yard has an open shack with a play dough kingdom inside, with dragons and moats and castles. We enter the new all purpose building, the gymnasium. We learned earlier that the building had been funded

by San Juan County. On the walls hang the students' drawings of whales, trees, dragons and people. One child's story on the wall tells of seals being saved from the hunters and another story is of horseback riding in a sunny field. Nobody is in this big, one-room building with its hardwood floors and wood burning stove, except us. We had heard that people on San Juan Island complained that this building was just built to be a community club for the few families of Stuart Island. Funded and fun did, they did, they say.

Outside, we pass a four story tree fort and a tree swing and also a prefabricated metal swing set, which looks out of place. We wander over to the old school house, class in session. Mac talks to a student behind the teacher's desk. Together they work out the child's individual schedule, tuned to his grade and speed. Seven students sit quietly as Mac introduces us and has us tell briefly of our kayak trip.

While the class resumes their studies, Cha and I explore the room, talking to the kids. John, the oldest, a hackysack player from the May Fest, had stepped on a nail and now sits noisily in the corner with his foot on the desk. Mac gives an oral spelling quiz to Jake, the youngest student. Holly, the only girl in the school, shows me pictures of horses she likes and she reads some of their statistics to me. Above her on the wall a sign reads; "Security is what you know, not what you have. By Holly." Seb, another student, corrects Holly's spelling test. Students here cooperate, everyone a student and teacher. They call Mac by his first name.

Two kids giggle in the corner and yell over to John who groans in another corner. "Hey, why don't you put cocaine on that cut? That will make it numb."

Several maps hang on the walls, drawn by students, along with a chart of marine mammals of the Western hemisphere. A poster reads, "Dental Disease is Optional." Another poster reads, "Jean Piaget 1896-1980, after 60 years of pioneering studies on the development of intelligence in children concluded that: 1) Motivation and rewards are not necessary--the structure in the child's mind lead to a kind of spontaneous development. 2) The teacher plays a limited role. For Piaget, the Child is the Real Educator, not the Teacher." Another sign reads, "Error is just as important condition of Life as Truth. Carl G. Jung."

For lunch we walk to the lighthouse on Turn Point, the north tip of Stuart Island. John rides the three wheel motorcycle because of his foot. The sun is high and warm, the north winds having cleared away the clouds.

During the walk the kids talk of wanting to move to the city to ride skateboards, see movies and play in penny arcades. Mac mentions that most of the locals desire to live self contained island lives and avoid the city as much as possible. I mention that the kids might have to get away before they can appreciate what they have. Mac tells me thirty-five to thirty-eight people live on Stuart. We ask about the loud and smelly generator house next to the big home on the west side. Mac says, "One lawyer from the east built that to supply energy to his home. He intimidated the locals and bypassed local beach rules."

After passing several No Trespassing signs we arrive at the boarded up lighthouse. A tower emits loud beeps to passing ships and I get too close. My ears ring. The current rips in the water, churning and spinning. To the north sit the Canadian Gulf Islands which Mac claims gets ten inches less rain each year than the dry banana belt of the San Juans.

Bubber sits down to his bag of Cheetos and Weston gets threatened not to leave gum on a seat again. Everybody eats lunch. Mac asks if we brought a hackysack. "Sure." The group gathers and kicks the sack a bit until we all laugh so much we must quit. One of the kids found something funny and his uncontrolled giggles spread contagiously through everybody. It feels so good. Laughter has to be one of life's best therapies.

We bid adios to Mac and the kids who head back to school. Cha and I agree that we wish we had the chance when we were kids for Mac's kind of school. They were funded, and fun did, they did, and it seems a good way. How good? Way good.

Cha and I head back to Spring Cove Heights and pack up, the other guys already gone. I finish quickly and leave first, paddling around through John's Pass between Stuart and John's Islands. In Prevost Harbor of Stuart lies Satellite Island, owned by the Y.M.C.A.

I sit alone on a rock facing the State Park on Stuart, my legs crossed and eyes closed against the low western sun. A ripple, then a splash reaches my ears from the water below me. I open my eyes to see an otter walk out of the water dragging his tail which is as long as the rest of the body. He waddles on the gravel beach, sniffs, wags his whiskers, then lays down and peers about. I sit quietly, watching. Then, like a pet dog, he rolls in the gravel on his back and around to both sides. He plays solo. I whistle. He searches for the sound then gives up, continuing rolls for a few minutes. Jumping back in the water, he lays still and looks in my direction. He departs, diving under the water, leaving no path, only concentric circles. I look up and see the other three guys paddling towards my tent.

May 5, 1981

All morning I study a large bug pumping on the ceiling of my tent, six long legs and a body. I decide he's a mosquito eater. It arches and pops out a tail which looks more like a double stinger. I wonder if instead of it being a mosquito killer, could it be a killer mosquito? The pointed stingers give it the appearance of being mad. Now he just lets go and drops... into my sleeping bag. Where did it go? I find him, still moving, but semi-squished, so I pick up the creature and lay it outside to recover. He'll figure it out.

We paddle away from Satellite Island about noon with a mild north wind to our port side. Deano and I leave first, heading towards Waldron Island, a place where many of the May Festers came from. Sunny and warm, we paddle in only shorts. The water sits calm in places, but it turbulates and whirls in others. A Canadian freighter passes by a couple miles to the north and about ten minutes later the water begins to swell and roll from the wakes, much like rolling hills on the plains or sand dunes but with the hills moving towards us, then away. It seems like a dream of an earthquake, the earth's crust shifting and molding. The currents turned some of the swells so the waves reaching us cross each other, moving up and down in different directions. After several minutes of waves the water flattens again.

Deano spots porpoises, shorter than I am tall, rolling over the water. They swim in a group of about a half dozen, but our slow kayaks don't interest them. We paddle on, the drips sliding down the heads of our paddles, dropping back to the sea with each dip. I watch my stomach muscles roll with the repetitive strokes. I breathe deep and slow with

my diaphragm and watch my stomach bulge with inhalations. I feel my body in rhythmic action, like my heart pumping.

We land on Waldron's Fishery Point, a steep gravel and sand beach with several houses above the tide line. When the other boys arrive we decide to continue on to Sucia Island, another State Park six miles further, the same distance we just paddled.

Sucia, named from the Spanish word for "bad" or "dirty" because of the webs of reefs around the island. After a couple hour paddle we enter Fossil Bay to get water. We are joined by a couple of immature bald eagles and a blue heron. Sucia is famous for its rocks, with caverns, caves and overhangs. Huge boulder chunks lay in the water like at Spring Cove. We are told by a Sucia Park attendant that fossils can still be found in the bay. The sun now drops behind the island. We leave to find camp, paddling around to the N.E. tip of Sucia, by Ewing Island. The first beach we pick turns out to be in front of a swamp with too many mosquitoes, so we park on a rock, which only joins to the main island at low tide. We squeeze the four tents on two tufts of grass. Mt. Baker looms behind, floating above the clouds. The top of the mountain glows red. We notice a few mice on the shore of Sucia, lining up for low tide so they can attack our food supplies. Seals surround our rock, popping their heads up to see what goes on.

Our tent pegs barely hang onto the rocky ground and we joke that if a good wind blows up we could be blown away. Such is. One rock on our islet appears as a frozen wave, curled over the water like a surfer's pipe dream. Grass grows on the top of the frozen wave. Light, we guess from Blaine, a U.S. border town, glows in the twilight from the N.E.

May 6, 1981

Rain falls hard this morning and I stay in my tent for a long time feeling food poisoned. Eventually I get myself up, go outside and jump rope in the rain, then I dive in the cold bay for refreshment. Cha and Deano motivate and build a community shelter from driftwood and the plastic tarp Cha carries for just such occasions. Atta boy, Cha.

We build a fire and stay under the rain shelter most of the day, reading books and joking. I read Lily's *Center of the Cyclone*. I mention to Deano I have a difficult time because of the man's messiah ego. Deano says he also has a messiah complex, a need to tell the world the way it is. I mention it seems to me that the way the world is, just is, and only an individual can interpret life for himself. "I like people to share their interpretations of the world with me, but its hard when a person presents his or her ideas as the only way. I guess I'm just a goober and how am I to know, but to me life isn't just a board game like Parker Brother's made it, all focused on job, family and security. But it is like a board game in that it is laid out in front of us and we just have to play it. Some people, I think, find it a bored game, and feel cheated and they want to be re-funned."

In the evening, we paddle into Echo Bay and board the Gunner's Moon, owned by a baby doctor and a real estate saleslady from Kirkland. They treat us as their own kids, feed us and give us beers. They don't drink beers but only keep them on board for guests like us. Les and Dolly ventured out for a vacation and found Echo Bay to hold up in for awhile. Les, the baby doctor, mentions he thinks some people think one way, others another, and they may not agree, but they each have their own reason. He mentions this

because he bought the boat with the name already on it, which he doesn't really care for, but he's not about to risk the bad luck of changing it.

After we consume all their beers and chips, we bid goodnight and paddle off into the dark. I pull out my recorder and discover the reason for the place to be named Echo Bay. I play for a long while before following the other guys back to camp. The music returns to me.

May 7, 1981

As we pack I can't find my squeeze tube of butter. I figure I left it on a log outside my tent. The ravens must have scored. All the gear stowed, we climb in our boats and float in the bay. I watch towards the mosquito swamp and notice many ravens squawking and scrambling over something, then the victor emerges, flying away with the prize in his black beak: my tube of butter.

The water lies without a ripple for the crossing from Sucia to Orcas, but the current still moves the water quite a bit, in our favor. I glance back to Matia Island, just a mound of rock and trees in the water. The current rips between Matia and Sucia.

We paddle to Doughty Point next to the Y.M.C.A. Camp Orkilla. After setting tents, except for Deano's, and stashing our gear, we paddle to the "Y" camp. The director gives us permission to shower. We proceed to use all the camp's hot water. Oops.

Deano calls Pam and we wait for him. He talks to his wife for over an hour. We talk to the campers and when Deano finally gets off the phone he thinks we've already left for town, so he does. After searching the camp for the love lost lad, Cha, Denis and I figure the space cat must have already left for town, so we do the same.

We find Deano in Eastsound. He's already met a fellow who will drive his loaded kayak to the ferry dock on the far side of Orcas. The fellow is a local singer, named Rod Stone. He drives Deano and me back to camp. I send Rod out in my kayak while Deano and I talk.

"When you guys return to Seattle in September you'll have to be retrained all over again on how to use a toilet," says Deano as he urinates on Rod Stone's tire. "It's kinda easy just to turn around and use a bush or go in the ocean all the time." Deano and I hug goodbye, his two week visit having passed quickly. "I gotta' get back to Pammy," he says. "When I left I said I'd only be gone a week."

"I told her you would be two, Deano."

Rod Stone returns, excited from his paddle, and says, "Lying in a kayak is the closest thing to being a seal." I tell him to write a song about that.

Deano leaves his paddle with me, which Cha, Denis and I had decided we'd need for insurance up north. "I'll send my brother seventy-five bucks for it tomorrow."

Deano says, "Catch ya. VD." He holds up a "V" with the index and middle fingers of his right hand, and looping his index finger and thumb of his left hand, joins the two, giving me the VD sign. I return it. Vacation Dynamics.

"Adios, amigo," I say.

Near our kayaks, by the water's edge, I find Denis and Cha talking with the counselors from the elementary school nature camp. Cha's hand lies in the lap of a cute high school senior from Mt. Vernon. When Denis and I paddle away in the dark, we leave Cha in the midst of a true romance, a heating love affair.

In our boats, slicing through the phosphorescent night, Denis and I talk skiing, one of our most common conversations. He says, "What a sport. I savor every turn. I love to energize the skis into long radius turns. It's so nice to see someone stable and comfortable on their boards. So relaxed, like sitting in a chair. Learning to ski well is learning to live well."

"Yep," I comment, Denis having sent me off down a steep slope over new snow, turning and banking where the terrain demands, playing the gravity game. "Kayaking is a gravity game too. When we ride the currents or surf down a wave. And kayaking is as relaxed a sport, but I bet we will see some radical days too."

"I bet we will," Denis says, his silhouette looking my way.

We climb a loose dirt cliff up to our tents and ritualize some herb stock for the occasion. Cha returns home soon.

"I think I'm in love," he says.

May 8, 1981

Denis and I leave early for island cruising, heading to town for food and post office and bookstore. As we depart from Cha, Denise, his love, strolls up with a couple of her girl friends. We send them to Cha's tent and bid goodbye, paddling away to Camp Orkilla to leave our boats.

We shop, buying cheese, vegetables and fruit. I'm a freak for mixing cottage cheese with Grape-nuts and grapefruit. In the cereal aisle, on my Grapenuts quest, I pass up life; Life in a box. And the box says Life is nutritional, too, made from grains and lots of sugar. In the magazine aisle, next to the cap guns and bubble blowers, I find more life; the magazine. How simple. Next to Life, on the inside of an Island Sounder newspaper, I find a picture of us four goofy guys and our toy boats ready to paddle into six foot chop waves. "The Call of the Wild." Uh huh, yup sirree, mmm hmm.

We lug our groceries outside, into the sunshine and find ourselves a cute little ivy patch to sit in and eat and drink beers and laugh at ourselves for sitting in an ivy patch.

"It's so nice to get all excited over just food," says Denis.

"Shore is, yup sirree," I say.

We wander into the bookstore for a star book and a bird book and *The Little Prince*. We meet the lady behind the counter. "You boys look like you've been in the sun," she says. We tell briefly of our trip and she says, "Oh, my daughter and son-in-law just left in their rowing dory. They're heading up to Glacier Bay, north of Ketchikan."

Both Denis and I respond simultaneously, "Really?" Denis says, "That would be something if we ran into them on the way down from Alaska." We buy our books and head back towards Camp Orkilla, knapsacks and arms loaded with goodies.

After hitching awhile with no luck, we just keep walking, the total distance to camp only about three miles. We stop by the road under the shade of a big cedar tree, laughing and sucking down beers. A boy on a bicycle peddles down the lane a long distance off. We watch as he peddles full speed, bent down in a horse jockey position, over the handlebars, teeth to the wind and pumping like mad. The boy gets his rhythm up, gains speed, then takes a break, standing up straight and just gliding, the wind hitting his body full force. As he nears us Denis shouts, "More aero-dynamic." The kid pumps in the

jockey position then stands up straight, again in his wind block position. "More aerodynamic," says Denis, the boy now next to us.

He stops his bike and asks, "What?" I'm laughing.

"Be more aero-dynamic. When you're coasting you let the wind slam your whole body. Stay bent over streamline like when you peddle."

"What?" he asks again. I laugh harder still, and sip my beer when I think I can do it without it squirting out my nose.

Denis says, too quiet for the kid to hear, "Tweet tweet, blah blah, kiddo. We got VD."

Back in camp, the elementary kids load on their bus to go home. One boy runs up to us and says, "Hey, we caught twenty fish this morning."

"Rock cod?" I ask.

"Yes, and he caught a twenty pound salmon, just off Freeman Island out there." The lad points to a proud boy, about nine years old who leans against the bus.

"So you guys heard about me, yah?" the boy asks with an eastern gangster accent. "I caught the Big One." He spits on the ground. Kids on the bus call him. "Hang on," he yells with the gangland boss authority, "I'm talking with these guys." He looks us in the eyes, "I hooked the biggest and landed him. I had to show these kids how to fish, see?" The bus driver yells that they'll miss the ferry.

"Well, I'll catch ya again, fellahs," the fisher boy says.

We wave goodbye then go fish out front of camp for awhile, off Freeman Island all the way to Doughty Point... without a single bite.

We slide into camp. I say to Denis, "Twenty pounds?"

We both shrug our shoulders. At camp Cha sits on his blanket writing in his journal. Denis shows us a greeting card he bought at the bookstore. A mouse is drawn with a silly grin on his face, drinking champagne in his tuxedo. I laugh because the picture is a perfect image of Denis.

Cha says, "We can call Denis 'Mouse' from now on."

"I don't think other people would understand," I say.

May 9, 1981

We three head off for town again, Cha needing groceries, Denis wanting to return to the bookstore. I want to wander aimlessly. We mail home the newspaper articles to folks and Deano. Cha runs into a chum he met in a business class at a community college, so by the time we all rendezvous, Cha and his buddy, Jeff, have already visited the liquor store for a bottle of tequila and a case of beer.

And off we fly, to some road somewhere in Jeff's car. We drive along a row of trees on a paved hill, sun shining hot, and stop the car in the middle of the street... a choice spot. With shots of tequila and beer, the hackysack flying, we dance in the road, wearing costumes of swim masks and Vuarnet sunglasses. More tequila and we tell bullshit stories and wear our shorts over our heads. I lay back on the hot pavement and stare at the blue sky and moan, "I've got Mexico dreams; a hot beach, my surf board, a coconut, papaya..."

Denis says, "Ha, some guy. Here we are in the middle of a vacation and some guy is homesick for Deja Vu Beach." We all hammer rock, paper and scissors to see who

wins the last shot of tequila. Cha and I get our scissors smashed by Jeff's and Denis' rocks. Then Denis goes against Jeff, two out of three, winner drinks. Rock smashes scissors, Denis wins. Rock covered by paper, one for Jeff. Scissors cuts paper. Denis shoots the final tequila of the fifth.

"Whoaaa," says Cha, draining the last beer. "Everything is going whoops. Is there an earthquake, whoooooa..." He hiccups, slides down, and says, "He's out."

Jeff invites us to his house on the water. On the way he stops in Eastsound for more beers; a half rack of Rainier and a six pack of Lowenbrau Darks."

"Whoaaa," yells Cha as we drive, his head hanging out the window in the breeze. I sit in the back seat behind him and all of a sudden he spazzes, jerks, and sprays my window with banana and cottage cheese. I quickly roll the window up the rest of the way and yell, "Watch out, he's blowing chunks."

"Some guy," laughs Denis.

I have no idea where Jeff drives us, and I don't even care, which I usually do when the driver has been drinking. But a swig or ten, and what the hell? Eh?

We pull into the driveway of a double trailer house looking down on the bay of Eastsound. A man and woman walk from the garden up to the car. I can barely see them through the wonderful designs Cha artistically spewed on my window. "You live with your folks, Jeff?" I ask, shocked, embarrassed, and wishing I could be back at my tent.

"Yah," he says, getting out of the two door car. I slide out the driver's side as I don't want to dissolve touching Cha's mess.

Jeff unzips his pants, and facing his folks, begins to pee on the flowers. I look back at Cha who hangs out the window over his salad mush door design.

"Jeff," his mother screeches. "Husband, look at your son. Does he have to do that there?" The family squeezes into a heated discussion about food and cars and booze and work. I close down my hearing and help Cha from the car, walking him down towards the water. At the hose I rinse him off and make him drink some good snowflake juice.

Jeff's mom gives me permission to take Cha inside to the bathroom where I strip him down and throw him in a warm tub. He mumbles, "Thanks, Mark, for taking care of me. I feel really dumb." He talks slow and fluid like a sleepy child. "I bet Jeff's folks think I'm the worst."

"No, they understand, Cha, they've got kids and probably have been there too. We all have."

"I just drank that tequila too fast." I throw him a rubber duck and he plays with it.

In the kitchen, the folks ask me how he is. "He's just mostly embarrassed."

The mom says, "Oh, he shouldn't worry about it. Does he want to eat?"

"Maybe when he's out of the tub, but I bet he'll want to sleep." I go back and force Cha to drink a half dozen glasses of water.

Jeff cooks us steaks and potatoes while his father rummages through the local paper. "Look," he says to his wife, "I knew these guys looked familiar." They read "The Call of the Wild" article in the Island Sounder.

The mom picks up her phone and calls a friend, mentioning she has us in her house. Now I feel accepted. She joins Jeff behind the stove and they grumble at each other, then Jeff play-karates his mother, kicking and growling like a cat.

After eating, Jeff goes to bed. We put Cha to bed also, but daylight still shines so Denis and I sit up with the folks finishing up the beer Jeff bought. Jeff's mother drinks some red wine. We talk about their family business and Jeff's girl friend.

After dark the dad finally says, "Let's go to bed, dear." But she says she isn't ready. Ten minutes later, as Denis and I talk with the mother, father mentions bed again. "I'm not ready," she says. After a half hour and another request, he gives up and goes to bed.

Connie Stevens sings on the stereo. Jeff's mom talks with us, "So my husband and Jeff and I moved out here from the city to make a more relaxed life, grow our own foods and try the self contained life. The kids don't need us any more. We let the kids go and now us folks can make a life of our own."

Denis and I drink the beer and cheer to her, Mother's Day only an hour away. She plays a Michael Murphy song, "Success in Survival." She says, "I feel attached to this song, especially on Mom's Day. First, last, and forever, I am my kids' mother and I don't regret anything I've done... only things I haven't done. Things I've always believed in, my realities, those are my rock; ME. And I can't change that rock, really. Only somewhat. I'm a business woman now, I'm getting my real estate license and I'm going to work. I can do that now that the kids are raised."

I put on Tchaikovsky's William Tell Overture. She continues, "I want to work now. Our money worries aren't really problems, ever, they're just momentary huffs, not real pain at all. The kids are raised now."

"He sure is," I say as Jeff walks out in his cotton pajama bottoms, rubbing his eyes. The clock reads two a.m.

"What are you doing to my Mom?" he asks.

Denis' and my beer bottles scatter the table. Denis has the Grateful Dead playing on the stereo. Cha now walks into the room in just his swim shorts. "Morning," he says, with a child's awakening smile. "Ooooh, I did it..."

Jeff's mom cooks him a big bacon and egg breakfast and then she goes to bed. I oodle over the meal, starved myself now, but Cha needs the food as medicine. Denis picks up a bottle of tequila Jeff has out on the counter. "Are you guys still at it?" Jeff asks, shaking the sleep from his brain.

Denis and I each take a swig on the bottle. Cha and Jeff each turn it down. We drink some more and put on our sunglasses. I eat a Ritz cracker off the table, chew it into a wad, drink more tequila, then stick the cracker wad on my sunglass lens. Denis takes a fresh cracker and sticks it over the mush on my eye, and puts the tequila to his own right eye. He takes an optical swig. I remove the cracker and dip from my eyepiece and eat it, then chase the food with tequila. Denis says, "Too bad we don't have any Twinkies." He stares me straight in the eye, his glasses now off showing his tequila shot eye all red. He looks as serious as I'd ever seen him. He says, "You know, I'd like to set a *Guinness Book* world's record for sitting in a box for days, or weeks, only eating Hostess Twinkies and drinking water. I'd set a record, and stay healthy too. Mom says on T.V. that they're so fresh and nutritious and..." He stares at me, bending forward. I lose his words as I fall to the floor laughing.

"Will you guys be quiet, my folks are sleeping, you fools," says Jeff. He and Cha shake their heads in disbelief.

The last I see Denis this night he's lying on his back plugged into the stereo with headphones. He wears his Vuarnets and the bottle of tequila rests in his armpit. Cha and Jeff have already gone to bed again and the sky lightens with morning. Denis' toes bounce a rhythm.

May 10, 1981

"You guys want coffee?" Jeff's father asks.

I lift my head slowly and look around at the blurred and spinning room. "Sure," I hear Denis say. He still lies in his same spot, next to the stereo, the Vuarnets and headphones next to his head.

"I'll have some too, I guess," I say, noticing a clock on the wall reading 7:30. I groan and lay back.

"Coffee's ready," he says from the kitchen. We drag ourselves up to suck on some low octane mud.

Soon everybody gathers in the kitchen, Jeff making pancakes. "Happy Mother's Day, Mom," I say.

"Did you boys call your Moms yet?" she asks.

We each call home. My mom says it sounds like I have a cold, but I tell her I am just leftover.

During breakfast, Jeff's dad says something which catches me off guard. He warns that if I write anything in my book about his family that he doesn't like, he'll be sure to sue me.

About nine o'clock Jeff hands us each a beer from his porch stash. We sit outside in the sun watching over Eastsound, trying to absorb fresh air.

Carrying towels, we step down the rocks to Jeff's little beach. Making sure his mom isn't watching, I strip off my shorts and say, "I told my mom on the phone that I'd go swimming and experience my birth again for a Mother's Day present. Maybe I can discover something that I've forgotten over the years. As a kid, my folks would always tell me to go to my womb."

I dive under water and swim three strokes, eyes open. Curling into a fetal position, my knees to my chest, I just hold still, trying to feel the warmth and security of a womb. I can feel my heartbeat as I bob in the salt water, holding my breath, trying to forget everything about the world outside my body, trying to maybe recapture memories of sensations from the womb, before I learned to put thoughts into words.

"Aaahhh," I come running out of the water, the cold finally seeping through. My breath needs replacement.

Cha swims then we all lay in the sun, our heads propped on a log. "Wrap your towels, you guys, here comes my mom." We cover up our personal parts that no mother could ever recognize anyways.

"Hey," I say with new insight. "We could make VD towels with Velcro, the leisure product. A strip on the top corner of each side, then we can wrap on the towel and it would stay. We could lie on any beach naked and when somebody comes along, we just flop the towel over and wa wa, we are properly dressed."

"Yah," says Denis, motivated with the idea. "Then we could go to parties with our VD towels on and everybody would want one and..."

Jeff interrupts, "What's this VD that you guys get so excited over?"

"Vacation Dynamics", says Cha.

"It's nothing," I say.

"We're doing it right now," says Denis, naked again since mom left, his head propped against the log in total relax position number 56133.

"This is the VD signal," I say, making the "V" with my right hand and joining the "D" with my left.

"What do I have to do to join?" asks Jeff.

"Nothing," says Denis.

Cha notices a fish carcass on the beach and an eagle overhead. He lays the fish in an open graveled area to try to draw the big bird into a photograph.

I burst out laughing. "What's so funny?" asks Jeff.

"Oh, I just flashed back on last night; Denis pouring tequila in his eye and saying he would set a world record for duration Twinkie eating in a sealed box."

We laugh about a few of the other crazies of the day before. "What I can't believe," says Denis, "is that the whole time we partied in that street, not one car or person passed."

"I bet somebody has already set the Twinkie in a box record, Denis. It's probably something like forty days or something," I say.

Denis pours a little beer on a tiny crab. "Now this guy is going to go tell all his crab buddies about the great intoxication he got, about the buzz that a human poured on him, and all his crab buddies will think him insane."

We all look down at the crab who arms his pinchers in the air and blows bubbles. "I have a friend who claims humans are just complicated bubbles," I say.

Jeff says, "Wait till I tell my girlfriend that I got VD this weekend. I can see her expression now. Then I'll tell her, 'No, babe, it's nothing.' She once told me that dogs have life the best. She wished she was a dog just so she could lie around and eat and play and be petted and brushed all the time."

"Ah, the essence of Dog Style," I say.

Cha says, "All animals do it easy. And kids do too until they're told they can't."

"VD isn't new. It's an old game with a new name," I say.

"Where did you guys pick up on VD, anyways?" asks Jeff, walking back from his beach stash with more beers.

"Once in Hussong's Cantina, in Ensenada, Mexico," I say. "From a couple named Steve and Sally from Santa Barbara. Steve ran a building service called 'When the Surf's Not Up Construction Company'. Well, after so many tequilas, we went to the beach cabin, the sun castle at La Mision, and drew up the constitution for VD."

"What did it say?" asks Cha.

"Nothing," I say. "I later looked up Vacation Dynamics in a couple of dictionaries and vacation comes from Latin vacatio, meaning freedom or release from occupation. The original verb, vacare, means to be empty, be free, the same root as for vacuum. And dynamics comes from the Greek word for power and 'to be able to'. Vacuum Power. Power of Emptiness; to be able to be free. The etymology for empty means rest and leisure." I feel like I am talking to myself, the others now faded into the sand.

But I continue, "Vacation Dynamics is helped by such statements of appreciation as 'full on bonus'."

"Right on," says Jeff.

"Right on' will do," I say, fading out myself, due to the lack of sleep and excess booze. A sea gull comments, "Guhgghuhahh," but I think maybe he only talks to the drunk crab.

As I melt into the sand, squinting over the glittering water at the hazy hills in the distance, I feel all my senses fade into the landscape. I don't move, I don't sleep, I do nothing. Hours pass this way. I'm aware of the clouds and the light blue to dark green hills. The views of far away are a painting, a backdrop for the steam-like clouds. The blue sky above the steam seems very real though.

Eventually Jeff drives us back to Camp Orkilla, twenty-four hours after meeting him, a twenty-four hour derelict sidetrack. I think it's called a binge.

We each sit in our own tents. I am surrounded by new foods, new candles, and new books. I'm glad I am limited by the size of my kayak so I can't collect too much junk. I am a born and raised American, with my built-in idea of when seeing something I like, thinking, "I like that, I want one."

I watch out my tent door over the cliff at an otter, I assume a river otter, because the locals said that sea otters are about extinct from fur hunters. The otter rolls, swims, and eats below. A big sign behind Cha's tent points out that Doughty Point attracts fish, otters, seals, porpoise, and whales, due to the current's trapping of marine organisms. I'm glad I'm not a trapped organism.

"Taste treat, taste treat," I hear outside my tent, Denis playing bird. "Taste treat." A hand with a quarter of a cantaloupe appears in my tent.

"What a deal!"

Cha and I go for a walk to the end of Doughty Point for the first time, feeling like we've missed a lot by heading to town everyday on Orcas. Under fast moving black clouds, the sun sets red and awesome over Vancouver Island. To the north we see the ski area, the line of lights running up Grouse Mountain above the city of Vancouver. Lightning bolts over the city. Under a waxing half moon, we duck into a cave and decide we could modify the cave into a nice home, about the size of one of our tents. We discuss tent modifications, like clothes lines inside and rain flaps so we could keep our doors open in the rain and still see the world go by.

Jupiter and Saturn shine above. Cha says, "What a beautiful place." He sits wedged between two rocks, supported by his back and his feet. "You know, I think my mom is finally accepting this lifestyle. She sent me an article about Professional Ski Patrol, that we are accepted as having careers. I don't know what else I would do if I couldn't ski and kayak and live outdoors. I do want to go back to school, though."

I say, also wedged between rocks in this cave, "I'm glad I graduated from college. It took me seven years, but what I learned most was how much I don't know."

A sea gull banks up the cliff on his cushion of air, reminding us of skiing. I ski for that same feel, the controlled speed of gravity, banking turns, to feel in control. I say, "I scare easy in cars when someone driving is feeling that speed and control, especially if they don't ski and understand how easy it is to fall."

"Cars scare me, too," says Cha. "I'm afraid of the other guy. Same on skis."

I add, "Especially doing avalanche control. If the partner skis in on top of us he can cut off a slab. And that's an avalanche. Everything below his skis goes."

We walk back in the dark to our tents. As I sit in mine, Denis visits with his latest sketch: the VD logo, designed on the face of a compass with an arrow pointing up, labeled "N".

I ask, "North to nothing? 'N' for nowhere, or navel? Nothing is north of the north pole."

"Tomorrow we paddle," Denis says. I sit back and think about just three of us again. The number is nice, for variety. Solo, or dual, or trio paddling. Solo is important. Cha and I, having lived on the lake together for six months prior to this trip, tend to disagree with each other quite often. We perpetuate a tension between us that I find only separation helps. I feel like he negates my ideas too often, rejects their validity without a fair trial. I think he feels about the same. Such is.

A slug tries to slime over the threshold into my tent. "No way, spaceman, I'm no specimen tonight." I feel so relaxed. What a Sunday. Seems like a day of rest to worship life is so important. I wonder if everybody returned to at least one day of rest a week if the world's mood would change. Maybe less stress, fewer crimes, less ulcers? Could the whole planet slow down to focus on beauty instead of hate and money and war? Or is there a drive inside to go on and on. Maybe warring is a natural response to an overall plan. Maybe our weapon technology is leading us somewhere. Are we just like antibodies building strength in the body of planets and stars? And learning to fight with the power of stars? Maybe other beings will present themselves as germs to us, and earth will no longer fight it's civil wars. Maybe we are just reacting like the natural responses in our own human bodies, building immunities against germs from outer space. Earthly civil wars may become obsolete.

"Watch out, you intergalactic slug. Maybe not. Are you a space slug only here for a good slime? How good? Way good?"

I don't know any of this, but I can't eliminate the possibilities. I know too little. Things are changing so fast that change is almost constant. That's almost like no change.

I sit in this tent on this waterfront property, fresh fruit surrounding me, nobody demanding anything of me. No serious depression or war. I can search for my own needs, and feel my way. This is paradise. It was never lost, like Milton told us. Life is a vacation. Freedom. Milton's Adam and Eve gained paradise, it seems to me, after their so-called "fall" from grace. They gained the ability to question, to strive for knowledge and understanding. How does the apple grow? Why does the sun go down? Without the ability to grow as the universe grew, Adam and Eve would have stagnated enough to grow mosquito larva. In Milton's paradise, the fruit trees grew plenty of food and Adam and Eve would daily go to prune the trees. The trees just grew back. They just pruned for something to do. They didn't ask why. Now we ask why. I like the question, "Why not?"

Why not play like the animals do naturally after the basic needs are met? Play must be a need. The universe may not have any grand scheme, but if it does we will follow it no matter what we do. Maybe those people with ulcers and stress are the chosen few to lead the grinding gears of civilization. Maybe not. Why not follow my heart's desire, to feel life, the breezes and trees and goatshit?

I lay back and watch Jupiter and focus on one of its orbitals. Did the slug come from there? I watch stars and hear splashes of water, and an occasional sea gull cry, but all else is silent. Do I hear music? Swing? I concentrate on it and the sound vanishes, but it returns when I empty my focus. Then jazz. And some classical. Then the blues.

Through the tents, I ask Denis if he hears what I do. He reports nothing except a wish that he could tune in too.

I continue to receive my audio hallucinations and begin to conduct the musical selections.

A few drops of rain fall, so I zip up. The zipper I fixed earlier with needle and thread works like new.

I recall Jimmy Buffet's song, "Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes," especially the line which reminds me of Jeff and the bottle of tequila. "I ran into a chum with a bottle of rum and wound up drinking all night." Only the bottle has changed to protect the guilty. My audio hallucinations continue the song for me, "If we couldn't laugh we would all go insane, if we weren't all crazy we would just go insane..."

I think Jimmy Buffet understands VD.

Tomorrow, bye bye to the U.S.

Goodnight.

Chapter 5

"Three Minutes in a Kayak"

"The Truth Must Lie Somewhere There In Between" The Grateful Dead

May 11, 1981

An oyster catcher flies around the point from the north, cheeping repetitively like a sonar. From the south flies the bird's stereo counterpart. The two join in flight down the beach and perch on a rock, continuing their cheeps. From the north arrives a third oyster catcher, its orange beak joining cheeps with the first two. All three fly, spaced in a perfect triangle, over Doughty Point, north bound.

The sun welcomes us this morning, the water calm. We rise to pack our gear.

"I gotta get organized," yells Denis.

"Oregon eyes? Who's she?" I ask.

"Does she organ-ize?" asks Cha.

"I don't know," says Denis, "But I'll sure feel better when I'm organized."

We load the boats on the rocky beach and paddle in shorts northwest. As we slide past Point Hammond on Waldron Island, I notice Denis slip his bathing suit off. I do the same. The Canadian customs office lies in Bedwell Harbor within Pender Islands, our goal for the day.

Harbor porpoise pass us as we near Skipjack Island. They look like baby orca whales, black, with the white saddle on their backs. Nude, I sit back, a towel between my bottom and the fiberglass molded seat. I rest my feet on deck while paddling. The cockpits of our touring kayaks are comfortably large enough for leg movement. Skipjack is more a rock than an island. Two sailboats anchor, basking in the sun.

"Howdy," I say to them. "On the Border", a song by the Eagles, floats through my head.

Cha declares, "Hey, we're moving to Canada."

"Let's go find some waterfront there," I say. The sun blazes. We paddle towards the cleavage formed between two Pender Island hills, about two miles from us.

Stopping to float where we guess lies the invisible boundary between the two North American nations. We enjoy the hospitality of both.

"What's that noise?" asks Denis. We listen and hear a strange "...doot... doot... doot." The high pitch gets louder. To the west we notice what looks like a big buoy with white waves to either side.

"How could that be," I wonder aloud. "The current wouldn't move that fast."

"Maybe it's a sailboat. It must be moving fast," says Cha.

"That noise... that's weird," Denis says, pausing to think. "I know what it is... it's a submarine!"

"Oh, yah," Cha and I agree.

The vessel nears. The bridge sticks high out of the water, wings extending to the side. Soldiers point at us from their tower. On the sub's rear mounts a long cylindrical object with a propeller. It looks like a huge torpedo bomb, longer than our kayaks, at least six feet in diameter. Written on the black object is, "OSRV SIMULATOR U.S. NAVY."

The nose of the submarine plows under a smooth and clear three foot film of water which only bubbles white upon hitting the bridge. Smooth waves roll towards us, eight feet high. Never yet had we seen such a huge wake.

The uniformed men on the bridge wave continually. "I think they are as thrilled by us as we are by them," says Denis.

I say, "That is... seriously awesome. I'm about as shocked now as when I paddled with that gray whale. And they are so opposite in nature."

"No kidding," says Cha. "That thing must be moving twenty-five knots right now."

"I bet it's a nuke," says Denis. We sit still until the sub speeds out of sight.

Paddling on, sun burnt already, I tell Cha and Denis, "This water already feels different. I sure can tell this is Canada."

"Bull," says Cha. "This is no different. The water's the same."

"No, Cha. This is foreign water."

A huge box freighter powers by with a couple foot wake. Subaru is written on the side. I've been told Subaru means Pleiades in Japanese, the constellation of the seven sisters.

The dry hills and red clay in Bedwell Harbor make the land around the custom's office look like New Mexico. At the dock the customs man asks, "Where's your boat, eh?"

"We're in kayaks. One each."

"Kayaks, eh? Where did you row from," he asks, arranging three forms on his clipboard.

"Seattle."

"Seattle, eh. That's a long way. Really? In kayaks?"

He isn't the only one to doubt us. Above, at the cocktail lounge, we drink beer with some of the Penderite locals. They try to convince us that we have a sailboat stashed around the corner.

"Yep," I admit to them, since they'll only believe in the sailboat. "We just paddled around the point. Three minutes in a kayak. That's the truth of our trip."

After several Canadian brews we paddle into the heart of Bedwell Harbor and sneak through a forty foot passage under the bridge gapping North and South Pender Islands. We emerge into Shark Cove and paddle around into Port Browning. The owner of the Port Browning Bar and the surrounding property gives us permission to camp for the night.

I sit inside at the bar under a carved wooden eagle. A man tells me it is made from white cedar. The local also tells me of the submarine. He is round and jolly, burly with a beard. "Sure, that's a nuclear submarine; out of San Diego. They run their training missions up along our border. They think that just 'cause we can't see 'em, we don't know they're there. They launch that simulator as a fake enemy. They blast it with training torpedoes. I've heard say they go 80 knots underwater, but I can't really believe that."

The jolly fellow asks about the book I write. After a few seconds thought he says, "Won't work. Enlightenment is not popular anymore."

"I don't think I know what enlightenment is," I respond.

We share beers with several locals before wandering out to sleep under an apple tree. Stars shine brightly. Denis says, "Canada has a whole different feel. A different attitude. I can't pinpoint the difference, but the people aren't the same as in the U.S."

May 12, 1981

I wake to two locals hauling lumber past my bed to a boat. They're building a "party raft" for mooring in the bay. The morning is already hot. We pack, swim, and get on our way, paddling out of the harbor into Plumper Sound. Here ocean freighters wait for clearance to enter Vancouver or Victoria.

The day becomes too hot to paddle; unbearable for our bear-ables. After only seven miles we beach and rest in the shade. Cha climbs the cliff to see if he can find the owner. He returns soon with permission to camp the night here on Dinner Point as long as we don't have a fire. The dry weather has forced a ban on the flames.

For dinner we feast on clams, mussels, and oysters. Cha whips up a spinach salad with a mustard and orange juice dressing. We also eat a bean and rice casserole. As usual, Cha and I consume mass quantities, twice what Denis eats. In one clam Cha finds an undigested crab. I find four pearls in one mussel, small and uneven, but clean and white.

Red barked twisting madrona trees line the water, many more than in the San Juans. The land seems much drier. A sea lion visits, grunting in our cove, welcoming us to Mayne Island. I bet he catches fish. We tried today and caught zero.

As I blow out my candle I wonder if the dream will occur again tonight. For a couple nights I have been high speed skiing on pavement in tennis shoes. Turning corners, I'd fight to hold an edge with the rubber on my feet, gripping as well as I could with the speed. I hope the dream action will return.

May 13, 1981

It's early. Clouds have come and rain falls lightly. The bay is calm with much driftwood circling in the ebbing flow. Rain makes paisley patterns on the flat moving surface. A low rumble, I guess a ferry boat, echoes as the rain increases. The madrona tree above my tent now drips steadily. Our plans were to paddle and I'm ready, but Cha has expressed he doesn't like to kayak on rainy days. We'll see. Flood tide begins around ten this morning so we could exit leisurely. Rain or shine, we could easily cover fifteen miles or more today.

Nanaimo is a bit more than thirty miles from here. After that we are in the Strait of Georgia. We will be protected from the Pacific Ocean by Vancouver Island, but the Strait could still be quite rough, being a wide Inside Passage.

It's interesting to watch the speed of logs in such calm water. The current herds up the driftwood and circles it through the little bay. Since we left Pender yesterday, the amount of drift material has steadily increased. The San Juans didn't have this quantity.

The rumbling ferry's wake now strikes the bay. Waves crash on the rocks. I like being awake this early to watch the world. It's nice.

The many birds singing, chirping, tweeting, doodily whopping, and pretty birdying are all beautiful in sight and sound, yet I don't know their names or titles. Like the strangers at May Fest, the animals become familiar. I can enjoy each animal the same

with or without a name and history. I enjoy and don't criticize the sea lion who visits loudly in the night. Yet I don't always treat my friends as fair. There is friction between Cha and me. I catch myself subtly criticizing him in my own head. He might not even notice.

A hummingbird makes a sucking chirp sound. He buzzes about five feet above my head, taking pollen from the buds on the Madrona tree. Is pollen the bird's total diet?

We finally decide to load the kayaks and paddle, agreeing on the need to move on. We bid Dinner Point goodbye. "See ya, man," says Denis.

"You see man, man?" asks Cha.

"Si, man," I answer. "What, man? Semen, man?"

"No, man. Seaman at sea, man," says Cha.

"Oh, si, man," I say.

"Okay, man. See ya man," says Cha. "Semen."

"It's just semantics," I say. "See man tick? Semen ticks, man. Do ticks have semen, man? Forget it. See ya, man."

We paddle towards two seals on a rock and a bald eagle with a white spot on his back. They all flee. Another guano covered rock bears a lone tree, naked of leaves. It looks kind of spooky. One king eagle sits on the tree. Hundreds of gulls rest on the rock.

Powering down the miles, into Trincomali Channel, we come to a freighter bearing the hammer and sickle of a Russian flag. As soon as it clears Wallace Island, it turns directly at us, a sharp turn probably programmed into a computer. Its sharp turn brings the ship past us only seven kayak lengths away. Its wake curls at us, spilling water from its crest, but we avoid wetness by turning and rocking with the wave.

As we break for lunch, Cha and I munching down raw oysters, the sun burns through the haze. A wood pulp smell hits me strong, but the other guys say they don't smell it. Am I having olfactory hallucinations now? Some clouds look like crumpled aluminum foil. The high clouds texture with beams of light. Lower clouds puff like cotton balls.

Wind remains steady in our faces, a northwesterly. After lunch paddle slow and relaxed, following the shore of Wallace Island. A brown creature with a white sports tie watches me as I paddle close to the rocky shore. He's small, long and skinny, like a Bavarian sausage, with a tail. The animal comes to the water's edge. I say, "Hi." He backs off a bit but I stay to watch. After a few minutes he still sits, still curious, his black nose at work. I bid him goodbye, "Semen," and he scampers into a rock cave. As I paddle along I see more of these critters, with their short ears and white running up the short brown fur, up their chests to their lower lips. Minks?

I catch up with Cha and Denis. They float quietly under a tall tree, light green needles revealing the tree's new growth. In the top of the tree sits the biggest golden eagle we've seen yet. It seems proud and still. We study him through Denis' monocular and Cha's telephoto lens. His wings spread, he stretches, then he resumes his perch position, watching, blinking. The gold and brown bird with white splotches bends forward like he's about to fly. Instead he lets it fly, out his rear.

"There she blows," says Cha, the bird's wastes falling to the ground. The mighty bird lifts one leg and stretches the talon. He looks like he waves hello. Soon he drops off the tree sideways and soars away.

We approach Canover Cove. A four by eight plywood sign reads "No Trespassing." Inside the cove is a nice house with manicured lawn, flowered garden, and boat dock. "What a home," exclaims Denis. A seal pops his head up just feet from Denis' stern, then slips quickly under water again. Three eagles fly in circles ahead, two of them fighting, diving at each other. The third eagle dives to the rocks, attempting to capture one of the little brown critters. He misses and arches back to the sky. A duck, black with red on folded wings and a white necklace, frightens at the eagle's attack. The eagle's flapping wings sound like the shaking of a heavy rug.

Along the Secretary Islands I look back towards the city of Crofton and see smoke pouring from a pulp mill. I feel better knowing the pulp I smelled earlier had a true origin. We slowly paddle over shallow shelves. I see purple and orange starfish. Seaweeds harbor large schools of tiny fish, and we see crabs, big enough to eat, crawling among the broken clam shells. A sea gull, pure white except for gray wings, dives to the water and emerges, gulping his prize. "This is just like television," I joke.

"Better," says Denis.

"How can you even say that?" laughs Cha, looking back at the pulp mill. "Do you guys hear that high pitched noise?"

"No, but let's get out of here before radiation gets us," says Denis.

"Help," I screech. "The radiation. I'm growing a third leg. Mutate. Mutate. My hackysack is threatening mutiny. Help."

Cha's mad at me. I figure because I didn't take his high pitch sound seriously. He falls back a half mile, Denis and I paddling on.

Approaching Norway Island I suggest from a spontaneous urge, "Denis, what do you think about going to Alaska now, instead of July. Then we can even be more relaxed in the paddle south. We could hitchhike. A lot of boats are heading north now." I point to a couple of trollers with Alaska numbers painted on their bridges. We paddle past a palapa type shack made of wood, a sun and rain shelter on the rocks. It looks inviting in the sun. "I'm having my Mexico dreams again and feel like an insta-change."

"It's an option," says Denis. "Sounds good to me. It might be better to go now then wait a month and a half. We could still hit the same places on the way back, only in the heat of summer."

We wait for Cha off the point of Secretary Island. A carved cedar sea lion arches up, facing the setting sun. It's eight feet long with flippers to the sides. Suddenly I realize that dolphins do have flippers, unlike the one I carved and gave to Laura. That must be how the movie star, Flipper, got his name.

"Alaska, Cha?" I ask.

"Huh?"

"Now, today. Want to go north?"

"Do you guys?"

"You bet..."

Five minutes later, in the middle of Houstoun Passage, we sit in our kayaks with our thumbs out to a tug boat. Soon we thumb, with no luck, to a couple of trollers with Craig written on them, a town near Ketchikan.

"They probably don't know what the hell we are up to," laughs Denis.

We paddle up to a home on Norway Island and talk to a nice elderly woman and man. They bring us fresh water in our containers and tell us that we can camp across the channel on Penalakut Spit. She says, "Sure, it's a public beach. Anybody can camp there."

We admire a golden bronze statue in her yard. It's a soaring eagle. She tells us of the local nest she watches with a baby eagle in it. "There was a seal carcass washed up the other day here. A dozen eagles swooped in and devoured it." She informs us the brown creatures are minks.

"No wonder their fur is so attractive," I say.

We paddle over to camp on the spit of Kuper Island. I set up my tent facing down the beach and build a driftwood patio to help keep the sand out. Once inside, I can no longer see the moon shining, now half way to full in a triangle with Jupiter and Saturn. Neither do I have a view of the water which does so much to mesmerize me. I admit to myself my lacking tent strategy and vow to try from now on for a view of the water.

May 14, 1981

The spit is a long sand bar stretching out a half mile from Kuper Island. Exposed, with no trees, the early sun wakes me. I spring from bed full of energy and begin a vigorous jump-rope session and a jog. I run down the dirt road, by an old barn. Up on the hillside I see a church and houses, the box type that I remember from Indian villages up north. When I fished on the Haida boat, out of Hydaburg, I often stayed in the Indian village. The town was barely one mile from end to end and the locals would drive their cars on the dirt roads wherever they went. I wonder, as I jog along this dirt road, whether we now camp on Indian property.

A new pickup truck, followed by a shiny new van, pulls up to me. Two Indians drinking beer in the front vehicle ask me, "You guys camped here?"

Two guys and a girl wait in the second vehicle. "Yes. We kayaked in last night. We were told this is public land."

"This is reservation."

I begin to wonder the progression our conversation will take. In Hydaburg I met some of the folks who didn't care too much for white men, but I always avoided a fight. Mijou, my sixty-seven year old captain, had warned me to stand up, to not show fear because that's what the aggressors wanted. I ask, "Is that an oyster farm over there, in Oyster Bay?" I point towards bails of oyster spats wrapped together with wire.

"Yep," says the driver of the pickup truck, the engine still running. "Where did you kayak from?"

"Seattle. We've been on the water since April second."

"When are you leaving?"

"This morning's tide. What town is that, on the hill?"

"Penelakut," he says. Both vehicles drive away.

I jog back to camp and meet an elder Indian gathering shells on the beach. He tells me about the oyster farm. "They suspend the spats two feet apart on a string. Little microbes in the water attach to the shells and each grows a whole cluster of eight or ten oysters. The first cycle took three years to complete, but now we get continuous crops."

I swim and wander back to camp. Denis is just now getting out of bed. He stands on the beach by his tent, bare naked, and pees without using his hands.

"Primate. Primate," I yell. He crawls back to bed.

I eat then find a piece of quarter-inch drift plywood. It's about one foot by four feet. With Denis' black felt marker, I write "ALASKA" in big letters. Holding it up so a tug boat can see it as he tootles by, I stretch into an exaggerated hitchhiking pose. Denis and Cha watch out their tents and just laugh. I explain to them some strategies, "Here's the wrong way, the uptight hitchhiking pose." I stand rigid and shaking. "Notice the tight, white knuckles. Now here is the mellow hitch, the smooth relaxed fingers, a smile." I see the tug boat captain look my way, stare, but keep on going. I add, "Now here is another favorite, the drunk hitchhiker. Buy a six pack of beer and hold it up to the traffic. Somebody will always stop for a beer. But stay somewhat sober or you'll..." I trip over my feet, roll down the sand into the water and spit the sea into the air. "Stutter, duhh..."

We slip into the loaded boats for another warm day and paddle out towards the middle of the channel. I hold up the sign to intercept traffic. What kind of boat will we get? The first time I joined a boat in Seattle, a halibut boat, the crew never sobered up. We drove the Inside Passage all the way to Ketchikan. They scared me. I took my duffel bag off the drunk boat and sat on the city float in Ketchikan. That's when I met Mijou, my Haida captain. He brought me to his home town on the Linda E, the purse seiner his father had built.

I hold the ALASKA sign high over my kayak. A couple of boats slow down to make sure we aren't signaling for help. But they keep going. We paddle by Pylades Island and DeCourcy Island. I heard a story from a Penderite that supposedly a man once bought DeCourcy to start a commune. He convinced a bunch of rich people that the world was coming to an end and the island would be the last surviving place on earth. He convinced the people to bring families and money, then he tortured and killed them. Rumor or truth, what do I know?

Off Link Island I hold up my sign again to a pleasure craft bearing an American flag, hoping to find the link to bridge the gap between here and Ketchikan. The stink machine slows down. A young woman hangs out, a camera to her eye, and we all wave. She shuts her window without a smile or a wave. In the blue fumes of their departure I bid them well. "City zoo, mam. Ape speaking. Yes mam, yes, this is the primate section. No, mam. We are still looking for the missing links."

I wonder to myself how someone could be lacking the courtesy to even wave. Take a picture, Martha. Shit the bed. Where is the link between rude and courteous, between good and bad. Or tweet and blah, ying and yang, or sweet and sour.

I paddle up to an orange object floating in the water. I pick it up to discover it to be a styrofoam carton for a Big Mac. And the carton is in perfect condition. How far is the nearest McDonald's? How wonderful. Someone gets their burger then opens the box thirty seconds later. He eats the burger and the life purpose of the carton is over. How handy and resourceful. I stash it in my kayak.

A Tokyo ship, the Tone Maro, anchors in the channel. We paddle our midget pods alongside. The ship's stern reaches above us like a tall building. Its rudder connects to the ship about twenty-five feet above our heads. We paddle through the gap between the ship and rudder, over the submerged propeller shafts. I don't bother guessing the results if the props suddenly turned.

Snow sits on the mountains to the west, on Vancouver Island. We paddle to Round Island, a mile from Dodd Narrows, and wait for slack tide. Cha complains of bad

stomach cramps. Groaning behind a rock, he squats for ten minutes. When he returns he gobbles several sandwiches.

Dodd Narrows, between Mudge Island and Vancouver Island, squeezes a great amount of water through a hundred yard wide channel. The ebb tide has already begun its surge. It slows our approach. Against the flow, Denis and I attack the center of the narrows. Cha attempts the west shore. Soon I realize Cha has scored an eddy, the current's backspin granting him a free ride. Denis and I paddle, pumping our muscles. A log suddenly appears, charging straight for our kayaks. I see another piece of wood drifting my desired direction up the east bank. I take the clue and paddle over to a very swift current which rapidly takes me as far as Cha has progressed up the west side. Denis still struggles up the center, now far behind us. I pass Cha but soon see a whirl of water thirty feet ahead forming a foot tall wall of water. As I speed up to the whirlpool, stroking as swiftly as I can, I attempt to break through the cyclone of water. The moment my bow enters the danger spot, my kayak stops moving and begins going backwards. I tilt my butt to the rushing water, banking against the rapids, my left paddle blade bracing on the downstream side. The main current draws me in and I fly back in the opposite direction. By now I notice Denis has clued in on the eddy of the west side. Cha already rounds Joan Point, the rock which clears him of the narrows.

Several boats wait at the north mouth of Dodd Narrows, watching our progress. The same stink machine with the camera lady is capturing the action on film. "Yes, mam" I say aloud as I get my boat turned the right direction again. "Yes, city zoo, mam. Ape speaking. No mam, mouse is out." A troller enters Dodd from the south. "No mam, no turtle here today, I hope." I fight against the center current. It moves even swifter now. The troller barrels down on my rear, his mast tilting 45 degrees, a result of the current. He charges forward turned at an angle. I paddle full strength. The troller keeps barreling down right behind me. I begin to wonder if I can fight the center channel current. If I can't and need to turn about, could the fishing boat let me by. He lacks control now as much as I do.

I finally thrust through the last rapid into the calmer water of Northumberland Channel. The troller clears Dodd Narrows right behind me. The camera lady's stink machine guns the motor and roars away. "Thanks for coming, mam."

Denis and I follow Cha to the beach. He runs quickly to the woods to hang his ass over a log... for a half hour. Denis and I walk back over the rocks to Joan Point and watch the narrows. In the short period since we cleared it, the water increased velocity so much that the entrance now rushes too fast for a kayak to pass. White water boils, funneling through the tight passage. "Another gap crossed," I say to Denis. He stands looking content, like a mouse in a tuxedo with a glass of champagne.

We dress in warmer clothes. Clouds now move from the south and the north, two fronts wedging together. The clouds mix and churn. Lightning flashes ahead over Nanaimo, five miles away. With Cha now feeling better, we load into the kayaks with rain coats and spray decks sealed tight. Into rain with white capping waves, we paddle past the mill and chemical plants. The steam twists from smoke stacks and immediately disperses into the wind. I say, "If we are struck by lightning, let this be the ultimate dissolve," but nobody notices. Cha says he feels "shitty". Paddling with the crashing waves, we enter Nanaimo Harbor and jump onto the city dock. Hail pelts our rain hoods.

A young red haired, red bearded fellow with a balding head approaches and asks, "Where did you guys come from in this storm?"

"From Kuper Island, about seventeen miles south."

"Want some tea to warm up and dry out? There's my boat," he points to a green wooden sailboat tied to the dock.

"Yah, I need it," says Cha.

The interior of Thomas and Leander's boat is hand worked with fine wood. The galley appears very lived in, with spices in the racks and clothes and books neatly tucked around. We dry out. They serve us a hot dinner and tea. Leander cares for Cha's cold with some cayenne and herbal tea, then he sets off paddling for Newcastle Island to set his camp. Denis and I wish to venture up to the town of Nanaimo to explore. Thomas warns, "I don't recommend the bars in this town."

Out on the dock an overweight man and his wife stand in the pouring rain with a pyramid collapsible crab trap like mine. They lean over the water trying to catch their dinner. The man asks me from under his rubber rain suit, "Is that the whales, that sound from the bay?"

He refers to the loud piercing beeps of the signal horn on the point across the water. Echoes bounce off the rock bulkhead in the wet night. "I don't know," I say. "Maybe..." I don't share what I believe to be true as I don't wish to ruin their imagination. They can believe the sound to be whales, and at home they will tell a wonderful story.

We visit two drinking establishments, each with separate entrances for men and women. In both the Queens Hotel and the Palace Hotel people sit around the big rooms drinking silently. Nobody smiles except the bartender at one bar. The room smells like urine. The bartender buys Denis and I beers and treats us well, but the atmosphere degrades our spirits. We return to our kayaks feeling about three levels lower than when we went into the "Hotels." The establishments' mood hung in the air like fly strips covered with dead bugs.

Denis and I find Cha already asleep on Newcastle Island. I climb into my cozy tent for a good night's sleep. Hail pelts my gore-tex covering as dreams drag me off into fantasy.

May 15, 1981

All is wet this morning, but the sun shines early in the clear blue sky. My view north peaks into the Strait of Georgia, the expanse of water calm and inviting.

I walk over to Cha's tent barefoot and ask, "How do you feel, Cha?" My feet look blue with cold in the wet grass.

"Mass better. What are we going to do?"

"I'm packing up and going to hit the docks. I'll find us a ride to Ketchikan. Want to help?"

"Sure."

We leave Denis and paddle our loaded boats back to town. After showering, I get a haircut from Leander. We sip tea. Soon Cha and I wander about the docks talking to a few fishermen, but with no luck. One boat which bears Alaska State numbers on the bridge ties to the gas pump dock. We talk to the tough looking woman who sorts diving gear on board.

"Sure, we're going past Ketchikan, but the Captain, he don't like to take riders."

We chat a bit with this lady and learn they need to rescue an anchor up north a few miles. A year earlier, having dragged the anchor over an underwater cable, it got hung up and had to be cut loose.

"I'm a certified diver," I tell her.

"Well, that might just get you a ride. A little ways at least. The Captain's up at the dive shop now, getting my tanks filled. We're going to be out of here in a hurry 'cause we're running with another boat."

"We'll return in a half hour or when we see him come back. We're over there," I say, pointing to the wooden sailboat of Thomas and Leander.

After first saying no, the Captain of the Marne grants us a ride to Campbell River, north of Ballenas Islands where the anchor lies. Eva, the woman first mate, talked him into allowing another diver along in case she needs help underwater. Loading the kayaks aboard from the dock, we place one on either side of the bow and one on the rear hatch. Our boats clutter the deck.

"These won't be in the way, will they Chuck?" Eva asks the Captain about the kayaks.

"If they are, we'll just throw them overboard," he mumbles. His face is strong and sharp, his chin prominent, reminding me of George C. Scott. His face slightly wrinkles and in his red logger suspenders and baggy blue jeans he walks like a bull. Eva smiles at me with fire in her eyes and gives me a thumb up for good luck.

"Cast off," yells the Captain.

All three of us kayakers jump to the ropes, untie and push off with the Captain's directions. Mijou had always yelled at me from the Linda E to get my speed into action, to untie the boat and shove off automatically in one smooth movement. Denis has fast boat reactions from working charter boats for several years out of Westport.

The Marne slides into the harbor. The Captain cranks a turn backwards, inching into a gap between the boulder bulkhead and another boat. We stand on deck, alert and waiting for any orders. Soon the water opens around us and the Marne diesels through Rainbow Channel, past Departure Bay, and north towards nothing.

On the stern of the Marne, Denis, Cha, and I talk. "What will we do if he drops us off at Campbell River?" asks Cha.

I say, "We're on now. I bet we ride all the way to Ketchikan."

"He doesn't seem to want us too much," says Denis.

"If we're quick with his orders and can help with that anchor, we can probably impress him. If he likes us by the end of the day he'll have a hard time throwing us off the boat," I say. "Cha, you're the chain saw mechanic. You know how to talk to rednecks. Go up front and talk with the Captain. Find out if there is anything he wants us to do."

Eva pokes her head out the door and calls me inside the cabin. She takes me down into the foc'sle to show me the extra diving gear in case she needs help. I can hear Cha up above talking to the Captain at the wheel.

During the second hour of the two hour motor to Ballenas Islands, we all stand on the bridge. The Captain once damaged his right ear so he has difficulty hearing us. I feel awkward yelling from his right side, so I remain quiet. So does he.

Eva talks of the dive. "The anchor sits in a bay under forty feet of water. Chuck has Loran settings and visual markings from when he cut the anchor loose, so we guess the search should be easy enough. I'll just connect a cable and we'll hoist her up."

We arrive at the spot and Eva dives down. Cha and I note how nice the islands look and mention we should return someday. The sandy beach is white and clean, the cove clear and serene. "Why, you sunny beach," I say.

After five minutes underwater, Eva returns with a motion of success. "Bring it up," she says.

Using the winch we hoist the anchor up to the side of the Marne but it catches on a water-line lip. Chuck runs inside to grab a gaff or some tool, but while he's gone I hook my calf on the gunwale and hang head down to the water. I lasso the barb of the anchor and swing it away from the boat. "Pull it up, you guys," I tell Denis and Cha. We flip the anchor end over and work it on board. When the Captain returns with his big hook, we already have the forty-foot chain on deck.

He looks surprised and says, "Atta boys."

Eva climbs on board with our help and removes her wet suit. As she pulls off the hood, her long reddish brown hair hangs down for the first time. She appears middle age and I wonder if she has kids or what's her story. Is she the Captain's prime mate, or just first mate?

The Marne underway again, we pass Lasqueti and Texada Islands, Hornby and Denman. These are names I remember from the ride on the drunk halibut boat. The land is completely new to Denis and Cha.

Eventually the Captain relaxes in his bunk and Cha steers the boat, Eva on guard. She says, "The Captain hasn't had a rest since we left Aberdeen. We ran all night up the Pacific Coast and then cut into the Straits of Juan de Fuca. I think Chuck trusts you guys already. This boat is his life and he usually won't let strangers run it. Good job on the anchor. Chuck told me to pull one of the albacore from the freezer. His words were, 'Cook up those kids a big meal, they deserve it.'" Eva directs Denis to the frozen tuna. "Grab the one on top. It's wrapped in newspaper."

Denis leaves to do his chores and I ask Eva, "Where did you get the fish?"

"Each August Chuck fishes offshore in California." Eva and I plot our course, check the time, now 1630. I figure we average 8.2 knots. Satisfied with our abilities, Eva climbs to her bunk to read.

Cha steers and I whisper to him, "I think we're going all the way, Cha."

"I think so too, now."

"Another gap bridged. We're going through the black hole," I say.

"I'd like to go through a black hole," says Cha, steering around a log.

"You already did. Now you're living on the other side."

"Huh?" he quizzes.

"Sure. You came through it the moment you were born."

Denis signals me outside to help him cut the frozen fish. I hold it while he hacksaws so it will thaw fast. Afterwards, I sit on the stern hatch alone, reminiscing of boat days in Alaska with Mijou.

Twenty feet over my head an eagle pumps maybe fifty miles an hour. He speeds to a group of sea gulls feeding on the water. As the Marne passes the bird group, more eagles pump in from all directions like a crowd of humans flocking around a clown

performing in the street or around people fighting. Several birds emerge with fish in their beaks. More eagles arrive.

Later I refer to the gathering as Denis, Cha and I whisper on the bridge. I am excited and exclaim, "Man, thousands of eagles were there..."

"No way," says Cha, "there were only three or four."

"Oh, there were twenty or thirty," I say. "That's thousands."

Hours later, after a good meal, Eva plots our course and Denis steers. The night is dark as we motor through Discovery Passage between Quadra and Vancouver Island. We pull into a bay of Quadra, next to the ferry terminal. Cha and I drop anchor from the bow. In the quiet after the engine shuts down, Cha and I look at each other in the dark. I say, "I wonder what happens now. Campbell River is just across the channel. This was supposed to be the end of the line."

"We couldn't even get our loaded kayaks off the boat here anyway. We'd need a dock," says Cha.

"We're going to Ketchikan," I say just as Eva pokes her head out.

She says, "Two of you can sleep downstairs and one on the floor upstairs. You have sleeping bags, don't you?"

"You betcha," Cha and I answer, in stereo.

May 16, 1981

I sleep restlessly all night hearing the anchor chain creak, moan and pop. The sounds, the gentle rocking, and the smell of the diesel fades me in and out of dreams of previous nights I spent sleeping in the foc'sle of the Linda E. I dream of Mijou waking me, yelling to get up, to get the anchor hoisted. Mijou's face returns to my bunk, red with rage and excited to move. The old Indian would always sleep lightly. He'd get up in the middle of the night and pace the galley or go out on deck to check the lines. He expected me to do the same. "You've got to always be aware," he would explain to me. "Even when you sleep you should know just what the boat is doing. Look at me, sixty-seven years old and I'm always ready for anything." He was too. He had a kind, round face, almost Oriental, when he was relaxed. I remember hearing stories, tabulated by white man, referring to the possibility of ancient Oriental migration on Japanese currents, past Hawaii, and directly to the Queen Charlotte Islands, the traditional home of the Haidas.

At 3:30 in the dark of morning, Eva's alarm sounds. I awaken from a sweaty dream of times with the Haida fishermen. As Chuck descends the ladder to start the engine, I am dressed and ready. Mijou had yelled at me to be aware, to be ready, dressed and boots on in time to help start the engine. I developed a paranoia of having Mijou catch me asleep. He rarely slept and expected the same of me, the green-horn white boy on ship. He would tell me at a time of quiet, with the day's work was done, "I have to yell at you. I'm making a good fisherman out of you. After I train you, you can fish on any high liner and make good money. You'll be well trained and they'll say, 'Mijou trained him'."

Denis and I hoist anchor in the dark. Chuck drives us north towards Race Point and Seymour Narrows, timing for the slack tide. On full tide in Seymour Narrows, current rushes up to twelve knots, three and a half knots faster than the Marne's capability. He tells us, "You boys better not paddle through Seymour Narrows on your

way south. Whirlpools suck big ships down and they pop up a mile away like corks. You guys are pretty crazy to do this trip anyways. I'd never get in one of those toy boats in these waters."

Eva puts a tape in the cassette machine. Captain Chuck begins to bounce to the beat of Neil Diamond. He imitates a kayaker with a double bladed paddle, his arms in front crossing back and forth. Cha, Denis, and I burst into laughter seeing Chuck loosen up.

Eva calls Joe on the radio, the Captain of the partner boat, Teasha. He anchors in a bay nearby and rises out of bed a little late for the Seymour Narrows tide change, guaranteeing them a fast ride.

The Marne motors through, the current pulling us at an angle and a tilt, but very smooth. Eva tells, "Last year I sailed through here by myself on a twenty-three foot boat. When the current is running, this whole passage is whirlpools and rapids. I got pulled through sideways and almost got dunked in the soup."

"How far did you sail by yourself?" I ask, impressed.

"From Sitka to Vancouver."

I hear some of Eva's life and find out she has three kids. The oldest, twenty years old, lives in a house Eva owns. "After they got old enough, I said to myself, I have to go live. Now I ski and backpack and ride my motorcycle. I kayak, like you guys, and sail and scuba dive a lot. I want to learn mountain climbing and how to surf."

I whisper to Cha, who stands quietly next to me, "The woman has VD."

We pass many small boats, today being the first day of sport fishing in British Columbia. Joe, on the Teasha, calls to tell they made it through the Narrows, but it was a wild ride. The current pulls us through Discovery Passage and on into Johnstone Strait. We average twelve knots with the current's influence.

Chuck and Eva curl up together with their books and we take over ship. Dodging the driftwood and other boats, we navigate up to Port Hardy and into Queen Charlotte Straits. This is one of the two major sections we will kayak away from the protection of the Inside Passage. The Marne enters the rolling swells of the Pacific Ocean.

Seeing the depth meter go off the scale, Cha asks Chuck, who now steers, "How deep is this water?"

"Deep enough to stand up and drink in, that's for sure." We cross through rocks called The Sea Otter Group. The waves now grow. Eva cooks us a salmon feast with beans and potatoes. We eat on the rocking sea and as usual, Cha and I make pigs of ourselves.

"Better eat it all, or the crabs will get it," says Eva. We eat in silence, Cha and I devouring all the food in sight. I think of Mijou, of eating aboard the Linda E. Disgusted and shaking his head, he'd say, "Why don't you trim your mustache? Half your food gets caught in it." For special, one day we ate steaks. As I cut off the fat, Mijou yelled. "What are you doing? You're not going to eat the best part? I'll never understand you people from down south," referring to the mainland U.S. Having seen me eat a handful of brewer's yeast tablets, he said, "You people from the south don't know how to eat. Look at me. I never eat pills, just good food. You're like those sick old ladies who eat pills for everything. That's no good." After the steak meal with Mijou, I left the table and he asked where I was going. I told him to the bathroom. "Just pee over the side. There's only men here."

I answered him, "I have to shit."

He told me, "What? You just ate the good steak and now you want to just go shit it back out? Why didn't you go before you ate?" I felt so intimidated by my Haida Captain so often that I couldn't tell when he was joking and when he was serious. I felt like a whipped puppy, green with fear.

After Cha and I finish three plates of food, I feel a bit green in the face from the rolling boat and the large lump in my stomach. I head outside and hang over the railing, losing orientation of the earth's true plane. My view of rolling hills of water moving at the Marne tilts the boat so I lose perspective. The waves pass under us, smooth but large, the boat rolling with the changing angles. I say goodbye to my three plates of food, "You crabs can have it anyways."

Only once had I been seasick on Mijou's boat. After a long five days of fishing, working almost around the clock, maybe two hours of sleep a night, the Linda E headed us back towards Ketchikan. I crawled down below into my bunk, with the heat and stink of the big diesel engine. I slept restlessly, constantly dreaming of being awakened by a screaming captain. And Mijou did wake me, screaming, "What are you doing asleep. You should be on board watching. You don't know these waters. You have to stay awake and learn them." The boat rocked violently and I felt fumigated from the diesel. Mijou yelled more, "I thought you had fallen overboard." His voice drowned the engine noise. I followed him up to the deck and lost my cookies overboard immediately. Mijou just shook his head in disappointment.

The Marne clears the ocean swells and enters the protection of Fitzhugh Sound. We pass Namu and in the dark enter Lama Passage. Eva and Chuck, trusting us fully now, go to bed. Cha, Denis and I take turns, two at a time watching the wheel. Outside of Bella Bella the logs become so thick in the water that I lie in the dark on the Marne's bow giving Denis signals so he can miss the debris. Chuck gets out of bed. After watching our strained efforts for a few moments, he orders the engines shut down and the anchor dropped till daylight.

May 17, 1981

"But please know I would have stopped this way long ago except that I know that if David catches this fish he'll have something inside him for all his life and it will make everything else easier." E. Hemingway *Islands in the Stream*

Again my dreams of Mijou are vivid. My mind flashes back to the Linda E, to days of fishing. We'd drop the seine net into the water, hold the quarter mile web open, watching fish jump around inside. Then we'd circle and close up after half an hour or so. Bunching up the leads under water, the net formed a purse, bagging up all the salmon and jelly fish. Anything that went wrong on board during the process, I would catch trouble, being the white boy green-horn. Mijou would holler at me, red in the face, "Why did you let that line go over the block? I told you to watch everything. You have to be alert."

I felt useless trying to explain myself. No excuse would help. When anything went wrong, it was my fault. If I'd ask questions, which to me felt very valid, Mijou would just shake his head. He could no longer conceive of my ignorance, he himself

being so experienced. What seemed natural and obvious to him was foreign to me. I lacked the instant intuitiveness he demanded.

At meal time, the day's work done, Mijou asked why I go to college. I explained my consideration of law school, at that time true in my head. "Bah," he'd say. "You don't even know the difference between a coho and a sockeye, how do you expect to be a law man? You college people from the south don't know anything when you come up here to fish. But I'm training you. When you fish on these high liners someday, they'll know you learned on an Indian boat. They'll say, 'Mijou trained that man!'"

Chuck starts up the Marne's engine and Cha and I crank up the anchor. Underway at sunrise, we pass the sleeping town of Bella Bella on port, and New Bella Bella on starboard.

"Cook the boys a big breakfast, Eva," Chuck says. "See the porpoise?"

Cha and I run out to the bow while Denis steers. A half dozen porpoise surf the wakes in front of our moving ship. They spin round and round, streamline in the water. They dive and surface again, maintaining the Marne's speed, inches off the bow. They surface to breathe, exhaling through their blow holes. Cha photographs the porpoise spins. I hang over the gunwale blowing notes on my recorder. For miles the porpoise swim with us. Chuck stands above us, watching. He comments he'd been with pods of hundreds before, all of them bouncing and playing with the moving boat. He says, "While fishing tuna, porpoise would get caught inside the nets and if they didn't get out, too often others would jump in. They have a strong sense of family and society. They fear the other side of the net whether they swim on the inside or the outside."

A duck flies to the side of the Marne. He flaps his wings full strength but only bounces on the ripples in the water. He's too fat to fly. "He must be a glutton, like us, Cha," I say. "If we keep eating the way we do, we won't be able to move some day, either."

Chuck puts us to work tying jam knots on all his summer hooks. Cha and I get to work for the day, soon mastering the twists and shoves of the leader through the hooks. With speed and precision we tie every hook Chuck has, conscious of every one being his livelihood. To tie a hook wrong could loose Chuck a fish... money. The Marne enters into Milbanke Sound. This is a short exposure to the Pacific Ocean, only a few miles of ocean swells. We duck into Finlayson Channel, then go up Princess Royal Channel. We pass Buttedale with its magnificent waterfall, and head on into Grenville Channel with the current.

With the evening still light, we slide into Kxngéal Inlet to join Joe and the Teasha for a rest and to wait for the next day's ebb current for a free ride north. Chuck and Eva have patched up their dinghy, so Cha and I choose to be guinea pigs. We row the lifeboat around the quiet cove singing, "Row, row, row your boat..." Joe laughs at us and jokes with Chuck for hiring three young men to run his boat. "You're just going to sleep all the way to Ketchikan." I stand and rock the rowboat, Cha manning the oars. The elders just laugh at our play. Fishing is, for Chuck, Joe, and Eva, as avalanche work is for us. It's kind of a merging of work and play, with a respect for both.

I lay my nose over the bow of the dinghy and stare at my rippled reflection. Mijou used to explain before fishing season began, as we sipped a whiskey in the galley of the Linda E, "We have it easy now. But you'd better be ready to work. We go around the clock and you won't sleep. And when you eat, then you eat fast. Isn't that right, Billy?"

Mijou would get confirmation from his sixteen year old grandson. Billy would just nod his head. Gary, Mijou's son, Billy's uncle, came to fish with us for a few weeks also, temporarily leaving his wife and kids in Seattle. Gary would share with me his growing feeling to move back to Hydaburg, the fever to rejoin his clan. He wanted to help his dad on the boat and help guide Billy in growing up. Gary seemed to bridge the gap between Billy and Mijou. He helped me to understand his father also.

Gary explained, "Dad isn't the type of man to compliment you to your face, but he talks good about you, Mark. He said to me that you learned faster than any green-horn he's ever had. You take him too seriously. Just hang in there."

Gary, Billy, and I would steer from the flying bridge of the Linda E, up in the wind and sun. We'd talk and share our lives. Gary would often get upset with Billy, usually blaming marijuana. Gary would say, "I used to know, but now I don't. Is that it, Billy?" His nephew would lift his weights and scan the horizon for jumping fish and just smile at the intended criticism.

I row the dinghy back to the Marne, slowly and quietly Cha in the bow. The shore of this bay is wild and the forest is dense. I wonder if camping will be easy on our paddle through here going south. Looks like grizzly country. We will avoid bear trouble. I consider ways on how to bridge the gaps between me and others, like Mijou and I often had, and Cha and I get. It's the same gap as between my parents and me. Is there really a missing link? I row the little boat. No leaks seep through the patchwork. I feel the circular rotation of the oars in my hands, pressing the resistance of the water. The oars float back through the air to start another stroke. It's been years since I rowed a boat. But I retain my training.

I row up to the Marne and climb aboard. "She's ready to save your life, Chuck," I report the dinghy's checkup results. "Or at least it worked tonight for us."

After stowing the dingy on top of the Marne, I sit quietly. What a nice night.

May 18, 1981

"You guys bring a gun?" Chuck asks as we head out of Grenville Channel. We tell him no. "I wouldn't camp in these woods without one. The bears will get you."

Mijou used to say the same. Once I followed the old water line out of Hydaburg, way up into the woods to a pond and waterfall. I ate salmon berries and huckleberries all the way up and down the trail. When Mijou found this out, he raged, "Nobody in this town goes up there without a gun. Bears will kill you. You don't know about these woods." He just shook his head at me.

The Marne motors into Prince Rupert to gas up. We are only ninety miles from Ketchikan. Eva warns us of hummingbirds which will dive-bomb, like kamikaze tweets. She also warns of mosquitoes. Chuck laughs this morning at us for successfully "sea-jacking" his boat. "You guys have earned the purple kayak award," he says. Denis, Cha and I sing our version of Gilligan's Island, only the tiny ship that got tossed we call the Marne instead of the Minnow.

Eva tells her story of her own attempt to enter the *Guinness Book of World Records*. "I played a 200 hour game of Monopoly. Underwater. With scuba tanks."

"No tanks, said General Patton," I say.

She continues, "We'd trade off players so we wouldn't turn to prunes, though. That was just another one of my vacations. I found when I was working a steady job I only got in the habit of spending money on things I didn't need. And I had to keep working to support the habit."

Throughout the journey on the Marne, Cha has been referring to Chuck as "Boss". Chuck finally says today, "Why don't you just cut out this 'Boss' crap?" The tiny ship is tossed with laughter.

The Marne heads into Dixon's Entrance, past a raging pulp mill that looks like a polluted city of Oz. Though I doubt any poppies would grow there, I bet the stink smoke would produce the same drowsiness. The smoke rolls over Dixon's Entrance. This is the other major exposure to the Pacific Ocean, but today the water lies so calm I wish I could water ski it. Our tents dry on the Marne's boom, still wet from their last use on Newcastle Island. I sit on the stern hatch and watch the raped land. The trees have been clear cut and it looks like a man loosing his hair. Everything is gone except the stubbles and brush. A sea gull flies over and drops a plop right next to me. I feel isolated from my senses. Sounds of the woods are drowned by the constant drone of the engine, which can be soothing at times, but obstructing to all other audio sensations. Also, we steam along so fast on the Marne I don't see all the animals I could notice from my kayak. In my paddle boat I can touch the water and rocks on shore, I can taste the spring blossoms' floating fragrances. This boat is convenient, like a fire light circle, but obstructing just the same too.

At 20:45 we zoom up Revillagigedo Channel, fifteen miles from Ketchikan. The water is still. The sun sets in front of the Marne. Eva turns on the city radio station. The tunes blare out, "Hawaii... oooh, Hawaii..." Chuck and Eva dance, arm in arm, through the galley, twirling and stepping. Cha, Denis, and I, with our shades over our eyes, snap our fingers to the appropriate beat. "Hawaii... oooh, Hawaii..." The radio sings to us. We sing to the sea. At 22:20, with the sun in the west and the full moon rising in the east, we dock with the Teasha at the city floats, the same place I used to dock with Mijou when we came to town. Things look the same; the town on piers, the Tongas Trading Company overseeing the docks, gazebos, fishing boats, and even the same Coast Guard cutter.

I tell Denis, "The bridge has filled the gap. The Marne did it. Nanaimo is Ketchikan."

The Captain tells us to stay on board until we clear customs. Eva asks secretly, "You guys aren't carrying dope, are you?"

"Who, us?" asks Denis.

Chapter 6

"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"

"The destiny of man is to unite, not to divide. If you keep on dividing you end up as a collection of monkeys throwing nuts at each other from separate trees."

T. H. White, *The Once and Future King*

May 19, 1981

The customs official boards the Marne early, for inspection. He checks out the bunks and the galley cupboards and the stern freezer. The uniformed man begins digging through Cha's kayak and I think he realizes how much gear we carry, that he would have to unpack the works for complete inspection.

As most successful hitchhikers' signs do, ours is left behind on deck of our first and last ride. We lug our heavy boats off the Marne to the city float. Chuck says, "If you fellows are still heading north, my boat's going that way. Did you want to visit Meyer's Chuck?" Earlier Denis had mentioned some family friends in the little village, forty miles north.

Cha answers, "We'll catch a salmon and get towed to Meyer's Chuck, Chuck."

Chuck says, "Catch a porpoise with a purpose."

"No." says Denis, "But thanks anyways. We're thinking of heading south from here. Thanks for the help you already gave us."

"You boys were great," says Eva. "We read a couple novels each and slept half the trip. You're lucky Chuck trusted you guys so much right off the bat. He usually wouldn't let strangers take over his instruments like that."

All five of us scatter around town, doing things we each consider important. I purchase a new current book, *The Pacific Coast of North America and Asia*, published by the U.S. Department of Commerce. I look up Rosario Strait and find about sixty points of reference where my old book only had one. No wonder we were so confused crossing Rosario that day.

I walk around Ketchikan full of memories. I feel really good for the companionship on the Marne. Five people in one small place was like a party for three days.

With dirty clothes in hand, I enter the same laundromat where I used to use the shower when fishing on the Linda E. Now the showers are gone. I remember standing there washing myself, looking down the drain hole and seeing rocks and sea below, the world's biggest sewer. I once lost the cap to my shampoo down that hole. Plop. Maybe it ended up in some third world country, having floated around the world, and is now used as a measuring spoon or a splint for a broken nose. Who knows?

Eva is also washing clothes. We look through a crack in the floor at the rocks below. Eva says, "In Anchorage I could sit on the toilet, flush it, then walk onto my balcony and watch the contents empty into the sea."

"That must have been fun," I say.

"The solution to pollution is dilution," says Eva. "And that's the way it will be for a long time."

"Until we're saturated," I say, glancing outside at the sunny street. "I thought it always rained in Ketchikan. This is a real sunny beach."

Eva says, "They say there are only twenty-two days a year of sun here, and this is number two for us. It's Hawaii... oooh, Hawaii," she dances a step.

I say, "I really admire you for your energy and the gumption you have to go do as you feel. I bet your kids will get the best of it too."

"I think more parents should relax on their kids," she says. "Kids don't need to be babied till they are legal age."

"We have a name for your lifestyle, we live it too. Vacation Dynamics, it's nothing. VD!"

"It's nothing, huh? What does it do?"

I say, "Nothing. You do nothing for it and it does nothing for you."

"You mean you just do nothing?"

"Among other things."

Eva squares her eyes on me and twists them under glasses. She says nothing.

I move my clothes into the dryer and reminisce of when I left Mijou and the boat once. I was so upset I wanted to cry. I carried my laundry up to this laundromat and just sat. I stared at the walls wondering what to do. I wanted to leave Mijou so bad. He had always told me that if I couldn't take it, to pack my sea bags. But I felt a friend to the old Indian too, and knew he depended on my work. He had me doing the motor maintenance for the power skiff as well as the Linda E's. I worked on every aspect of the boat. Being aboard the Linda E in early spring, long in advance of the fishing season, I had organized all his tools and spare parts. I could grab anything he needed, immediately, and nobody else on board, not even Mijou, knew where I stored everything. But I passed through those hard times and stuck out the season until the end. I left after the last opening, though the Fish and Game Department hadn't yet declared the season closed. Mijou hoped for one more opening. But the fish were gone, and so was I. When I first quit, Mijou turned red and said if he ever passed me in the street, he'd look the other way. But I couldn't stay under his power any more. He said, "If you don't stay till next week, I'll charge you fifty dollars for not helping with the net when we put it into storage."

"That's fine," I answered, feeling hurt for receiving no credit for working on the Linda E that month and a half prior to the season. I had stripped all his woodwork and painted the boat. Mijou and I had worked together, companions, friends, but with me on a leash. Dog is man's best friend.

Mijou came down to the seaplane as I loaded to depart. He apologized for saying he'd look the other way and I'd be welcome back. We shook hands and I felt he accomplished what he set out to do with me. He made a good fisherman and probably made me more alert. "Bye, Mijou, thanks." I know Mijou to be a good man; his methods were just sometimes difficult. People around Ketchikan smiled and greeted him with respect. Other fishermen spoke highly of him.

His last words were, "I'm still going to charge you that fifty dollars, though."

Eva and I finish the laundry and bid goodbye again. By evening, Cha, Denis, and I are ready to paddle away. The name Ketchikan came from the Tlingit Indian word for "Spread Eagle Wings," our intention exactly.

"Let's go up to the Arctic Bar to fill our water jugs and have a brew before heading south," I say. "We still have a couple hours of light."

Inside the Arctic, Denis runs into his brother-in-law's sister. She sits and sips a beer with one of her girlfriends. Gwen, with long black hair and an Indian's soft brown complexion, invites us to spend the night, or however many we want, in her home.

"Sure," we say. Taking sleeping bags, books, food, and clean clothes from our kayaks at the city float, we move into Gwen's living room.

We drink a couple beers with Gwen and her energized red haired friend, Linda. Soon the three of us kayakers nod off to sleep, tired from resting so much on the long boat ride.

May 20, 1981

Gwen leaves early for work, to SARAH, or rather, SSRAA. The Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association is a non-profit group. They receive three percent of the commercial fishermen's gross intake to fertilize eggs. They grow fish, then release them back to sea. This is man's intervention to help perpetuate a breed so we can eat mass. And the world feeds itself...

Gwen leaves us sprawled out in the living room. Sleeping bags, our smelly shoes, and all our gear scatters about like toys in a child's room. My blue birthday t-shirt with "The one who dies with the most toys wins," written on the chest, stares me in the face. I peer out of my sleeping bag and tell Denis that the statement is not quite right.

"Change it then," he says. I take a felt pen and add below, "Only if used."

With new nylon material he bought yesterday, Denis sews an awning on his tent. The patio roof will allow Denis to keep his tent door open with a view even in wet storms. Cha's tent was designed already to be able to open, if desired, in the rain.

Cha and I cook breakfast and I can feel a tension between us. He says, "I'm thinking about taking a cook job on the shrimp boat down at the docks. Chuck told me yesterday there's an opening. You guys can just paddle around Alaska a few weeks and after I make some money, we can paddle south."

I lay some bacon strips in the fry pan and remain quiet for a minute. Then I say, "I don't know, Cha. It would be kind of hard on a trip like this to wait for a workingman. That would close off a few options, limit the possibilities..."

"You mean you wouldn't wait for me?"

"There's a good chance of that. I can't say right now. I kind of like the lack of obligations right now. Why do you need more money, anyways? You've got enough for the whole trip."

"But I'll be broke when I get home and I want to go to Mammoth Mountain for the winter and I think I'll need more film..."

"No, Cha. I can't promise you I'll wait." Denis stays quiet at the sewing machine.

"Options, suck," says Cha, getting mad at me. "I only like to have one option and just do that."

"I'm paddling out of here as soon as possible." I say, tired of the argument.

"I hate you," says Cha. He leaves the room and takes a shower.

I turn the bacon. Now the trip feels wrong. I feel wrong. Cha and I had fought before the trip, in the lake house. I came home from a party we had both been to. Cha had been tense for quite a few days in anticipation of selling his Camaro car and leaving his job. He had come home before me, so I woke him, on my knees, next to his bed, saying,

"Hey, Cha, wake up. There's a bomb... and a fire. Hey, wake up, there's a riot and a war and an earthquake..." Cha sat up quickly, turned towards me and swung his fist full steam into my face. Then he lay back down again, on his stomach. My lip instantly swelled as did my temper. I stood over him, and let my nose just drip blood on his bare back. I was mad. As I walked out of the room, I said, "I'm not so sure you'll be much fun for six months in the kayaks. I hope that punch released your hate instead of being just an indulgence."

I fry up some eggs. Denis still sews. The house is quiet except for sizzling grease and the shower running. I don't need this tension. By myself things are so easy and consistent. But when somebody gets mad, I react with reciprocal emotions, the same as when Laura or my mother would cry, I too would cry. I don't want to hate but I can't find respect at times for Cha as my traveling companion. I feel we might both be better off without one another. But can I leave the group? That might not be fair to Denis. Denis shouldn't have to decide between two people, on who to paddle with. We are a trio. I'd go alone, but would Denis want to do the trip like that? Cha has explained to me he won't travel alone again. Cha once visited Europe alone, a three-month trip planned. But he scared himself so much that he came home two months early to avoid being alone, without familiar faces. But I don't want to paddle with the group now.

We eat and clean up the living room in silence, then leave to meet Gwen downtown during her lunch break. Kicking around the hackysack in the street, waiting for noon, we see a woman emerge from the Shamrock Bar, the local strip joint. She wears high heel shoes, lots of make-up on her naturally brown skin, and her teeth are studded with what appear to be diamonds. She walks over to us and checks us each out. Then she wraps herself around Cha, whispers in his ear, and tongues his neck. Denis and I look at each other and laugh. "Some guy."

Princess introduces herself and hugs Cha. She walks him towards the bridge over the creek. Salmon already swim upstream below. When I visited Ketchikan two years earlier, a sign here, at the entrance to the upstream boardwalk which is lined with little house shops, read: "Here resided Dolly's Place, the only place on earth where both salmon and man went upstream to spawn."

Cha looks to us with that "What'll I do" expression on his face. He is still being passive to her fondling. I tell Princess, "Fifteen dollars and you can have him for an hour."

"I can have him for nothing," she says. "I'll see you later, sugar," she says to Cha. "Come into the Shamrock tonight and I'll dance for you."

We laugh our way towards Gwen's office. A fellow who had been watching the scene stops me and tells a story. "That woman would surprise you. She's from Costa Rica and practices voodoo. She actually shrinks heads."

I laugh. "I think she wants to shrink Cha's head... from hard to soft."

"No, really," this bearded fellow continues, "She wants him to see her dance because when she does, she dances to the gods. She uses a high bar and swings around. She's quite a gymnast. She runs six miles a day."

I follow where Cha and Denis headed off to and Princess comes out and grabs my arm. She says, "Tell your friend to come see me tonight. Really."

"I will."

I walk back into Gwen's office. Cha, Gwen, and Denis howl laughter in the back room. I wave to redhead Linda. She says on the phone as she waves back, "Hell, he's not mellow. Mellow is having been there and come back. He's just plain bored." She covers the mouthpiece and says, "I'm talking about my date from a couple nights ago."

I join the back-room gang. Gwen says, "Yah, I know about her. Princess came onto my boyfriend, Larry, when he first came to town." Linda walks in the room. Gwen says, "Cha even looks like Larry, doesn't he, Linda?"

Linda kicks the desk with her foot and says, "Shit!" She turns around quickly and says, "Oh, fuck, I said shit. Oh, shit, I said fuck. Oh, fuck..."

After the girls' lunch hour, we head down to the dock to check the kayaks. We get in a conversation with a fellow. Dock talk, in Ketchikan, is a highly valued pastime. It's called "bullshitting." People expect others to take time out to bullshit. So the fellow named Terry stops and hears our plans.

He says, "You guys should spend some time up around here awhile, out around Prince of Wales Island. You could paddle up by Hydaburg to Craig. There are old villages everywhere. You could paddle up Behm Canal into the Misty Fjords or go north to Glacier Bay. The wilderness only starts here." We look down on charts spread on the dock. "Those are options," says Denis. I tell the fellow that I stayed in Hydaburg with Mijou, and Terry knows him. "Sure, he finally sold the Linda E and bought a fiberglass troller. He got tired of running the purse seiner and a six-man crew. He's into the easy fishing now."

"Let's head up to the Arctic for a beer," says Denis.

Us three sit on the balcony at the Arctic Bar. It hangs over the water, seaplanes tied up below. We join others on the deck and watch a fat fellow and a blonde Amazon woman fighting. They throw words back and forth like darts. "I'd like to slosh in your twat and make you groan and beg for more," says the round man. Cha, Denis, and I burst into laughing tears.

"Fuck me naked," says the Amazon blonde. She is six foot tall and solid. "I bet you couldn't even get it up, you fat slob. I bet you're just a fat fagot." He stands up quickly, fists clenched and growling. She steps around behind our table and sits between Denis and Cha. As the big guy sits on my side of the table, she looks Cha and Denis over. Her fingers wander to Cha's hair and suddenly she forgets her feud.

"I like you," she says to Cha. "Want to go somewhere?"

Cha gives the old "what'll I do" look again and Denis says, "You're hot today, Cha." The Amazon woman begs Cha to go for a walk, but Cha says he can't right now.

Our obese table partner says, "My dad told me if you ever turn down a lady, you can never catch up again."

"It's never ketchup in Ketchikan," I say. "It's just when it's catsup, the pussy's turned down so you don't Ketchikanoria."

"What's your name," Cha asks the hustler lady.

"Pocalolo," she says. "The Hawaiian name for marijuana."

Roley poley says, "No, it's Poco Loco. That means she's a little crazy... and she is too. A couple nights ago she kicked a cop in the balls."

"Fuck me naked," says Poco Loco.

"What a good time," says Denis.

Poco Loco looks Cha in the eyes and says, "This is your lucky day. You get to turn into rabbit pellets."

We hear a man and woman screaming from inside the bar. Poco Loco says, "Oh, good. Suzie's here." She just stands and walks away from the table like she never saw us before. We drain our glasses and get ready to leave. Over the winding of a seaplane below, I hear stomach man tell Cha, "Now you're never going to catch up."

Walking out through the Arctic Bar, I notice Poco Loco in a corner with some guy, tonguing his ear.

At Gwen's, she and Linda cook hamburgers and drink beers. She offers us beers and we tell of Cha's latest woman. She says, "I've heard of her down at the office before. I'll ask about Poco Loco tomorrow. Boy, I sure got mad after you guys left today. Some guy from the Fisheries Department came in his suit and tie and started throwing around all his fishing facts. He happened to mention how lucky our salmon fishery is not to be infested with worms in the fish. Boy, did we protest. If those damn office people in the Fish Department would get out into the field, go out on a salmon boat, they'd learn that nine out of ten salmon we clean has tape worms." She raises her voice and slaps a hamburger patty like a baby's bum. "Damn people. They come in SARAH and tell us how to run the place. They go tell fishermen what they can and can't do. And they don't spend anytime learning on the water with their hands in the smelly fish. They read about the fish in college!"

"Have a beer," Cha offers with a giggle.

Linda asks, "Why didn't you get hamburger buns with sesame seeds. Those are too small too. I don't like meat hanging out of the buns, I like big firm buns with all the meat inside."

We laugh, interpreting her culinary tastes as sexual.

Understanding what she said, Linda says, "Oh, fuck." She covers her mouth. "Oh shit, I said fuck. Oh, fuck, I said shit..."

"Hey, Denis," says Gwen. "I called Jack today up at Meyer's Chuck. Larry and I are flying up this weekend. You guys should paddle on up and we'll party."

Denis thinks and answers, "That's an option."

I add, "We could. I remember stopping there a couple years ago. It's a neat little fishing village."

"It's more representative of Alaska," says Gwen. "You should come up if you have time."

Linda says, "If time flies like an arrow, then fruit flies like a banana."

"Oh, have you guys read this?" Gwen asks, holding up a copy of Coming into the Country. "It's about small Alaskan villages."

"I have. Cha's reading it right now. I think Cha is coming into the country. Sounds like a fun tree," I say.

After dinner Gwen goes out and Cha heads down to Chuck's boat to find out more about the cook job. Denis and I put on some music and relax, reading and talking plans. Hours pass and the clock rounds midnight. We decide to go downtown for a drink. The bars stay open till five in the morning in Ketchikan.

May 21 1981

"For he knew people who jump generally have something to wind them up.
But he couldn't see it." Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*

On our midnight walk to town we find Cha returning from the Marne. He joins us. We peek into every bar, looking for just the right spot. At a liquor store, a shop adjacent to and run by the bar, we buy a half pint of cheap scotch. When outside the Frontier Saloon, music strikes our ears... "Whip it, whip it good..." And we know the place is for us. After cover charge, inside we find the band wearing leather masks, bearing whips and chains. "Whip it," I yell at them. The bartender brings our pitcher and charges... what? \$7.50...?! Denis passes me some money under the table and says, "Go get a pint... of Cuervo Gold," which I do.

We sneak shots from our new bottle and notice a big Indian trying to hustle the three girls at the table next to ours. They show disgust towards him. The bouncer notices and asks the fellow to leave the bar. The Indian stands, wobbles and faces the bouncer. Both men are very big. The bouncer goes behind the bar to ask his buddy to cover him. The Indian pulls out and opens a locking blade knife and hides it behind his back, visible though to our table. When nobody says anything else, he slowly backs out the door, stumbling over a chair behind him, and leaves.

The bouncer tells us, as I sit back relaxing with the tequila in my hand, in plain view, "I wasn't too worried, I knew you guys were here and would have backed me."

"Ha," says Cha. "He had a knife."

"I knew he would," he says. "Be more inconspicuous with that bottle."

We laugh at the innocence of our obviousness. Cha runs down the street for another half pint of scotch. When he returns, Denis and I are dancing with two girls from the table next to ours, so he joins with the third. We pass around the new bottle. As the band moves into their drum roll solo, everybody slows down as the beat gets faster... everybody except me. I offer my dancing partner a shot of scotch and she refuses, so I finish the bottle and lay it on the stage. Everybody has now stopped dancing, even my partner, but I keep going, picking up the beat with the drummer, my feet moving faster and faster. I keep up the pace. After a couple of seconds, everybody sits and I do the Alpentel jiggle boogie, shuffling my feet as fast as the drum rolls, skiing around the perimeter of the dance floor. I see and hear my two buddies at our table rolling with laughter. The drum solo continues to the end of the song and the bar people cheer wildly until the next song begins, another high-speed boogie.

Two short haired Coast Guard boys yell out, "It's a wonderful day to die."

Cha and Denis now join me on the dance floor and us three ski up a storm. Nobody else dances. We do the kayak, like Chuck taught us on the Marne, and we jump in the air, round in circles, loose limbs flinging like dancing star fish. Heating up, Denis and I slip off our heavy wool pants and dance in our swim shorts.

The bar energizes, people clap and scream as we ski and dance wildly. When one couple gains the nerve to join us, several other couples follow out too. Us boys just continue, weaving our ski paths in and out of the couples, generally being rowdy. We dance barefoot.

The song ends and the bouncer tells us we have to wear our wool pants, bathing suits not accepted. A couple people boo him. The girl in the band asks Cha what we are on, and where can she get some. He says, "Take yourself a couple dollars to the bar and buy a beer."

A girl asks me how we get so much energy, and I smile and say, "VD." She doesn't understand.

Denis is also asked what drug we took, and his answer is, "Good music."

The bartender and the lead guitarist in the band ask us to come more often to liven up the place. We leave to the street, spread eagle wings. A girl with long blonde hair disappears around the corner in front of us. I chase her down. She and I sit down on the sidewalk with a reefer (what's that I refer to?). She seems very lethargic, like a real downer, so when Cha and Denis round the corner, I stand. Cha sits down with the girl and puts his arm around her while Denis trades a reefer to two guys in a truck for three quarters of a fifth of whiskey. I boogie in the street till I puke, and feel much better. When offered some more booze, I say, "No way."

We end up on the waterfront in a gazebo. Several of the town drunks join us and they are pleased to drink the whiskey. Denis wanders away, loses his cookies, and returns. Cha hangs onto the blonde girl, but neither of them talk. I ask Denis how's he doing. He shakes his hand, thumb and pinky extended, the Hawaiian sign for, "Hanging in there."

I talk with an Indian named Mike about fishing, every once in awhile asking Denis about his condition. His head hangs between his legs but he musters the energy to shake his hand. "Hanging in there." Cha and the girl sit close together, still not talking.

Mike and I get along great. A half dozen drunks sit around us.

Denis stands and staggers away, mumbling, "Home..."

I stand to leave, shaking Mike's hand goodbye. Cha asks his blonde friend if she wants to go home with him.

She answers, "I'll have to go to my boyfriend's apartment to get my keys." Her voice is now only a squeak. They wander off.

Mike tells me, "That's Crazy Chelsie he's with. She doesn't think too much."

Back at Gwen's, I drown myself with water and eat some bread. Cha and Crazy Chelsie soon arrive and sit down on the living room floor. She starts to giggle as I put on hats and funny faces, like a child would giggle at silliness. Soon the noise is very loud and Gwen comes out of the bedroom to see Cha and the girl sitting there. I fake I'm asleep, and Denis is asleep.

Next I know, it's 9:30 in the morning and the phone is ringing. Cha answers it. Gwen asks, all flustered, "Have you screwed her yet?" Cha tells her no. "Well, get her out of there. Now! These guys at the office know her and say she's dirty and she'll rip me off. She hasn't used the bathroom yet, has she?" The girl is in the bathroom. "Get her out of there, out of the house, and watch her close."

The blonde leaves. Soon Gwen arrives home and cleans the bathroom. She asks Denis, "Why did you bring Poco Loco here?"

"That wasn't Poco Loco," says Denis. "That's a different girl."

Gwen blushes and apologizes. "She wasn't your type anyways, Cha."

Denis adds, "She probably wonders what happened. She ditched her boyfriend to come here, then just got thrown out."

Gwen leaves, laughing. We hungover bums just fall back to sleep.

At five in the afternoon, the landlord comes down from upstairs. We still lie in bed, me reading Steinbeck's *Travels with Charlie*, the other two sleep. I tell him our kayak story and say, "We're leaving this town tomorrow, I hope." Denis lifts his head and says, "We don't have drinking problems. We drink, we get drunk, we fall down... no problem." His head drops back to his wadded shirt pillow.

May 22 1981

"Like the venerable moss-bearded Daniel Boone, he will have no one near him
but nature herself; and her he takes to wife in the wilderness waters,
and the best of wives she is, though she keeps so many moody secrets."
Melville *Moby Dick*

We paddle north to the grocery store and load up supplies. Packing our boats, the tension tightens between Cha and I. I really don't feel like much of the cause. As I climb in my kayak, wanting to pull ahead, alone, Cha tells me, "Nothing pleases me more than to piss you off." This pisses me off.

I paddle north in Tongas Narrows, our destination now being Meyer's Chuck. Slowly, I calm down as I look around and see what beauty there is. Deer Mountain, Ward Mountain, Juno Mountain, all rising above the spread wings of Ketchikan. The city extends it's wings, the international airport across the Narrows on Gravina Island, and the factories up in Bush Cove. I see old shipwrecks, fishing vessels thrashed on the shores, abandoned and rotting. This paddling in Alaska feels like starting the trip all over again. The vast land amazes me.

I enter into Behm Canal and wait by Guard Island for Denis and Cha. We must decide whether to cross the five miles to Caamano Point. To the south I see down Clarence Strait, into Dixon's Entrance and out to the open Pacific Ocean. A Prince Rupert ferry ship passes, its wake clashing with the southwest waves. I bounce in the aggravation of the two colliding forces.

My partners catch up. "Do we cross?" asks Cha.

"We decide. The waves go with us and it's five miles," I say.

"Let's go," says Denis. And we do.

The waves swell, some of them toppling, but all to our advantage, though we do get very wet. We surf forty feet from one another. As Denis and Cha slide into troughs between wave crests, they disappear completely from my sight. The sun shines down while the waves grow to six feet. The southwest swells hit our left sides from the rear. This action paddling seems to pass quickly.

As soon as we reach Caamano Point we search for a spot to duck in from the wetness. The beaten rock cliffs drop steep to the water, revealing no safe place to beach. Two miles further, getting anxious to find a rest spot, Denis sneaks between two rocks and discovers a rocky cove with clear calm water. Colored rocks glitter in the fluid ripples. I sit and stare into the water, mesmerized by the fluidity of vision, like watching the straw waving on a hula skirt. Clambering up the gravel beach, we drain. Water saturates us completely from the overflowing waves. I regret not having a tighter spray

skirt. After the sixteen-mile non-stop paddle, solid ground feels quite nice. We wander to the edge of the thick woods to find tent spots. I anticipate the need for my machete.

"Score," yells Denis, finding a green wooden shack. Inside is a wood stove, stacked firewood, matches, candles, lanterns, a hatchet, a machete, Ovaltine, and canned food. A bunk mounts on the wall, covered with a clean foam pad. An inscription on the barn-style door reads, "Please accept the hospitality of this cabin. Leave things as you found them. This cabin is for emergencies. If you're here, you probably need it!"

We hammer paper, rock, and scissors for the bunk. I win the floor.

"I'm glad you found that gap in the rocks, Denis. The passage to paradise."

Our gear dries over the hot stove. Denis and I play Yahtzee on a big log and sip fresh spring snowflake juice in tumblers from the cabin. I fancy up the drinks with slices of orange. We wear wool clothes and alpaca Peruvian war helmets.

Denis and Cha go to sleep early while I sit on the log watching twilight. With no wind the trees around don't move. Occasionally the light green tips of a spruce tree spring up as water drips off. The yellow tips of the budding tree give off a scent. I gather a few and steep a spruce tea over my camp stove. Leander had told me it's very high in Vitamin C. The tea even tastes lemony. I watch a drop form from the bud. It is en route, a traveler, falling from the sky, draining back to the ocean. I feel like the drop. Eventually, my body will too return to the sea and evaporate away. As a drop of water, I can fall in the mountains that I love so much, a balanced and harmonized snowflake. Drip, drop, tweet, blah.

Somewhere I lost my kayak's rain cap. I had it this morning. It probably fell out somewhere, like when I rushed to get away from Cha at the grocery store dock.

With my recorder, the night getting very dark, I learn new songs: "And the tide rushes in, and washes my passage away...", and "The Fool on the Hill."

May 23, 1981

"fortitude; strength of mind that allows one to endure
pain or adversity with courage" *American Heritage Dictionary*

I stare at the various animal traps hanging on the wall as I lie in my sleeping bag. Somebody must have built this as a hunting cabin.

We launch our kayaks back through the two rocks, entering rolling, smooth ocean swells. Rain torrents. Large water drops hit the saline sea surface, bouncing into the air in a nipple rebound. We paddle hard and steady, passing drift trees stranded twenty feet above our heads from the high tide. In Hydaburg we would use the tide to strand the Linda E high and dry so we could copper paint the exterior hull. The copper would help keep barnacles away. The tides are time standards for water folk who plan the days accordingly. Some bays dry out at low tide and all fishing boats are left on the mud. Now I see these huge poles stranded so high and I wonder how to use the tremendous tide power. I've heard talk of putting turbos at the mouths of bays which would empty daily and thus generate electricity.

I slow down a couple miles from Meyer's Chuck. The others paddle on, out of sight and free from my thoughts. Giant rock slabs slice and jab into the water, frozen in place from the last glacial age. The fissures and cracks dwarf me. Close to the wall, I look

down at many purple and orange starfish. I like paddling solo. Maybe we can break up our trio for a week or so when we return to British Columbia.

One-inch fish jump through the kelp. If I had a net, I'd have some fine bait. I drop my jig worm down through the kelp, un-reeling it from my hand line stick. The smell of low tide is strong, all the exposed sea growth emitting odors. Bouncing my worm off the sea floor, I feel no response. I paddle on.



I arrive in Meyer's Chuck at nine in the evening. Cha and Denis sit drinking beers on a dock where twenty or so boats moor. Above the water I see some homes built on piers and a trading post. "We haven't found Jack yet," says Denis, "But one fellow said we've been expected."

We paddle away from the village to a camp left by another person under big old cedars. He stayed here for six months. The visqueen tarp he used for a shelter scatters about the camp. A fallen cedar tree lies split almost into fine shingles. They rot in the rain. Tin cans and beer bottles litter the forest around the visqueen camp. We fall right to sleep after our wet eighteen-mile paddle.

May 24, 1981

I awaken late to watch a sea gull chase and dive at a slow soaring eagle. Eagles have been even more abundant since we've reached Alaska. The bald eagle gets fed up, grabs the sea gull by the neck, and dunks him in the water, then flies away.

The moss under my tent is thick, inches of it, so the rain runs right through. Big leafed skunk cabbage surrounds. Its smell is mild compared to the evergreen scents. Rain falls again. I can hear it above the trees. For the first half hour the trees keep us dry. But

they will also keep dripping a half hour after the rain stops. Denis and I play Yahtzee in the half dome. "We need sun," yells Cha.

"We'll have a high pressure system all the way to Seattle," I yell through the nylon. I like Denis' new rain awning. The view through the forest is valuable.

Denis says, "Rain isn't bad. Then we'll appreciate the sun even more."

"Besides, I'd hate to have this wonderful moss dry up," I add.

We paddle our empty kayaks around to the back chuck, where Jack lives. I receive nasal orgasms from the pollen and cedar and swamps. We pass a floating house moored away from shore. Jack's home sits on solid ground. Jack is an elder fellow cooking up a pot of coffee. We meet Larry, Gwen's boyfriend. He looks a bit like Cha, the beard and rosy cheeks. Jack wears Eskimo slippers made by his mother-in-law. She was a true igloo-liver way up north, using seals for fur, food, and oils.

At my request Larry tells us of his job. "I count fish in the fall and spring, hiking up the rivers and looking into pools."

"Do you see bears?"

"Sure. All the time in the fall. I carry a gun then, mostly because my partner is scared of them. I've never shot a bear before. If I just make a lot of noise and move around a lot, they leave me alone. I wouldn't want to sneak up on one. There aren't supposed to be Grizzlies in this area."

"I've seen em," says Jack, pouring the coffee.

"So have I," says Larry. I look down at my wrist. The leather bear bracelet Laura tied on at the locks still circles.

"Do you eat bear?" I ask.

"Some people do. They eat spring bears. I don't," says Larry. "Fall bears eat old dead fish so the meat can be full of trichinosis."

"How come the water is so orange around here?" I ask.

Gwen answers, "Tannic acid. Rotting cedar. They say it gives the shits if you drink it."

"What's a few squirts here and there," I say.

"Towards the end of summer water gets scarce around here," says Jack. "The rocky ground won't hold water. It all runs off. After a good rain you'll see waterfalls everywhere. We collect it in fifty-gallon drums from the roof, and we filter it from the swamps. The land will hold even less in a few years. The government is supposed to clear-cut all the trees on this peninsula."

Gwen and Larry say they have to leave. We paddle around to the front chuck to see them off. Meyer's Chuck is very short, so their seaplane tracks on the water until twenty feet from the rocks, for maximum speed, then lifts dangerously over the isthmus. My heart thumps as I watch the plane shoot out of the bay on a routine takeoff.

Cha follows a clue given by Larry to the hot fishing spot. He buys frozen herring from the trading post. Jack invites Denis and I to the Sunday town picnic.

We join the town's people. They serve halibut steaks and both white and red salmon. The fish were cooked wrapped in skunk cabbage and foil over the fire. We eat salads and cakes. Tubs full of beer and ice tempt us so Denis and I sip a few and talk with Jack and his brother, Joe. Jack breathes hard, working for his air. He retired after living and working in Edmonds, Washington, most his life. Joe, having lived here for some

years, boasts of his four years supply of food; salted herring, smoked salmon, dried fruits, pickles and grains. Two kids run by us screaming. Joe pats the smallest boy on the head.

The mother yells, "Don't run or you'll trip on your face." The boy steps on rocks over the water. The mom yells again, "Don't get in the water. Don't go beyond that rock."

The boy pulls down his pants in front of the crowd and pees. Denis whispers to me, "That's his way of telling his mother, 'I don't tell you what to do, so piss off.'" The boy pulls his pants off the rest of the way and jumps in the water. He swims to a floating log.

Before leaving the Chuck back to camp, Denis stops to call Suzy. Suzy and Denis were steady for eight years but they broke up last fall. Their friendship still remains strong. Denis explains, "It's kind of pointless to stay together. We would only get together again if we decided to have a family." He returns from making the call, a bit disappointed. "She wasn't even home, but I talked to Greg, her brother. Kind of expensive call to not even talk to her. But the operator said I talked by way of a satellite. My voice traveled over the North Pole, down to the Equator, and back to Bellevue. I just talked around the world for the price of seven hundred miles. That's a deal!"

We paddle towards the purplish orange sunset, the clouds and islands in the distance-tinted blue. Cha catches up, fish tied to his deck. Excited, he says, "Man. Boy. Yessirree, Bob, yah uh uhuh, mmmhmm yah uhuh. MMMmmm. I caught fish. You should have seen the dead sea lion floating next to me. I hope you guys are starved, I got six fish."

"We're stuffed. We ate mass at the party," says Denis.

"Oh," says Cha, with a disappointed tone.

"But nice fishing though, Cha," says Denis.

I sit with Cha as he cooks his fish by the tide pools at Visqueen Camp. Mussels and barnacles line the rocks, but I see no crabs. Seals seem to have slackened a bit since leaving the San Juans.

Telling about today's picnic, I mention to Cha about Joe's food stash. "I think it's neat to have food put away for later times, just in case."

Cha says, "That's stupid. We'll never have a food shortage."

I say, "People have in the past, in Joe's day even. Seems smart to me. I've always thought we took food for granted. The old Safeway may not always be."

"Bull shit," says Cha. I take this as my clue to leave to my tent.

Now I sit alone. How I want to paddle this trip solo. I've never been alone for a period of time. I don't know what loneliness is. I don't even think I could get lonesome with all these trees and eagles. And slugs. Why do Cha and I clash so much. I take offense when I shouldn't and he insults me unlike he does anybody else. Why?

May 25, 1981

I paddle away from Visqueen Beach first, solo. We head south. The water rests calm, rain falls hard. I find a floating eagle feather and attach it to an alligator clip and snap it on my bowline. The raindrops rebound up from the sheet water surface almost two inches. Eyeing down the centerline of my kayak, past and through the eagle feather, I sing songs, whistle, and travel in my mind with memories and plans. Two eagles, small like immature balds, twirl, falling through the air, claws connected. Before crashing, they

release their grips and fly away in different directions. What grace they fly with, like skiing on 224 cm downhill skis. Strong, efficient strokes. A raven flies by, flapping incessantly, like a skier trying to go fast on short skis.

I pick the eagle feather from my bow and wave it through the air. The resistance is considerable. No wonder the eagle flies so easily and can glide so far. I continue paddling, feeling the resistance of my paddle blade in the water. I slow my strokes. Steady and long reaching, I glide much smoother. The wind picks up from the south, throwing small one-foot waves at my boat, slowing my progress. Resistance.

"What is, Mr. Eagle?" I ask, counting six eagles above. The wind howls, seeming to sing. I pick up the song, "The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind..."

I beach cold and wet. As I wait for my partners, I dance on the sand for about fifteen minutes to warm up. After lunch we resume into the rain and wind. Denis and I paddle, singing together. This day feels almost like any workday. We focus our minds in order to appreciate. Like pounding nails or typing at a desk. I sing, "I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don't feel so sad..."

Waves slosh over my boat and drip inside, between my spray deck and chest. Waterfalls cascade down the cliffs along shore. "Let's camp," I yell to the guys.

In a little bend of shore, just north of Niblack Point, we step easily onto the sand beach. Denis stands and swings wildly in the air. He rubs his eyes. "They got Kamikaze bugs here. They start from ten feet away and buzz straight into your eye."

I stand, untouched by the bugs and say, "Who is they and who is you?"

Scrounging along the driftwood, Cha yells out, "Score!" He holds up two faded Rainier beer cans, the red mountains barely visible. "They're unopened. Alright, we're living off the land."

"Who says carbos are hard to scavenge up here?" I ask. "Let's start a movement; drift beer, not logs."

The Rainiers still taste mountain fresh. Our worked bodies absorb the alcohol for a quick buzz. We set up camp, moving driftwood around so we can sleep above the high tide line. My float bags show definite use, shredding at the seams. I hang my wet things in the wind to dry.

In dry clothes, I sit quietly on the point for at least an hour. Then I jump rope. Cha soon joins me with his rope. Stretching, I feel revived after the hard day's work. A little exercise seems all I need to freshen my blood and attitude. Cha and I swim, our hearts still pounding from the exertion. When we get out of the water our sped-up systems warm us quickly.

Denis sits playing with a big bug. It grips his thumb and won't let go. He tugs at it lightly, but it still hangs on. Tired of it, he says, "Enough of this noise," and presses his thumb against a log. A squish maneuver.

Cha says, "He's a dead player now."

Denis lifts his thumb and the bug still lives. He flings it into space saying, "Enough of this."

Then the food trip begins. After several pieces of bread, three apples, a half-pound of cheese, a half dozen dried figs, I'm still starving. I mix up my secret weapon... Krusteaz pancakes. After about a dozen of these little gut bombs, my zachelies are tamed. The food trip subsided, I am left stunned... the second half of tweet tweet, blah blah.

And of course sleep must follow as I'd hate to digest any of the junk in my stomach before an eight-hour rest. In my zipped up tent, I close my eyes. The wind blows outside, rippling my fabric walls.

May 26, 1981

I persuade the other two reluctant kayakers to paddle this morning. Usually all it takes is one of us who cares to persuade the others. The first six miles to Caamano Point, past our retreat cove and green cabin, pass quickly. I paddle through bouquets of seaweed which look like individual crab claws floating in bundles. Air pockets fill their shape. Cha scoops up a two and a half inch diameter glass float and decides it will be our crystal ball. "Good," I say. "We can use that to determine our Kayaker's Reality."

From Caamano Point we paddle against light swells across the five miles of Behm Canal. During the last couple of miles the wind increases, splashing water in our faces. I speed up, feeling too vulnerable if the wind should pick up more. Leaving the others behind, I chant one line of blues over and over, "Don't rock the boat, baby, wooo ooh, don't rock it now... woooo now now now now, now now..."

I near an old front-loading ferry, the kind with a bow gate for the loading ramp. The Seahawk looks like it's been converted to a home. Behind me miles of water stretch making it seem like I paddle from nowhere. A man's voice comes over the Seahawk's loudspeaker, "Are you crazy or do you just look nuts?" I raise my arms and paddle in the air showing I don't know the answer. The loudspeaker laughs. People on board shoot photos.

Clear of the waves, I paddle into Tongas Narrows, past Vallenar Point. Deer graze in the grass. An eagle perches on a rock point, facing into the wind. His wings blow up behind like a cape. I name the rock Cape Eagle and land my kayak to wait for my companions. I kick among some rocks, most of them the size of Cha's crystal ball, and munch on some sea lettuce, the light green ribbons covering the rocks exposed by low tide. Mijou took me during May on the Linda E to gather sea lettuce. He claimed May to be the only month the food is best, so we gathered fifteen gunnysacks full. "You gather that just like an Indian," he told me. We later spread the lettuce to dry on bed sheets in his father's boat barn. His father, the builder of the Linda E, ninety-two years old, helped us. The old man still chopped wood and lived alone, across the street from Mijou.

Mijou also took me seining with his small net, one that natives of Alaska are allowed to use before the commercial season opens, to fish for home use. We canned the salmon at his house. The cans cooked inside a fifty-gallon drum full of water, over a fire.

Here on Cape Eagle, I munch the sea lettuce but it doesn't chew very well. After we had dried the lettuce in Mijou's barn, we would eat it like popcorn or throw it in a soup to reconstitute. Cha and Denis paddle up. I turn over a rock and a tiny eel squirms about. I cover him up again.

Cha says, "Man, the whole paddle I thought about a hamburger and french fries, a milk shake and about three kinds of donuts."

We laugh at his cravings. I tell him to eat some Krusteaz pancakes. Cha finds a can of unopened Pepsi, but it doesn't refresh us at all.

Paddling slowly on down Tongas Narrows, I feel happy I decided not to leave the group. Where would my life go if I just avoided friends and isolated myself. Learning to

cooperate is my education. We are brothers and must watch out for each other, no matter the friction. The problems are superficial anyway. I tuck in close to shore. An older woman floats her boat out to a buoy. She tugs on a rope strung through pulleys like a clothesline. She's a tough gal in rubber boots with flyaway gray hair. The sleeves of her sweatshirt roll to her elbows. She yells to me, "My son paddles one of those things." I paddle closer and she starts spitting out words, aching to tell me everything before I leave. "My son does everything. Hell, he's a college graduate and he skis and fishes halibut. He's climbed Mt. McKinley. He's been everywhere."

"Really?" I squeeze in. A bald eagle flies close overhead.

She says, "Damn eagles. I hate them. And I can't shoot 'em. They'd charge me a thousand bucks. Darn American symbol and such. People down south think the bird is so amazing but all it does is kill my pedigreed puppies. They take my chickens too. So do the minks, but luckily, the eagles get the minks. I got three dogs. The golden retriever doesn't mind me, but the collie and cockapoo obey good. I don't want any more dogs, unless I find another collie. I'm a sucker for collies."

I stroke the water back and forth to stay in the same spot. I smile as the lady rattles on.

"Why, I haven't left this home more than six times in the last twenty years. That Ketchikan side of the channel is too crazy for me. I can't afford the gas anyways. Damn rich people. It's all their fault gas costs so much. They just drive all the time and the price don't mean nothing. I have two years food stashed. There will be a shortage again some day, I know there will with all these crazy people. I remember when we rationed food fifty years ago. We had books telling us just what we could eat and how much. I came to Alaska in 1934 and later acquired this land, the last of the homesteads this side of Ketchikan. That was in '56."

Two otters pop up next to my kayak and listen also. Cha and Denis have paddled out of sight. I'm ready to move on. "I..."

But she interrupts me, "I use rain water for my home. I have a three hundred gallon holding tank. But when my husband was alive the tank burst. Water gushed everywhere. But my husband fixed it with steel bands..."

"It's been nice talking with you," I squeeze in quickly. "I've got to catch my buddies..."

"Okay. Bye now," she says, securing the lines of her boat. She walks away without another word.

Cha and Denis set up on a beach with easy tent spots and lots of driftwood. A wrecked thirty foot-fishing vessel tilts high up on the beach. We join together on the boat and sing Gilligan's Island, then we trot off into the woods to fill water bottles from a river. Back at camp I jump rope, wearing only tennis shoes. Denis lies naked on his blanket. Cha rounds the corner, walking with a girl. We quickly dress. She doesn't talk much, so we go on with our play. A deer carcass lies on the beach. I sit next to it.

Cha says, "Now that's a dead player," as he shoots a photo. Soon the girl leaves to her home around the corner of a bay.

Our camp sits two miles from the Ketchikan International Airport. Jets roar out their thunder each takeoff. Seaplanes and helicopters constantly buzz low, coming and going from the city. The sun has found us. Our gear scatters around drying.

My tent nestles into a cleared area under a burnt cedar tree and an overhanging hemlock. I wish I had tested its staying ability before setting camp. I sure like these soft beds of moss and beds of sand. Better even than a bed of coals. You betcha.

Across the channel, above the numerous hills and mountains, I see streaks of rain striking down to earth. I feel my nose is so much more sensitized than when I left Seattle. The greens of the woods and dead animals and low tides flush into my nasal passage. My nose seems almost compatible to my sense of sight now.

Alaskans haven't seemed quite as interested in our trip as folks were down south. Maybe because life is so hard-core here without even climbing into a kayak. A lot of paddlers have passed through here. Jack told us in Meyer's Chuck of the two Puerto Ricans, Chino and Miko, who came through last summer in folding Klepper kayaks. He also told us of Ginger and her friend who rowed up the same summer as I fished up here. Jack housed them in Meyer's Chuck, and thought it fun that I graduated from the same high school as Ginger.

Paddling by myself is helping me get along with Cha. I've been avoiding conversations with him, though. Seems like when I share my observations, opinions, and theories with him, he negates me without caring about the contents of my words. I feel like he keeps challenging me, trying to trap me, to prove me a hypocrite. But I tell him I am a hypocrite. I think everybody is to some extent. So I am finding time easier to pass playing in my own head. I did the same with Mijou. It's easier than having somebody try to change my personal opinions. If we all thought the same, what would happen to individuality? Every snowflake is different. An eagle eats meat and a cow eats grass. The difference is there. Why change it? Problems arise when beliefs clash; like an eagle eating the old lady's pedigreed puppies. Both justify their own, but their own contradicts the other.

I try to understand other points of view. I want to understand why people think as they do. When I read a book, I try to see the author's reality and how he got there. I don't want to siphon everything through what I know. I want to see the other perspective. An eagle doesn't eat meat because I like steak. He has his own reasons. I wish Cha would not try to change my ideas to his, not try to change the meat of my thoughts into hash of his own perceptions. But then, I'm just as guilty of the meat grinding of ideas as he is.

Tomorrow we hit Ketchikan again, to restock food. I will sew a new rain cap at Gwen's. This time I hope to leave town before twenty-four hours pass. I will stay with this trio, as I did with Mijou, no matter how aggravated I become with the forced companionship. I am blind now to the benefits I will later realize. I now appreciate every word Mijou forced into my cluttered brain. He injected his ideas on me. I made it hard on myself accepting those ideas but now I can focus on Mijou and understand why he treated me so. As Captain of a fishing vessel, he needed me to be an efficiently operating piece of equipment. And he never intended to have that interfere with our friendship. He acted as he felt justified. Maybe Cha and I can flow these waters smoothly together, each solo in our kayaks. Time does wonders for revealing these things.

I climb from my tent to relieve my bladder. The tree still hangs, threatening my bed. I kind of like the slight insecurity it poses, the pending exterminator. Goodnight.

5/27/81

I set out early to paddle the seven miles to town amidst the heavy traffic of Tongas Narrows. Speedboats, fishing vessels, and seaplanes busy around. I lean back, paddling slow, dreaming. On one boat, a man and his lady fish. They yell to me, "How many miles to a gallon you get?" I tell them a gallon of beer can go a long way. I paddle on, thinking how true that is. I drink the beer, pee it out. It flows down to the sea, up to the clouds, then back to the mountains. It then flows down the Artesian River and finally is made into beer again.

Gusts of wind creep slowly over the water, ripples being my telltale for the invisible forces. One seaplane lands a couple kayak lengths away, too close for my comfort. I like to respect the human error margin. The plane motors over to a dock and the emerging people point at me. A gargling growl comes from behind and I turn to see a grizzly size sea lion swimming his way towards the city. "Hey... hey, you..." I yell, but he cares nothing for such idle conversation.

Denis catches up just as I reach the city limits. We mellow paddle into the city floats and wait in the street for Cha. In the auto parts parking lot one fellow bends over his car engine as his girlfriend stands by. I admire the fine womanly features. The guy looks up, misinterpreting my stares. "Yah, it's a car, fellah," he says.

I instantly classify the guy as a jerk for his nice words and say "Car car go beep beep." Cha joins us and we walk up to Gwen's.

With new material, I sew my rain cap. When trying it out on the cockpit, I discover it too small. "Shit," I say. "Oh fuck, I said shit. Oh shit, I said fuck..."

I sew a wedge into the rain cap.

Testing it again, again it is too small.

We spend one last night on Gwen's floor.

Chapter 7

"More Guts than Dick Tracy"

"There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath."

Moby Dick by Melville

May 28, 1981

We squeeze into our overloaded kayaks. Bread and beers tuck between my legs, a bunch of bananas on the side. Our half submerged boats contain enough food to last across the Pacific Ocean stretch of Dixon's Entrance. By two o'clock we paddle away from Ketchikan. With my feet on deck, I relax and play my recorder, the theme song from Billy Jack. When the song finishes a crowd of Indians cheer from the shipping dock. "Alright, Billy Jack. Yeah!"

At the south end of town Cha decides he needs to dump a load. He climbs from his kayak onto the red buoy number four and pinches a loaf. He drops his doo doo. I paddle away backwards making fun of him. Sitting bare on a towel, the sun warms me. The water's calm.

We head southeast past Pennock Island. Squeezing through the sport fishermen's boats off Mountain Point, we cross George and Carroll Inlets. Denis leads us to a cove that echoes like an amphitheater. The rocks and trees slope up the curved hill amplifying the sound of tiny waves lapping at the shore. An old barge lies wrecked on the beach. Denis whispers, "I hear ghosts in the trees." The wind is still, yet the trees shift and creak. Above Ghost Beach looms Black Mountain. To the south, past Bold Island, clouds and dark water approach.

We paddle on as far as Round Island in Revillagigedo Channel, when the wind sends us to find camp. A long stretch of sand on Bold Island reveals the lush green we have learned usually means fresh water. As we unpack, the tide rushes in so fast over the wide beach that we hustle to keep our kayaks out of its reach. We climb into the dark woods and set camp under the mossy trees.

May 29, 1981

I sit in my tent doing the tide calculations, my normal contribution to the group. Cha peeks his head in the door and asks, "How's the Ajax laundry detergent man?"

"Huh?" I question.

"Well, how's the Tide man?"

"Oooooh."

A routine pack. We look across the channel to the path of a giant rock slide. Rocks, trees, and dirt deposit at the base of the thousand foot wide, five hundred foot long swath. No-see-em bugs attack viciously. We swat at their bites and scratch immediately. Once on the water, we hope to be free of the pests. Several follow Cha out. As he joins us we kill them all. Swat. Smack. Pow..." Don't kill that one," I yell. "That's Fred. He's my friend."

Swak! "He's a dead player now," says Cha.

"So is Bob Marley," says Denis, reminding us of our latest news.

"Look," points Cha. "A swimming crab." It floats a foot beneath the surface, seven feet above the eel grass bottom.

A flock of Canadian geese flee from Turn Island. "Look at that one fly a complete circle," I say. "He's going to the end of the line. Now he has to fly like crazy to catch up..."

"It's his job, man," says Cha.

"Gotta keep up with the Jones," I add. "I wonder if they fly in the 'V' formation to cut wind resistance. And like breaking a trail through the snow on skis, when the leader gets tired, he falls to the rear."

"Your goose is as good as mine," says Denis.

A group of eagles circle above Round Island, clouds above them. On our kayak decks we have tied fishing poles, tennis shoes, beers, pots and pans, water bottles, a crab trap, life vests, and a spare paddle, separated in two pieces. Standing up in front of me flies my eagle feather rock clip.

Cha lets out his fishing line with a salmon lure. He trolls as we paddle towards the south entrance of Behm Canal. Tongas Mountain to the left reveals its 3700 foot snow covered summit. At my request, Denis feeds me information about fishing. Cha also listens. "When you play the fish, switch the reel off the clicker. That's just for when you're snoozing to let you know. Also, for more entertainment use your thumb instead of the drag for bottom fish and stuff."

Cha says, "When I catch a fish I'm usually so excited I just reel him in and forget to play him at all."

"After you catch a few you can even have fun playing a little rat using you thumb."

I consider for a moment back to my childhood wonders. I didn't understand why people spent whole days fishing and not even care if they got fish. Now I see fishing can be a pastime for someone to go sit in a boat or on the bank of some river and chew on a piece of grass and hum a tune. Fishing grants an excuse to relax and be outside, where actually no excuse is needed. Fishing adds a focus for a pleasant day, and maybe adds food to the dinner. Playing the fish. Playing. VD.

We pop open Rainiers as the rain begins to fall. The spray decks go on and we use their elastic loops to hold beers secure while we paddle. Cha and Denis slide a half mile ahead while I write notes. I struggle to catch up. Do the geese actually struggle to catch up with their flock when they fall behind?

From Point Alva we cross the five miles to Black Point. Rain soaks us. Our hands shrivel as they would soaking in a bathtub. Even our navels fill up. Off Boca de Quadra sounds a loud "Pooosch." A whale's head and blow hole appears on the surface. He rolls forward revealing the small dorsal fin a few feet back from the head. The whale is long and thin and swims straight toward Cha, seventy-five feet away. The whale is more gray than an orca and lacks the white saddle marks. "Pooosch." He rises twenty-five feet in front of Cha, fifty from Denis and me. "Pooosch." He rises one more time, a hundred feet behind us, swimming away.

"That was a minke whale I think. He looked about twenty-five feet long," I say.

"Boy," says Cha. "I was scared. My heart beat two hundred miles an hour. Man!"

"Boy man," says Denis.

We paddle into Kah Shakes Cove where we heard that hot springs boil from the ground. The cove recedes inland a couple of miles. We hear cackles of an eagle, the loud consecutive tweets, increasing frequency, kind of like I imagine a skipping stone would sound if each bounce on the water squeaked. Deep in the cove we see an old rotting shack falling to the ground under two tall alders. An aged apple tree grows in a clearing, a leftover from the old homestead. Walking the beach I notice the masses of driftwood, much of it drilled or with cut ends. I am surprised to know that man has handled so much of the timber, even here in the wild. I hear what sounds to be running water, so the search begins for the hot springs. I even think I smell sulfur. But the water noise turns out to be the rustling alders. The sulfur must be on my brain... soul for brain.

We head out to the cove amongst the hooded gulls. The birds have white undersides and tails. Gray colors the wings. Some wear black hoods, some gray, and some are hoodless. I wonder if they have prejudices regarding hood color? The rain has stopped. Denis and I paddle sitting on the rear of our kayaks, feet in the cockpits. This is a little less stable but the variety is comfortable.

Fully rounded birds, like pintail ducks loaded down with fish, bounce along the water. They are too bloated to fly. Just too too too...

And my weight is too much for the Easy Rider kayak to support on the deck. The fiberglass pops in. I slide back to the molded seat. With a punch the kayak pops back to shape. I'm just too too too... Denis' thicker boat holds his weight just fine.

Foggy bay looms in front of us. We paddle in, tired from the twenty-five mile day, and look for camp. A pair of high speed ducks zoom past. If they can keep up that action for a long time they could be in Seattle in a jiff. Or they might poop out quickly from the great exertion. Or are they stressed, flying from danger, or, or...?

Instantly the bugs zero in on our bodies and begin their meals. We land on a Caribbean white beach of De Long Island. Several seals swim up to welcome us. These are the beginning waters of Dixon's Entrance. We hope the water remains this calm for a couple days.

The tents view east into Very Inlet, the storm shelter spot Eva recommended. She had to hole up there in her sailboat. We eat triple decker sandwiches with veggies and cheese and mass garlic. Garlic maybe will hold off the bug bites for a short time, at least till the squeeters acquire a taste for it.

We each read in our own tents, satisfied with the long paddle today. In the dark of night something screams, a wild cat, or...?

May 30, 1981

Denis and I walk the white sandy beach around the south end of De Long Island to check wave action. Bites cover our bare skin from the hordes of mosquitoes. I try to keep my fingernails from scratching. They provide such nice temporary relief, but at the cost of maybe opening a wound and suffering more later. The ocean swells roll onto the island's west side. They crash on the rocks, but out a distance the waves move smoothly without white caps. We decide to paddle soon.

Denis returns to camp while I sit on a rock to play my recorder. A mink scurries by ten feet away. He looks like an overweight person with his legs too short. Another of

the sleek furred critters picks up a sea anemone and walks away with it in his mouth. Do minks eat those? I've heard that on Russian mink farms they feed the animals whale meat. I play my first tune to an audience of seals... "Ah Dee Doo Ah Dee Doo Dah Day, Ah Dee Doo Ah Dee Day Dee, he whistled and he sang till the green woods rang, and he won the heart of a la-a-a-a-dy..." Next tune for my seals I play, "I'd like to be under the sea in an octopus' garden in the shade..."

At my feet a small bug attacks a short but steep sand pile. He could easily trot around it but instead he runs up full speed. The faster he runs, the more sand he kicks out behind. Making no progress, he runs faster, his metabolism racing. The sand flings backwards. He goes nowhere. "Nowhere bug please listen, don't you know what you're missing..." The bug even wears wings that he doesn't use. The poor stressed thing is blinded by his own efforts. I probably would be too. I probably look the same when I jump rope for close to an hour, burning in one spot. Seems like the insect desires the goal so much that he blinds himself to easier ways. If he sat down, emptied his mind, he'd soon discover the path around the obstacle. He might even enjoy a nice flight over the problem, wings spread, drifting on a breeze. "Nowhere bug, the world is at your command..." Nowhere... now here.

The morning's sun shines between swiftly passing clouds. We pack up and head out to the open ocean. Wind gusts in our faces, strong at moments. We round De Long Island into bigger waves than we've ever entered before. But not the exploding kinds. These just roll gently in from the west. The swells are fun, a new terrain sensation. Behind each wave my partners disappear from sight.

Within minutes a few of the five and six foot waves begin to cap and break on us. Our skin, bare to the sun, chills to the cold water. My bow line stretches between the two cleats a couple feet in front of the cockpit, acting as an initial break for the wave, halting some of the water from splashing on my drip deck. The water spreads a thin film over the blue fiberglass and with the correct angles my eyes receive prisms of light, colors of the rainbow. To head south, our desired direction, we must paddle sideways to the action. The wild surf bounces our pods, the undulations sometimes hiding Cha and Denis from my sight for several consecutive waves. With his waterproof Minolta, Denis shoots a few shots of the fun. Cha tries with his thirty-five millimeter OM-1 but the saltwater is too threatening for the expensive equipment.

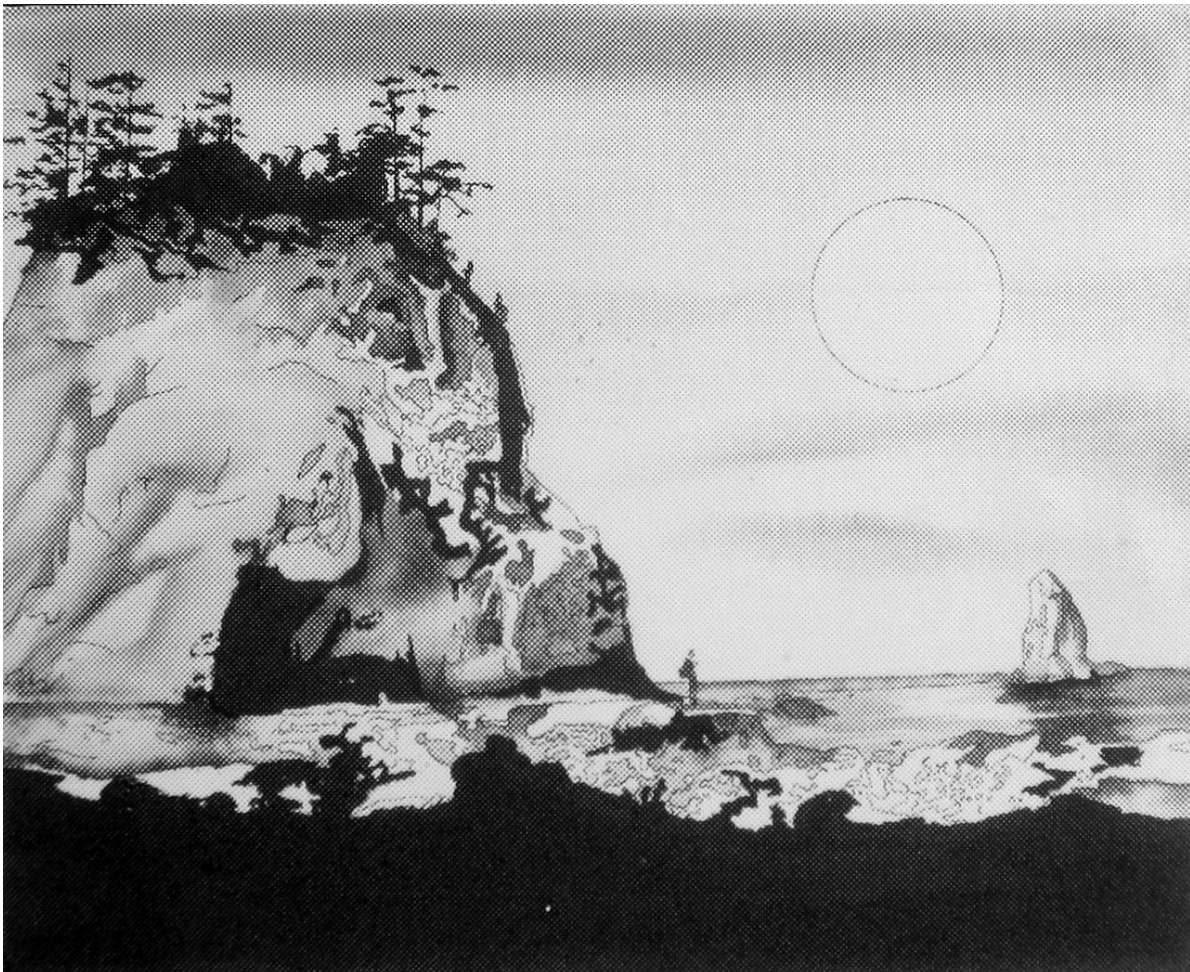
An hour and a half pass. We paddle sideways to the rollers and turn straight into the breakers so they won't flip us. We progress only two miles. I'm the first to yell, "This is crazy, Denis. Let's take the day off. I don't feel like working..."

Unanimously we decide to paddle around to the inside of the south end of Foggy Cove. We pull onto a beach with fresh water trickling through the woods. My adrenalin subsides once again, behind the protection of the cove. Removing spray decks, we relax next to the kayaks, watching the surge. Even the water in the calm of the bay looks like a split level living room. Water shifts in planes, some two feet up from others, rising and falling like tectonic plates under the San Andreas fault.

I sit on a rock wondering just what my limits in a kayak would be. I could probably never find my true limit. If my kayak flipped and I lived, I would learn from the situation. If I happened into the same circumstances a second time, I could avoid being flipped. I can only cross a new threshold, not find a limit. Today we approached a new threshold but we escaped finding it. We ducked into this cove without any revelation

other than we can paddle those waters. Slowly, but we can do it. Living under the threshold means I may not get hurt or thrown from a kayak, but I may not cross into new realms. Like a mountain climber climbing consecutively tougher ascents. Every mistake should be an education and enable me to proceed further next time. Isn't evolution the process of making mistakes? I like to live among action, to tempt new planes. I pour dry sand on a pile between my legs. The pile grows. I always stand on the top of such a pile, and as I pour on more experience the pile grows. I don't find a limit to the pile's size, I only cross new thresholds. Sometimes I wonder if my only limit is my own disbelief in myself. If I believe in myself I can pour more sand on my pile, knowing I can shuffle on through back to the top. Some sand slides down to help build the foundation more, but the pile still grows. If I scare, back off, the wind would erode my sand pile. Like if I were to go home, lie in bed and eat Twinkies. For me security is in choosing to climb bigger waves, to pour more sand on my pile. I can even learn from the success and failure of others. Once I believe something possible, it is that much easier to attain. I can feed on the thresholds reached by people before me. I'm healthy and with a proper focus I should be able to do just about anything anybody else can, and more.

I break a black veined white translucent rock on another rock. Layers split, almost like the separation of crystal. Denis sees me breaking rocks and scolds, "You destructive human."



I defend myself, of course. "What do you mean? I'm just working the action nature would eventually do. Enough big waves would turn this beach into nice sand. I'm just nature myself."

Denis comes back with, "Well, you've got your work cut out for you then."

"C'mon Mark," says Cha. "Quit spacing. Let's go dig some clams for dinner."

"Atta boy Cha," I answer. We walk down and dig into the sand at the low tide line. While we dig, each of us piling up our clams, we continually splash each other. As soon as we figure we have enough food, the real fight begins. I chase Cha through the shallow water and tackle his legs. I escape and he chases me. He tackles. We laugh and kick water then run out to deeper water. We swim further and for a longer time than we have yet in this cold water. And it feels good. A new threshold.

An old barge style dock floats in the bay. Cha and I run around the shore and find an old rotting shack. The bugs attack wildly, loving our sweet garlic smell. I yell to the dock in the water, "Hey Doc, I need an I.V."

"An intravenous?" asks Cha, the E.M.T.

"No. An Infinite Vacation," I answer, the VDer.

Denis and I set tents back in the woods, clearing spots with my machete. Cha plots his camp on the beach a few inches above the seaweed left by the previous high tide. Cha cooks us a great dinner with clams, rice, cheese, and vegetables. "Soup's on," he calls. We come running through the woods barefoot. We haven't worn shoes since Ketchikan.

"The feet are sensitive little floppers, aren't they?" I say to Denis as we tiptoe over barnacled rocks. "No more shoes. So much for modern conveniences."

As we approach, Cha drops some of the casserole in the dirt. He looks like he's ready to swear. I intercept him, "Cheese and rice got all muddy."

The feast fills our tummies. We toss the couple extra clams, the few that didn't open, back into the water of the incoming tide. The clams spin through the air and Denis says, "'Whoa, wow, what a ride,' that clam's saying."

After dinner we eat oranges for dessert and discuss possibilities for better waterproofing of the kayaks in big waves. "We could sew a couple straps onto the spray deck to go over the shoulders. Then those big waves wouldn't pool up in the spray skirt," says Denis.

"Or use like a tank top wetsuit which velcros to the top of the spray deck so we seal ourselves almost completely," I suggest.

"Seal yourself," says Cha to our marine friend who pops up in the bay on cue.

"I think," I add, "that a sock that fits into the cockpit made of neoprene and that seals on the same lip as the spray deck would be great. Just big enough to sit in so that if the boat did fill with water only the sock would."

"And all you'd need to do to empty the water would be turn the sock inside out," says Cha.

I break apart my orange slowly and inspect the outrageous fruit. What ingenious packaging, each section separate, each with individual juice packs the size of rice kernels. A thousand packets make one section, a dozen sections make an orange.

The rain starts again. We head to our tents. Cha stays awake late into the night making sure the tide won't get him. He falls asleep as it laps at his door, still not sure if he's cleared the attack.

May 31, 1981

Last of the May days. This feels like a month ago...a time warp. We call off the paddle this morning; strong upper winds and lazy kayakers. As far as we can tell from our charts, the next ten miles may not have any place to beach. It appears to be all cliffs. Mosquitoes and other biting bugs swarm on the outside of my tent screen just wishing they could get me. I have killed all the mosquitoes inside my shelter. I let the spiders in here live. What I really need is a pet praying mantis to eat these little buggers. This morning I lie here scared. No really. What if while I relax here on my sleeping bag a tree falls on me, or an upset clam decides to slither into these trees and attack?!

Meanwhile my trash accumulates. Until now we have lugged our wastes with us to the next town. But these northern towns believe the outgoing tide to be the perfect solution to rid themselves of plastics and cans and old rags. When I lived in Hydaburg, one day Mijou gave me a bag of rags and ordered them thrown off the end of the dock. I didn't do it. The rags seemed still usable to me, being my first objection, and the tide being a poor garbage disposal being my second. The next day he yelled at me, "Do as I say..." So I did, knowing the town had no other means of disposal.

But for now I'll save my trash for later.

I visit Cha inside his tent, away from the bugs. He has been watching human action in the bay, centered around the old float. A stink machine yacht joined a seaplane. A troller and two seiners docked a little later. Cha says, "I tied the crab pot with clams for bait to the pontoon of the seaplane."

"Good job."

We watch men from the vehicles converse awhile. Since Cha only kidded me about the crab trap, we doubt the people even know we watch. The tree tops shake in the storm. We guess the rigs all joined in the sheltered cove by coincidence, but then we watch boxes emerge. The vehicles trade goods.

"A drug deal?" Cha guesses.

One more troller arrives and exchanges more merchandise with the rest. All the men climb into skiffs and motor around the corner into the next cove.

"Let's take a tray out and ask for samples," I say.

"They'd probably shoot us for witnessing," says Cha.

Soon they all return and all vehicles leave, no more than two hours after arrival, motoring back out into the storm waters.

I tell Cha of a dream I had in the night. A girl visited us and called us all stupid for sleeping with food in our tents, because of bears.

I leave Cha so he can read *Papillon*, and I visit Denis who reads *Future Shock*. Back in my VD home unit I relax, stretch, and massage myself. My muscles feel good having the day off. It's said that muscles break down under extreme exercise, like from our wave paddle yesterday and the twenty five miles the previous day. After the tissues tear down, it's not supposed to grow until relaxed. Continued tearing isn't as efficient as the combination of use and non-use. Exert, rest, exert, rest. Relaxation is a necessary part of growth. I figure the brain must work in the same way. Constant use of my mind is complimented by non-use, by relaxing; fishing, sitting on a beach, exerting physically, or anything. For me, my most exciting thoughts just pop into my head when I get away from

my books and mental projects. If I need a solution to a problem, it usually comes when I'm not thinking of the problem. The power of emptiness.

"Hey you guys, come here," yells Cha from the beach. I join him next to the creek where it meets the bay. The tide is way out, so we stand on mud. Cha points to a track. "Bear."

I check in my animal tracks book and verify it to be a small black bear. "I just dozed off," says Cha. "And he must have walked right in front of my tent while I slept. He's been here since the tide went out."

In the woods, next to the tents, we find animal feces, green with grass, the size of golf balls. "I wish my book showed animal shit as well as the tracks. At least it is grass in the poop and not an eye ball or something."

We each return to our food laden tents and continue the horizontal day on into the dark night.

June 1, 1981

We decide to pack up. Floating in the bay I watch two silver fish jump clear out of the water. They float sideways through the air and splash, actually more like a poit, back below the surface. I wonder if they're baby salmon just released from a hatchery or if they spawned on their own, or if they are even salmon.

We enter the water of Dixon's Entrance and all is swell... just ocean swells, calm, not disturbed here by any wind. I can see far out into the distance.

The swell sizes increase and soon we battle big waves again. After eight miles of kayaking the waves suddenly turn into walls of water and white caps so we duck into the sheltered Tree Point. Gusts blow hard as we sneak up a creek with the high tide and step out to camp. Rain falls hard.

Denis drips out of his boat saying, "This damn hole I drilled for my fishing rod holder leaks bad."

"Why don't you fix it?" I ask. "Shove a stick or a pancake in it. Plug it up."

"Naw. The fiberglass would chip. It's so thin. Maybe when I'm irritated enough from sponging all the time I'll do something about it."

With the machete we hack in the wet woods to clear tent spots. The rain falls so hard I hurry to get myself and all my gear inside. My tent rides like a CJ5 Jeep over rough terrain. It's like a roller coaster inside, tilting and rolling on moss and sticks. Now, while the others struggle with their tents, I sit like Snoopy: "Happiness is sitting in a box." I wonder about the big rotten cedar outside though. It could squish me at any time and squish all my dreams too, into the ground. I'd make good food for the eagles and a feast for the bugs. And, ah, but wouldn't I make lovely fertilizer?

After Denis establishes himself and relaxes awhile, he invites me over for a smoke. I tweedle dum barefoot over the moss, careful of the thorny Devil's Club.

"These moss beds are comfortable," says Denis. "We should market them."

"They're better than that river bed would be," I add, looking out Denis' mosquito netting. The rain awning diverts the water nicely, away from his tent. "This screen meshes a neat double image on the edge of trees and things outside."

Denis says, "Oh, the net? Ya, it gives me kind of the spatial effect. When I first set up after paddling today I sat down, smoked a dubee and put on my Nehs," referring to

his Vuarnet sunglasses. "And I just watched out the screen. For the spatial effect. I thought about a VD summer day, a game of golf and a swim and bar-b-que and playing croquette for hours in the hot afternoon. I've played croquette with a head lamp after drinking all night. I'd beam the ball, then the wicket, then I'd beam the trail for the ball. Beaming strategy."

"I can't believe this rain. Seems like a couple of inches an hour," I say. "And just think, Perrier charges a dollar for a little bottle of fresh spring water."

We munch on corn nuts. "Did you see that marshmallow cream in the store? I can't believe people buy that stuff," I say.

"Sure," explains Denis, "just spread the goo on Wonder Bread and you have an instant homemade Twinkie."

I ponder for a moment. "Just think of the taste. Yum, I'm drooling. Sounds as good as drinking molten plastic shakes. Just think if all the plastic in the world suddenly disappeared. Blink... there would go our tents, the nylon on the sleeping bags..."

"Our kayaks," adds Denis. "The epoxy glue holding the paddles together..."

"Our stoves would be a pile of assorted metal parts. No more skis or blenders or hair dryers..."

Cha appears at the door and joins us. I play "Rain drops keep falling on my head" on my plastic recorder. Denis comments he will buy one in the next town.

Cha says, "You know, I wouldn't even miss music at all if it didn't exist."

"I can't imagine not singing or whistling or listening to tunes," says Denis. "Music is an important part of my life. While paddling I sing to pass the time enjoyably. I've heard you sing while you paddle, Cha."

"Oh, I do. Some. I hope we don't get stuck here too long, I'm almost out of food."

"I thought you had mass," I say. "What happened to all your dried foods? The beans and rice, lentils. That dried fruit, pancakes, hot cereal, dry milk?"

"Oh, I've got that. I'm just going to run out of cheese and bread and Grapenuts."

"I'm going to nap and catch up on some dreams," says Denis.

"Too bad you can't monitor them for us all to review later," I say leaving into the rain, dodging Devil's Club.

Night comes on. I sit in solitude in my CJ5. Denis and Cha talk in Denis' tent. Rain still pours. I use my sponge to divert rivers flowing through my home.

June 2, 1981

When we wake Cha is anxious to paddle. Denis is noncommittal. I say wait an hour to see if the wind blows up by ten like it has for three days. Cha has already packed up anyways. Within the hour waves break on the beach too violently to even enter the water.

I harvest a few gumboots and talk to some seals that bob in the waves under rain. They seem like dogs of the sea. Their wide eyes beg for food... just a fish or something. I cook the gumboots in my tent and eat them with grain cereal. The cereal spills on my tent floor. Damn, that makes me feel dumb. I should be able to avoid stupid blunders. As I wipe up the mess, Cha yells, "Hey, Mark, do you realize how many miles we still have to Prince Rupert?" His voice feels threatening... angry.

Cha has the charts. "I don't know, maybe thirty?" Damn cereal clings to my wool blanket.

"No," he yells back. "It's more than that."

I shake my sponge outside, the porridge flings. "No, Cha, I don't know. I know nothing."

I finish cleaning the mess and eat, zipped into my tent. Seems like Cha only wanted to test me, to trap me. So I say I know nothing. How can I know nothing? Seems like what I think I know is usually wrong. If I know, then I close the possibility that I don't know. Everything changes and expands so fast, I can only try to learn as much as I can, but then I only have the scholastic ability to reproduce facts, regurgitate figures. I place my breakfast dishes out in the rain, my automatic dishwasher.

So what is knowledge? Is it my ability to deal with the present and plan on tomorrow? Or is that intelligence? Does added knowledge add intelligence? Or visa versa. Intelligence must be innate and the ability to use that intelligence throughout life is knowledge. Are the most knowledgeable people the ones who can live with the least stress and most comfort? I don't know.

I still know nothing. But I might know because I experience. And science tells me, and the media, and my family and friends. I hear claims of truth, people knowing what time tells. But for me to accept those truths, I find myself flustered. I am daily proven wrong. I have no Reality with the capital "R". My reality is just mush in my head. I think I see everything, the three dimensions. But what about time? I can reach back in time with my altering memory or with a historian's perceptions in a book. But that all comes from the head mush too. What about a sixth dimension that I don't even conceive? Or a seventh or an eighth? What the hell is quantum mechanics? If I would be a serious student of mathematics, my whole conception of reality could be numerical and energy fields, grids and time distortions. It is at this moment. But what do I know? I know nothing. I live in a world defined by my ancestors and whatever definitions I make up on my own, if any.

All the songs, all the books, poems, plays, each and every voice of all the people on this earth, they are all here for me to experience and to believe what I must. I live as I will within the complicated biological and sociological functions that we call life. I build my intricate spider web of relationships, understandings, and acquaintances throughout my life. That's my reality.

Are all my words and thoughts only repeats of the past? What I have seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled are now incorporated and I can't separate my own ideas from the hash of my mind. Growth is rapid. Science keeps naming new elements, new stars, new theories. But is that only discovering what is already present? No, I must believe the universe is still expanding and man's ideas are analogous. Nature fights for survival, survival of the fittest Darwin told us. Man and nature develops new awareness, like adding another room onto my tent. Or is awareness more quality than quantity?

Has it all been said before? If so, the best I can do is tell my own story the way I see it. I don't know where my thoughts come from, but I can usually find words or some way to describe how I feel. To feel. Isn't the sense of touch of my fingers one of my five senses? So when my heart is touched, isn't that a sixth sense? So do I just lie on my stomach in this tent under rain dripping cedars, on top of moss and sticks, and write a hash book? Is what I say just all the meat of time ground round and smothered with my

own special barbecue sauce? I wish I could smoke some hash right now. It helps to slow down my mind. But I mustn't forget VD, the power of emptiness...

But serially, or as an oatmeal wiper would say, cereally... or surreally. No, seriously, I feel like this is just another day in the life of a bug.

Do I write poems?...

A day in the rain and the bugs
Is enough to send me for the jugs,
But there is none near
Not even a beer,
So I think I'll suck on some slugs.

How can a book about kayaks break out in such profundity? Professional fun, did he? During this six month's kayak trip I bet I spend only a portion of the time talking about kayaks. Only a portion is spent in the kayaks. Maybe only a portion is even spent talking. But the parts make up the whole... who said that? We think by ourselves in the boats, we spend most of the time alone. We converse, but mostly we search our own spaces. Cha thinks about school and I saw he wrote Denise, the camp counselor from Camp Orkilla. He thinks about getting a job on the Pro Patrol at Mammoth Mountain. He thinks about fishing next spring on a troller, maybe Chuck's. He has all his memories. He thinks about photography, and me, and his dad, and his mom.

I'm not so sure where Denis' mind wanders in his tent... but it does. To skiing probably. He wants to get off chair lifts and onto the Pro Patrol so he too can throw dynamite. And he desires a first aid course in fall and to attend college in Bellingham in spring. He thinks of Suzy. For eight years they were prime mates. She's strong in his memories. I noticed he wrote Echo, a cutie from Alpentel. Denis is very quiet about his memories and plans and dreams. I wish he'd open up more sometimes.

And my thoughts become known as I write almost everything. I save few secrets for myself. Jot jot jot, page to page.

I play my recorder, "Baby the rain must fall..." I am amazed at the number of songs I can play now. Thanks to Do-re-me. If I can whistle it, I can play it. But there is much to learn. Deano pointed out I can't play chords on this instrument, and I'm stuck with a couple of keys, mostly C. Maybe I'll learn to read music some day, but for now, I'm impressed. New realms and thresholds ahead.

I'm terrible. I always have four books going at once and then I even start a fifth and finish it before the others. I guess I've gone to school too long. And next year is my brother's tenth year out of high school. My how fruit flies like bananas. Time too. Just too too too.

My day passes in this tent. Ah, but dig 'em tent living, yum. I am caught up on sewing my float bag rips. Now I stare into my candle. I am the flame on the candle. The remaining wax and wick show my future. Only a few drips of wax remain from my past. The rest has burnt away. But the flame knows where I've been, the memory that burns in my head. When the candle melts away and dies, I will place another candle in its place. The earth will do the same for me. Goodnight.

June 3, 1981

The waves grow. The rain floods non-stop. Our kayaks remain at rest another day. We need a weather break so we can high fly and kick ass paddle for cover. These storms would blow only lightly anywhere sheltered from Dixon's Entrance. We might be grounded a week, or even more. I'm excited for the narrow Grenville Channel. We can free ride in on the floods, and ebb tide our way right out the other side. If we had to we could paddle now, but we'd be soaked and the boats would fill with water. I could say this is lousy and sit around all day moping in the tight confines of my tent, hiding from the rain and bugs. But boredom is a poor excuse for living. I can always enjoy nothing. VD.

The rain falls constantly. We wait in our tents. Soon the waves must ease. We camp. We aren't surviving off the land. To do that efficiently we need much more; nets, traps, guns, and a home to spend time preserving the food for storage. Our only survival food is what we catch and eat immediately. For nomads, eating shellfish is easiest. We depend on grocery stores. Indians who traveled these waters in the old days carried preserved food from home, or they stopped long enough to dry fish along the way. Even up in the dense wild country of the north, people still import foodstuffs... grains mostly, but also dried milk and nuts. The land and sea provides almost unlimited proteins for subsistence, but starchy foods occur so rarely they must be grown or imported. Indians found starchy foods in roots of clover and in the fibrous, tough bracken fern. They often ate certain inner barks of trees also. Berries will grow plentifully in the fall, the fructose an excellent carbohydrate. They can be canned, frozen, or made into fruit leather. Indians often made up for the lack of carbo calories by eating fats, as Mijou revealed to me when I cut away the fat from my steak at that one dinner.

Prior to this trip I think I had misconceptions of food and survival while traveling daily in a kayak. I figured we would eat fish every night. We probably could if we invested the time and energy. We eat so much that buying groceries becomes inevitable... and easy. A farm situation with a garden seems a nice self sufficient way to live. Some day I wish to do that, but here and now is much too wet. Rain, rain, rain. So southbound we go, from grocery store to grocery store. Those store shelves would empty so fast if there ever became a distribution problem. I'm anxious for the berries to start showing. My mother once told me the first word I ever spoke was "Berry."

The wind shifts more from the south so our bay is calm on one end. I launch my empty kayak in the rain and drop a fish line. Nothing even bites my purple squid jig. Wind picks up and roughens the water. I am forced to shore, so I consume a huge bean and rice casserole. I'd better skip dinner tonight.

We communicate between tents with Tarzan yells, at least Cha and I do. Denis doesn't. Looking through Cha's chart books gets me excited to paddle. We have so much ahead of us and so much time to play. What a life! I'm impressed. My memories flash back my past in segments; seasons here and there. Now I'm just making another segment for later. VD makes good memories.

I like having spiders in my tent. They snare biting critters in their webs, keeping my tent free of creepy crawlers. That name strikes a memory. Creepy Crawlers... I remember now. My folks bought me a toy kit, with heating elements and molds to make Creepy Crawlers. Edible bugs. Maybe I got that as a kid because as a baby I ate potato bugs. Goo. My Creepy Crawler factory toy assembly caught my eye on television. Mark

overcome by marketing. This machine cooked plastic looking varieties; cockroaches, flies, worms, snakes, even spiders. And these things I ate. They must have been sugar and gum base. Or was that factory kit called Incredible Edibles? That's it. Creepy Crawlers were the rubber things I stuck on the end of my pencils.

I have better memories of the blocks my folks gave me, just simple scraps of wood. I'd play with those and eat an apple. Seems better than making and eating plastic candy bugs. Blocks were my favorite, and I didn't learn about them from television. Blocks that are used teach originality and laws of physics. Blocks give a child's mind, and we are all children, time to develop solo... or with friends. I built structures, tore them down, and built a new design. I never had to repeat the same mold over and over. Full on bonus. Blocks are safe. They wouldn't be marketed because wood scraps are too easy to get for nothing. Blocks aren't deceiving. If my folks had considered the truth of Incredible Edibles they probably never would have bought the toy. But the truth can't be marketed because such things wouldn't sell. Too bad advertisings couldn't be motivated into educating rather than slipping a buck away from a consumer. Blocks get down to the basics. A child can build foundations with blocks. Blocks can be used many times and they only get better.

My t-shirt stares me in the face again. "He who dies with the most toys wins... only if used." I don't know if quantity should even be included there. There shouldn't be competition for peace of mind.

I peel another orange. I'm still impressed with this packaging. Does the peel have even more Vitamin C than the fruit itself? Too bad so much cost and energy goes into packaging in stores. I guess the marketing appeal is at fault. I hope I don't find a styrofoam hamburger wrapper up here. Waste package for waste food. Beans and rice could feed the world if we focused efforts on such basics. I feel healthier with the basic foods we eat on this trip. While eating potatoes on the Linda E, Mijou's grandson, Billy, said "Good enough for white boy, huh Mark?"

"Good enough for white boy and Indian, Billy," I answered.

We have this earth to plant with good food. Nobody needs to starve. And I hope my book is as a rose seed. When planted, one flower will grow. If more seeds could be planted, more flowers could grow. Someday, I hope to say, "Look what arose from that one seed."

Now darkness permeates my tent. Once again I light my candle. Ah, petroleum by-product. Oh well, I like my candles. I'm a hypocrite finding justifications for myself, like everybody. So I will utilize the candle. Here... I'll hang my socks and bandanna over the flame to dry... and here... I'll take this wire splint and, uh, bend it to make a grill. I'll put some spruce tea water over the heat. I'll write by the light. Ah. A candle grants me so much entertainment, it gives my home a nice glow, gives my thoughts a comfortable perspective, and gives my time a nice value. Ah, nice simplicities. When I buy new candles, I actually get excited.

Damn. The spruce needle tea spills. But not much. I still get a cup full. Bozo!

I listen to the night sounds. I hear waves breaking on the beach. When I don't hear them I will assume, if it's light that we can leave. I hear the rushing water in the creek. It's a good size now, eight feet across and a couple feet deep. That's a bit larger than when we arrived. Rain has fallen for three non-stop days. This is rocky ground, runoff country. I hear the wind blowing deep moans through the upper boughs of the trees. The wind

blows hemlock needles. They fall on my tent, the ol' tit tit tit tit, pluck, spoit, toot, sos, tit tit tit. The combination of wind and water sounds give a constant noise to the world, a nice steady slur of background music. When the wind ceases, and the rain quits, the creek will slow to a quiet dribble, the hemlock and water drops will cease on my tent, the upper trees will silence their sway, and the ocean will calm to the Pacific. I heard some pretty bird sounds today that make me think of sun and calm weather. I would like to lie in a hammock with a single straw hanging from my mouth.

How entertained the Indians must have been in this region. I've heard they passed leisurely lives because they could harvest and prepare salmon and seafood during productive seasons, then devote the rest of the year to rituals and arts. Whatever they needed, they devised a way to accomplish with wood carving and using the resources available. Sheer resourcefulness. How entertaining. They lived with activities; kayaking, hunting, dancing, and creating.

I must make do with what I've got... which reminds me, I want an awning like Denis' tent has. But I don't have a sewing machine or materials. What do I have? Ah, I know. I can rip open this plastic salmon bag and use these three clips I bought for a clothes line, take some cord... and hooray. Now I have a view. My living space is visually enlarged. But the night obscures my vision in darkness. Morning will shine in. The storm continues. Maybe tomorrow we can leave.

June 4, 1981

Ah, I see out my tent, thanks to my new awning. I see rain and waves. Such is. Happy Birthday to my brother Paul. And same to Rob. Too bad you only paddled with us to the locks on April second.

The low tide recedes way out over rugged boulders. The creek runs through them, wide and shallow. If we exit on low tide we will have a tough time loading the boats. The whole beach is a rocky river.

Now noon. I notice the first signs of a northerly wind flow. The clouds switch directions. Maybe soon a high pressure system and then our departure from Tree Point. And boy, howdy, that plastic salmon bag sure enhances my life! Visuals, man, visuals.

With the rain slacking, I take advantage and jump rope on a large drift log. My heart wakens, my muscles limber and tighten. I dance, incorporating foot play. Soon Cha joins me with his rope. We jump, holding a fix on each other's eyes. We dance on the logs as mirror images. Patty Duke would be proud of us. I always stretch before and after jumping, especially my ankles and Achilles tendons. Ah, with exercise the world brightens. Inside and out.

Now, at eight this evening, the wind is not exactly northwesterly, but it's swinging that way. Rain has been stopped for seven hours now. Waves even slacken a little. Planning a morning escape, we each cook a few dozen pancakes for tomorrow's quick food. Denis and I join in his tent for nighttime rituals. We discuss the coming winter and decide we should both rejuvenate our vans to live in through the snows. Vans would be huge living spaces compared to tents. Ah, a plan. I love plans. A focus for the future. I love optimism. Denis says, "And we can buy personalized license plates, VD 1 & VD 2."

"See ya. Paddle in the morning."

"Semen," yells Cha from his tent.

June 5, 1981

"Each person is born to one possession which out values all others...
his last breath." Mark Twain

We plan to rise by four for our escape, to beat the low tide. By eight we crawl from our tents and by ten a.m. we carry our kayaks across the wet boulders. Gathering all of our accumulated trash, I stuff it in a stump monster's throat. Happy we can ski and slide comfortably over low friction surfaces, we slip with our gear down the low tide's green slimy rock. A couple small waves sneak into Denis' and my boats, but not too much water. We paddle south around Tree Point in calm ocean surges. Smooth swells tower over our heads when sitting low in a trough. The waves just roll under. Near Boat Harbor the swells explode over a submerged rock with the force of dynamite. The spray in the air dwarfs us as we slither by. The rock varies from covered completely to being six feet exposed. Another submerged rock never clears the water but swells roll over the top, curl and topple, a potential twenty foot ride for a surfer, if he could ever be here.

After about three miles we round Cape Fox. I peer into it's fingerling coves, one with a clean sandy beach... very inviting. We cross four miles in Nakat Bay with calm wind and a little drizzle of rain. Through Lord Islands, which is just a group of rocks in the center of the crossing, we paddle straight for the southeast point of Kanagunut Island. We head around Sitklan Island and into Tongas Passage, the entrance to Pearse Canal. This is the international border. As we cross into Canada by Haystack Island, a slight wind picks up from the north, blowing offshore the sweet smells of forest. The wind passes over our heads and we see its ripples further out. The solid rocks of the border islands lie in strata, slanting into the water at fifty degrees or more from the horizon. They appear as rocks buckled up from the earth. Rain continues lightly. We paddle close to the orange and red rocks. Few trees survive on these islets. As we guess we cross over the border, the imaginary dotted line somewhere in the depths of the ocean, Cha asks, "How's Canada feel, huh?"

"Eh?" says Denis, quick on his cultural adaption. "No more 'huh' from now on."

"Canada, spelled C Eh N Eh D Eh," I add. "The water definitely moves that foreign way."

"Sure," explains Denis, "it moves on the metric system."

Rain slackens now and then. We take advantage each time by removing our spray skirts to let our lower bodies breathe. We paddle close to one rock. It juts from the water like a pulled tooth. A lone tree grows on the rock's summit. The tooth rock layers in the fifty degree slants as the other rocks did, like a whole section of earth dramatically upheaved at once.

"Ever since we crossed the border I've felt like a cup of tea..." I say with a British accent.

"That's what you are then," answers Cha. The wind shifts around to the east, then the north again, then to the west.

I paddle in awe that the Indians and early explorers covered this same country. They maybe even slept on the same beaches years ago, and few people have bothered the land since. Quiet in our boats, we munch our pre-made Krusteaz Pancakes; ah, the food

of the future, like Twinkies. The sun sneaks a column of light down through the clouds. I paddle into the small ray hoping to get beamed up to the sky.

Inside Boston Islands, looking for the tea party, we move around to Tracy Point. Now we have a decision. "Should we cross the seven miles of Portland Inlet or should we sneak into the bay under Entry Peak?" I ask.

"We've already paddled almost eighteen miles today," says Cha. "I don't know. I'm too tired, but maybe I'd go."

"The water has stayed calm all day," I say. "And we don't know how long Dixon's Entrance will stay quiet for us. Maybe we should cross."

"I'm ready to go for it for sure," says Denis.

Cha bends a little, "I'm really tired, but I want new food. I'll do anything."

"I think we have at least four hours of light left. Let's go," I bid. "Port Simpson is just on the other side. You can get your Grapenuts there, Cha."

We start across together, slowly in smooth, small swells. I paddle thinking of our established Kayakers' Reality. We don't know about the weather or the waves, whether we are safe making this crossing, but we have to decide. We could never move without making a basic assumption. Kayakers' Reality states Portland Inlet is okay to cross now.

Soon the water calms into glassy reflections. With no wind at all the swells are barely perceivable. The view up Portland Inlet glows in gray light. Snowy hills loom above the water in the background. The snowcaps shine as white as the head of the soaring bald eagle. Soon rain begins again and we replace our spray decks. Rain falls hard. It bounces up off the water. Sky and mountains and water run together in one shade of gray. The sun peeks out through the pouring rain and paints a light rainbow, first just the north end of it. Violet, green, yellow, and red. The colors slowly fill in, reaching upward like a child awakening from a dream, growing with colors and intensity, slowly arching to the apex. The rainbow extends across Portland Inlet, now three-quarters of an arch. It crowns a sharp pointed peak of rock, a nipple in the sky absorbing its own rays of sunlight. The rain stops and Cha photographs as the rainbow reaches full arch. A second rainbow starts its trek across the sky above the first. The base colors of the original brightens enough to warrant sunglasses. The colors are intensified as bright as I'd ever seen colored light in nature. I sit in awe, the sun against my back, my spray deck off again. The scene becomes my pot of gold. From some point behind me, I sit at the base of the rainbow, right in the pot of gold. I feel it. But from my perspective the rainbow ends are far to the north and south. Everybody sits in the rainbow's end from one point of view. I feel the awe I felt in April watching the Aurora Borealis by Turn Island. The upper rainbow begins to fade rapidly. So does Cha. He's anxious to hit land and sleep and eat. A cloud shadow dissects the rainbow pairs. The effect is dotted lines of intense colors floating in the sky.

Denis paddles over to me. Cha now paddles directly at the base of the lowest, brightest rainbow.

"Cha says his knee hurts and his hip bothers him so he's going to rush on ahead," I relay to Denis. Clouds cast patchwork shadows on the distant green mountains, on the dense forests. A pair of porpoise roll by as Denis and I hang to each others' boats.

Denis says, "Those porpoise are saying, 'Whooa, nice colors. Let's play kiddo...'" The gray colors return, once again intensifying our own plastic colors. We see the yellow

coat and beige kayak of Cha's as he recedes into the distance. Denis and I both have blue coats and blue boats. The calm water reflects the fragileness of glass.

"Smoke?" suggests Denis. We sit midway in the crossing, three and a half miles from the closest land.

"You bet. Isn't this weather wild?" I ask. "I enjoy this crazy weather as much as the sunny days. This changing wind, the calms, the rains, the colors, the clouds..."

We pass the eagle feather stone clip back and forth through several dubees. The clouds appear hairline and thin in one direction, as rain bursts with streaks in another, and big fluffy cotton balls elsewhere. Dynamic.

With Cha now out of sight, I re-clip the eagle feather to my bowstring. I point south and say, "Hey look Denis. That water is black way over there. I think I even see white caps..." "I don't think so," says Denis. I put on my spray deck anyways and so does he. We start paddling. The black water nears us fast and we pick up paddling speed to match. Within ten minutes a gust, at least forty or fifty knots, hits us almost head on. The big ocean swells grow immediately.

"These swells are going to get huge, quickly," I say. "And they're going to be breaking on us..." We paddle full speed with no view of Cha.

"This is no problem," says Denis. I wonder if he is joking. My only concern would be if the wind picked up even more. The initial strong gusts slow to about a steady thirty-five knots. I can only guess. Strong winds. The waves slam us. They're monsters; ten feet or more from trough to crest. The summits of the waves curl and crash as we charge into them. The waves still grow. I ride up one. My kayak climbs. The water is steep ahead and behind me. Crash. The exploding crest slams my chest and spray deck. Water seeps inside my boat, a pool of gallons stretches my spray deck down. Will the elastic hold around the cockpit? If my spray deck collapses under the water's weight, one wave would fill my boat. My legs lock in the boat, knees shoved into the sides. Fingers lock on the paddle. I consider turning our backs to the waves and paddling up Portland Inlet but I don't believe the kayaks could maintain direct surfing lines down the waves. Any sideways action to these monsters would be too dangerous. The land lies to our port side. When one or two waves swell without toppling, both Denis and I take advantage. We turn and paddle sideways to the waves to gain distance towards land, which is still three miles away. We keep the stabilizer blades out of the water so we can turn quickly in and out of the waves. We focus on Birnie Island. Maintaining the sideways paddling as long as possible, we must turn back to hit the crashing monsters straight on. I watch as Denis mounts a couple, the white water slamming and slowing him with the crash each time he mounts a summit. My own boat goes air bound after each wave slams my chest and the descent down the other side is a fast slide with momentum up the next. Our raincoat hoods cover our heads. I shake like a dog often to keep the water from dripping constantly into my eyes. We paddle on. Adrenalin juices drive us. About three twelve foot waves crash in a row, then about four or five allow us to traverse towards land. I am granted only moments to swish the deep puddles from the sagging spray deck. Missing strokes could be the end, yet to have the spray deck cave in and the boat fill with water, that would be the end... or the beginning? We pump on, silently paddling two kayak lengths from each other.

For awhile I ease the exertion by traveling in time and space. Memories and dreams launch me into ecstasy. Two dolphins alongside my surfboard in Mexico. I

waited for the right wave. I touched a passing dolphin with my hand. I dream... I grab the fin of the dolphin and ride, under water... we surface for breaths...

All time merges into the present moment. The omnipresent. I mount the waves with Pacific state of mind. I am part of the waves, flowing with the energy, feeding from the waves' energies and returning it through my paddle and my mind. My blade grips the water. My arms, shoulders, back and stomach, all merge. My whole being thrusts my kayak forward into the power of each wave. Crash... the curl smashes my chest and I plow through. The momentum of the wave is altered as much as my momentum.

Without conscious thought or plan, I speak out. My deep voice commands and I hear the words as if they come from the sky and waves; "The will to survive... is stronger than any power on earth."

I'm awed. I flash back on a time in school, a beginning Biology class. The teacher told us of Darwin's Origin of Species. I felt strange then. I do now. Deja vu... Darwin... me... The will to survive... The waves... Here Now!

My paddling is easy. Denis looks very content. Fear has left me. After witnessing drift trees stranded on rocks from storms such as this one, and seeing the explosions on submerged rocks, I feel strong. I gather more strength from the sun as it shines through the clouds. Progress continues slowly. Charging up a wave, I either pivot over the top and slam the downhill side, or I slide through and over without a jolt. After some hours of non-stop paddling, past Pointer Rocks and into Cunningham Pass, my kayak rides much lower. Three inches of water cover my genitals and thighs. Water sloshes back and forth causing instability.

Finlayson Island finally grants us protection from the open ocean waves. Now we charge four footers. These are easier on my constitution than the twelve footers.

I yell to Denis as we near Birnie Island, "Let's turn about and ride these waves along the shore until a cove. The north end will be sheltered if we don't find anything else."

"I don't see any coves," says Denis. "You do what you want. I'm going into these waves around the south end where the lighthouse is. I want to find Cha."

Water sloshes throughout the inside of my kayak. I'm anxious to beach... "That's stupid," I yell. For the first time on the trip I doubt Denis' choice. "Cha wouldn't have paddled into that storm any more than he had to."

"You go ahead. I'm going this way," he says.

"That's stupid. We can't separate the trio any more." I'm upset, but I follow him. We charge along the island. No place appears along the shore to escape. We paddle for almost an hour to cover the quarter mile around the point. I see Denis ride a wave into the rocky beach, pounding with the surf. I say to myself, "That dumbshit..."

I ride a wave in and turn sideways to get out without crashing my kayak. Popping off my spray deck I step into the water and a wave rolls me and my water filled kayak onto the rocks. My kayak flips. I drag it and me out onto shore and watch Denis trip on the barnacled rocks. He swears, a little blood dripping from his hand. Draining my boat, and lifting the heavy thing, I waddle out of the waves.

"That was a stupid decision. I'm a member of the save-your-own-ass club and next time I'll just beach it." I'm hyped up. My energy drains quickly now that the adrenalin rush passes. Denis holds his hand and says nothing.

My whole body shakes and quivers with cold, from sitting in my wet boat for so long. I unpack quickly and climb the hill to set camp. I realize hypothermia is close. With my tent set, my wet clothes off and draining in the trees, I dress in dry clothes. Denis and I unpack his gear and set up his camp. He shivers, but makes no reference to the cold. I say, "Denis, I'm really sorry for getting so upset. I don't usually talk like that."

"That's fine. I didn't know your boat was so full of water. My boat stayed dry. I could have kept going a long time."

"Next time I'll get a smaller, tighter spray deck like yours. How's your hand?"

"It's fine." Denis joins me for a couple Tarzan yells for Cha's sake. Having expended so much energy in the water, we are now totally exhausted. We each plop onto our beds in the tents. No sign of Cha. My sleeping bag is a bit wet, but not enough to keep me awake. We pass out as if dead drunk.

June 6, 1981

My first thought upon awakening goes to Cha. Where is he? We must eat and go find him. It's already nine o'clock. I feel kind of ashamed for getting mad at Denis. A negative attitude is not acceptable no matter what my assessment of the situation happens to be. As I am the controller of my kayak, likewise I am for my attitudes. No excuse can permit the words I threw at Denis. He's so mellow. He just looked at me like a scolded pet, his hand bleeding. No words were needed. We each understood the situation.

I yell through the tents to Denis, "It's my folks 28th anniversary today. They still act like they are newlyweds."

He answers, "That's the way it should be. Let's blow this popsicle stand."

I walk around gathering my clothes from the trees and give my loudest Tarzan calls, in hope of Cha responding. Denis says, "I thought I heard Tarzan yells a few minutes ago. Did you?"

"I don't think I did." We load and paddle towards Port Simpson which lies a little more than two miles away. The water sits calm and gray, reflecting the clouds.

"Look at that boat... that's Cha on board."

"I don't see him," says Denis.

"Yes, that's him. Score!" I say. The boat approaches and Cha looks so happy.

He yells at us, "Man, you guys have the whole town worried. Seaplanes and everybody are out searching."

"We just camped right there at the lighthouse on the south end of Birnie," says Denis.

"Ha," laughs Cha in his normal burst. "I camped on Birnie, too. The north end though. I'll meet you in town." The others on board smile and wave to us and tell that coffee will be ready.

At the docks strangers toss words at us, like "Good to see you guys alive," and, "Hell of a storm, wasn't it?" Cha introduces us to the captain and his wife of the CaroLeanne, the halibut/tender boat that greeted us in the bay. Art and Carol travel up here summers to fish. Winters they live in Nanaimo. They own two boats, the second named "Four Strong Winds". It ties up next to CaroLeanne.

Cha tells his story. "Man, I couldn't see you guys at all. That storm blew up so fast. I crashed, sound asleep, as soon as I landed. I headed straight for Birnie Island then

rode with the waves around the north end and found an easy spot to beach. Boy, I thought you guys had seen the last. In the night I woke from a dream. I heard Tarzan yells in my sleep and I couldn't yell back. I jumped out of bed real scared." Locals of Port Simpson stand around listening. "I shined my flashlight around on the water and in the woods and Tarzan yelled, but you guys weren't around. I sat in the cafe here in town by 7:30 this morning and I just waited. I felt better this morning than last night. I knew you guys would have made it, but the locals thought I should have been more scared. They said if you guys turned around when you were way out there and rode the waves that you would have gotten caught in the rips off Work Channel..."

"It pays to work to avoid Work sometimes," I mumble.

Cha continues, "Then I got scared. They said the standing waves would rip you apart. Someone came in the coffee shop and said the CaroLeanne, Art and Carol, offered to take me out searching. When I dreamed in the night I talked to you guys, you said you were okay."

"You talked to an otter probably," laughs Art. He's a tall Indian with a puff of gray hair on his chin for a beard.

Carol, dark haired, strong and healthy, asks, "Mark and Denis, want some chili, rolls and coffee?"

We munch food and Denis asks Cha, "So you didn't yell out Tarzan at about nine this morning?"

"No."

Art says, "It was probably the mummies. There is a tunnel under the lighthouse next to where you camped where Indians used to bury the dead. Nobody camps there where you guys did. We really got scared for you. That ebb tide yesterday with the southeast wind storms up some big standing waves. The current from Nass River, which empties out to Portland Inlet, it shoots down the channel and smacks into the wind. I motored my steel skiff out there one day right after I bought it and a similar storm blew up. Waves flooded the boat. We were scared..."

"After that," says Carol, "I named the skiff F.S."

"For Fucking Skiff," Art finishes. Rain begins its onslaught again.

"You guys take the day off and sleep on Four Strong Winds. Take the whole boat, there's food aboard. Make yourselves at home. The wind is supposed to blow forty again today," says Carol.

We three look at one another and I say, "Great offer, but we have food..."

"No, eat the food on the boat. The men who piloted it up here for us from Nanaimo left it on board. It will rot if someone doesn't eat it."

Once again we encounter the world's best people. We move in, dry out, and watch the rain pour all day. One strong wind blows and rocks the Four Strong Winds. Cha and I head up to the village in the rain as I want to call my folks and congratulate their anniversary. "I can't believe this, Cha..."

"What's that?" We both walk barefoot.

"All this rain and I haven't see one local person with a raincoat on. They all wear wool jackets and nylon ski coats. That's too funny. They wear rubber boots but no raincoats."

"Probably rains so much they figure they will be wet no matter what," guesses Cha. "The rain falls, yep, mm hmm, yep, it falls all the time. It never stops. Then it rains, yep, mm hmm..."

I giggle with Cha's silliness. We walk the mud and puddled streets past colorful painted homes, totem poles, and Mexican style gazebos. We enter the cafe. A man sitting in a booth says to Cha, "I hear you found your friends."

The lady behind the counter asks, "Are you guys really crazy or just brave?"

"Both," answers Cha.

"You guys must be tough," says the elder in the booth. "Those boys that came to town in those dugout canoes the other day dropped like dead fish on the dock after their twenty mile paddle."

"Twenty miles is a long ways," I say.

We feast on the boat. Art and Carol go up to town to a friend's house for dinner. We drink coffee and stay wired until midnight.

June 7, 1981

After midnight Art and Carol return to the boats. Laughing out loud, Art pokes his head in the door. "You guys like wine?"

Art and Carol clamber into the galley with a liter of white Riesling wine and five glasses. "From our own wine cellars, to celebrate living," says Art as he sits and pours. He laughs and tells a joke. "Did you hear about the two Tsimpsonian Indians who drank tea all night? No? They Drowned in their tepee." We roar with laughter and Art tells another joke. "Why does the Tsimpsonian Indian wear a jock strap? Don't know? Ha. Totem pole." More laughter and Art continues, "No, seriously, I've always told my kids they were a work of Art." Art laughs the hardest at that one.

Carol adds, "That goof even bought the kids t-shirts that say that."

"Are your kids in Nanaimo?" I ask.

"We have three. Our daughter is Leanne. The boat is named after her and me," explains Carol. "Our son worked on the boat for us, but he was electrocuted about three months ago."

"Electrocuted you said?" I ask.

"Yes. An extension cord fell in the water while he drilled on board. He couldn't let go."

"How's he now?"

"Getting better, faster than the doctor expected. But he still stutters." I can tell the shock still remains in the parents too. "That sure changed our goals in life. We were all set to work and make all the money we could. Our lives have turned around. We value life much more now cause we could have lost our son in a matter of seconds."

Art adds, "That's why we offered so fast to help search for you guys. This is a water town and we've seen a lot of deaths in storms like yesterday's. People in this town recognize danger fast, and respond. That's why we were more scared for your buddies than you were, Cha." Art watches us and says seriously, "You guys have more guts than Dick Tracy."

This makes laughter and brings us from the sadness of Art and Carol's son's accident. Art says, "Sometimes we need to decide our values. Sea lions swim into our

fish nets when we work. We have sea lion bombs we can stuff into herring and throw to them. It blows up and his head flies off. If we don't kill it, he'll take a bite out of every halibut we pull up. They mangle the fish but they don't just eat on one. They bite them all. Now what do we do... money for our lives or let the sea lion live?"

"Yah, I kill mosquitoes," I say, sipping my wine.

Art goes for another bottle of Riesling, a two liter one. Uncorking it he says, "Yah, you guys are doing your trip like my ancestors. Nothing modern with you like a radio. You rely on your brains and you communicate better now than most people on earth. You're more attune to nature."

I say, "Our only RADIO is Radical Action Days In Ocean. Our PA system is Party Action."

Art says, "I noticed you guys never wear shoes, even in town in the rain. Old Indians never wore shoes either, even in the snow. The men almost always went naked."

"Same with us," says Cha.

Art tells, "You know, twenty years ago, Indians didn't have rights. We couldn't drink in bars. My dad got arrested drinking with his fish buyer once. If an Indian signed over his Indian rights he could live as a white man and drink. But we couldn't sign away our culture like that. For years the students in Prince Rupert couldn't speak their native tongue. The native cultures were suppressed. But today the schools here in Port Simpson teach the Tsimpsonian language again."

Carol says, "During the war, boats would come to town and search our homes to see if we stored more than two pounds of sugar. If we did, they took it. So we hid the sugar in the woods."

"What did you mention today about Cha talking to an otter, Art?" I ask.

"That's an old legend, not many folks follow it anymore," says Carol. "Maybe some of the real old people in town..."

Art tells, "Tsimpsonian legend tells of the sea otter clans. Real otters who could change their images. Say, when Cha sat on Birnie Island last night he could have dreamed of his girl friend. An otter would have known that. The otter would change shape to be whatever Cha dreamed of and the otter could approach Cha. If it blew in Cha's face, Cha would become one of the sea otters, but still human looking."

"Why would that be bad?" I ask. "Seems like a person could integrate human and otter characteristics and become better for it."

"A strong person could," says Art, "but most just become subjects, overpowered and they lose their will."

"The legend said," adds Carol, "that a person could discover if the image was really an otter or the girlfriend by waving a stick in front of its face. But people were so prejudiced and scared they went around waving sticks all over the villages."

"I'm surprised people aren't prejudiced here," says Cha.

"The Tsimpsonian people are good people. We aren't prejudiced. Half the town is the legal white section and pretty much everybody gets along," explains Art. "Tsimpsonian always were gentle people, not like the Haidas who warred and took slaves..."

"Slaves, huh?" I ponder aloud.

"How long have you two been married?" asks Denis as Art brings in another bottle, a Black Forest Girl.

Art puts his arm around Carol and says, "Twenty-four years and she's the best. The most tremendous thing in the world. She's my marriage partner forever and the best fisherman that could ever help me on the boats. We're friends first, and we're lucky to be lovers on top of that."

Art heads out for his guitar from the other boat. Denis and I pull out our harmonica and recorder. Songs begin. We let Art lead, adding with our instruments... "I don't give a damn about a greenback dollar, I spend it as fast as I can..." We sing and play. We do cowboy songs and hear old Indian songs and fishing ballads. Art pulls out a cigarette and places the guitar next to him. "You guys smoke?" he asks.

We sit quietly, then I say, "Not tobacco."

"You smoke the other stuff?" he asks.

We sit quietly again till I say, "Well, that depends. We do if you don't mind but we don't if you do mind."

"Well, if you have it... we'll smoke."

So the party continues with another bottle of wine. "How about more music?" I say.

Art stares me in the eyes and says, "Okay. Do we play music or do we philosophize?"

Art looks us three over quietly. He says, "Okay. I want to know why, seriously, do you guys do this trip? I meant it when I said you guys have more guts than Dick Tracy."

I laugh again and say, "Yah, well, why is Dick Tracy a Dick and not Rich?" But that doesn't change Art's seriousness. Neither Cha nor Denis show anything they wish to say, so I answer, "Well, for the storm we had yesterday, I guess. While I paddled and wondered if the waves would keep growing bigger, that being my only real concern, I yelled to the wind without thought, 'The will to survive is stronger than any power on earth.' I think I had to find that out first hand. You guys know how you value your lives after seeing your son electrocuted."

All is silent. I wonder if I had talked foolishly.

"Actually," I add, "Vacation Dynamics. We're missionaries spreading VD."

Carol looks shocked at that one so I explain, "No, VD is Vacation Dynamics. It's Nothing." I don't feel my explanation eases the shock.

Art and Carol eventually wander off the bed. So does Cha. Denis and I climb out into the calm morning and sit on the bow of Four Strong Winds. He plays guitar and I use my recorder. "How's that Gordon Lightfoot song go about reading minds?" I ask.

"I know what you're talking about, but I can't grasp it either," says Denis.

I find a couple notes of the song but I can't grab onto the whole. "I used to know but now I don't know."

We sit with the rising sun and finally climb into bed about six a.m.

Sleep lasts a long time. When we do rise, we find our kayaks filled with water in the previous day's storm, rain having seeped through the nylon caps. I watch Carol with the town kids. They adore her. Fishing and talking together, they act as one family. We bid our thanks and goodbyes and depart about five in the evening. Cha photographs Art and Carol. They each put on favorite hats. Art fluffs the tuft of hair on his chin, "Make sure you get the beard."

"Once south of Ocean Falls you guys should get more sun," says Carol. "Today is beautiful for you though. Well, you're off like a dirty shirt, eh?" We can hear Carol's laugh echo through Port Simpson. We paddle away, under the bridge joining town and Finlayson Island.

Cha mentions, "That's the way to get married. Marry your best friend."

"That's for sure," says Denis.

We paddle on, the sun shining. We pass Big Bay and an island with a sandy point. Hundreds of ducks just sit around quacking about the weather. The tree tops grow bent away from the south, I guess from the high storm winds from that direction, like the one that caught us. I follow Denis and watch his kayak. I envision him riding a horse, his boat being the horse's fat ass... a wide assed kayak. Giddy up. The water chops a bit from the current, forming many directional waves. The effect is pockets in the water like sun cups on a glacial field of ice.

Cha and I talk about the Portland Inlet crossing. He says, "I kept on talking to God, praying for help. I got scared the wind would get worse, which it usually does. I talked to God, asking him to keep the wind down. I'd tell him, 'It sure would be a bonus if the wind would stop,' then I'd tell him, 'It sure would be a bonus if it didn't get worse!'"

"I thought about the wind getting worse too," I say. Denis now paddles with us. "That initial fear is kind of neat. It gives the stress response to get the ass in gear."

"Fear is never good," says Denis. "It only gets in the way."

"I use it," I say.

"No, Denis is right. Fear only makes things worse," says Cha. "If we were never afraid we could do anything."

"For me, fear can instigate rationality that may save my life. If while skiing I cross a wind slab that might avalanche, I first feel a twinge of fear. I'll experience that fear until I either get on with the task or I turn back and get off the danger spot. Fear is my first recognition of danger."

Denis says, "But if you never got scared you would know no danger."

"I think you guys are saying like in Portland Inlet fear would be pointless to contain all through the paddle, but..."

"Right. Fear is only bad," says Cha.

"But sometimes danger has to be recognized. For survival. Fear causes immediate stress and from that comes the exertion. Stress is the internal message telling me..."

"I don't think so. We better stop this conversation," says Cha.

I slow and let those two go on ahead. They keep talking and laughing. My argument continues in my own head... like a healthy body doesn't measure the oxygen in our blood to know when to breathe. A healthy body measures the carbon dioxide, the waste. That which needs removing tells the body when it's time for fresh air.

Stress is the stimulus to alter inertia.

My thoughts stress me. Stop. Empty.

We stop for dinner about nine o'clock. The sun reaches down to its cocktail hours. After sandwiches and no bugs, we remount our horseys and continue on past Ryan Point, through Duncan Bay, and inside Tugwell Island. At Metlakatla Channel we set camp, the sky drunk with tequila sunsets, syrupy grenadine splashed over the horizon, as red as red can be. Above, the sky glows clear blue with a waxing crescent moon. Many seals play off our beach as we custom fit our tents into the sand between driftwood.

From my tent I watch the moon shine through the screen mesh. Its light refracts out like the whirl of a spinning propeller. A fallen tree lies on the beach, its fifteen foot high trunk like a giant cauliflower. I watch the moon reflect over the seemingly endless Pacific Ocean, past Queen Charlotte Islands forty miles away. The lunar beam paves the true yellow brick road. To the east the channel enters inside again. The Inside Passage. Tomorrow we paddle six miles to Prince Rupert for customs and restock. I hope to not indulge in city action for more than a few hours. "Goodnight, yellow brick road..."

June 8, 1981

My first thoughts go towards the fear conversation from yesterday. I felt such negative energies between my partners and myself. They said I was flat out wrong. Why do I let those negatives hurt me? I feel struck. Their point was totally valid, that obstacles and thresholds are often easiest to overcome when they aren't recognized as obstacles... like a child can often do, maybe without bruises. But do I have to be totally wrong? I've always felt too sensitive to negative energies, like playing competition sports when friends get mad and swear and throw things. I'd sooner not play. With my kayak I should be able to pass the time without having to indulge in emotional battles with others. So now I must let this hurt pass.

In my kayak at 7:30 this morning, I clean my sunglasses, rubbing and polishing the mirror lenses. In the reflection the sun shines behind my greasy mop of hair. My nose waves into huge distortion on the convex lens, my sun freckles enlarged to raisin size. I say "Waa waa waa cha say. Let's boogie boys. Goodbye for now, oh sweet Pacific. Dixon's Entrance, stage left, even." I paddle ahead with the Indian village of Metlakatla on one side and Digby Island on the other. I sing, "Slow down, you're moving too fast, you've got to let the morning last..." Ah, flash. A new song. I drop my paddle, lower my stabilizer, and pick up my recorder from my side. The notes come naturally, "Just kicken down cobble stone, life I love you, all is groovy..."

A boat ferrying people buzzes out from the Indian village on our port side, delivering workers to a weekday in Prince Rupert. Ah, but the routine traffic, fishing skiffs with kids, a stink machine with a camera aimed out the window at us. Big boat, little boat, putt putt... On a larger yacht an old Indian in a nice suit and tie salutes us proudly. Our kayaks probably bring him a wave of memories as we mount and ride the yacht's wake. He looks at least ninety years old.

The current picks up in the thousand foot narrow of Venn Passage, small whirl pools on either side of our boats. Around the last bend, Prince Rupert sits at the base of the hills basking in sun. We stop at Grindstone Point to stash our illegal smoke so we can clear customs. We laugh because the herb makes us criminals. Cha suggests we just leave it forever as he is afraid of being arrested.

A duck feather floats on the glassy water, impressed into the surface but not penetrating the water's skin, almost as if the feather rests on a bed of silk. Trains roll along the city waterfront in front of fishery buildings and warehouses. I see no waterfront homes in town. A CN train engine rolls forward on the southbound track. I glare across the water at its smoke pouring out as a cloud. The smoke creeps along in the draft above the train, rolling into a big ball, slowly, forward toward downtown. The smoke cloud

spreads and disperses. Cha asks, "What did Eva say? 'The solution to pollution is dilution'."

"Does Prince Rupert come in a can?" I ask.

We dock. Cha runs up to call customs office. Denis and I make conversation with a couple of girls on sailboats. The two boats sail north together to Alaska. Assorted individuals get on and off the boats along the route, kind of like life.

One girl, a nature guide from up north, points out a murre which is one of those birds we watch that bounce fly across the water after eating so much. I point to several eagles flying over the docks and streets. "Kind of too bad the eagles hang out around here," I say.

"Are you kidding," she asks. I say no. She asks why.

"Just seems like they're like the crows now, flying above trash and waiting for a kid to throw away his fish and chips. Ravens were sacred, eagles were sacred. Ravens stooped to trash, now they are treated as scavenging crows. Eagles shouldn't start being scavengers of human wastes. The osprey will take the eagle's place if they don't maintain their pride."

She says, "I bet more animals change to scavengers rather than hunters, like rats. They will have to survive."

The customs girl arrives. She says she's new and has no idea how to deal with kayakers on paper. "You don't look new to me," I say. "You're already full grown." With the help of our slip from Pender Island customs, we become legal foreign visitors.

In town we find shopping malls and fancy stores with every toy, spool of thread, and alfalfa seed we need. In one department store the Gordon Lightfoot song that Denis and I couldn't remember plays over the speaker systems. "If you could read my mind love, what a tale my thoughts could tell..." The song gives me goose bumps, "...I will never be set free as long as I'm a ghost you can see."

With all our groceries, supplies, and a case of beer each, we borrow Safeway shopping carts and ride slowly down the hills to our kayaks. Now the boats overflow with food, even without our bodies. To alleviate part of the problem, we eat mass. The gas dock attendant tells us that Chino and Miko, the two Puerto Rican kayakers who passed through last year, had left their kayaks at the dock for two weeks. They hung around town. "Oh, no," we three say. "We won't let that happen to us, now will we?"

"What do you call that, Denis?" I ask. "Is it 'Will Power'?"

Running the carts back, we fly full speed over the railroad tracks. I watch Cha as he hits the tracks and his cart flies five feet in the air. Cha jumps high behind it and throws his feet back to a tip drop. But the cart lands first, and stops. Shooooowoppitty... yowch. He scabs his knee and rips his thirteen button navy pants.

We leave the carts at Safeway and walk to town. A fellow in a field mends a tent, stitching new material on by hand. Walking over, Denis asks, "Fixing your home?"

I hum, "Where the rain gets in and stops my mind from wandering..."

"Yes. We will live in this in the Okanogan. We will pick apples." The bearded man with a pony tail speaks with a French accent.

"We live in tents too," says Cha.

"Intense?" I ask.

This fellow invites us into his home where a half dozen French Canadians sit around talking their native language. They offer us some mushroom soup made from

vegetables the supermarket gave them, the goods being too old for the shelves. Several of the people get ready to leave to the apple harvest. They make their year's money in a couple months so they can vacation the rest. One fellow says he's been living out of his canoe for a month.

We say goodbye to these cheery people and wander down to one of the clubs for music and Canadian brews. A fellow we sit with tells us of Lake Williston, four hundred miles east. The manmade body of water covered up many trees when it was made. Now, finally the roots give way and the trees pop from the water like mission control space shots. The huge trees flying through the air really scare the sports fishermen in their rowboats.

The music in this bar sounds from a juke box. I drop in a couple quarters. We discover Pink Floyd's "Brick in the Wall," and a Dire Straits' song both have been tampered with. The disco beat has been added. An extra shoop bop shoop bop...

The waitress brings a tray of beers to our table. Our new friend ordered them for us. He tries to help unload the tray but seven beers spill all over the table. "There's a dead player," says Cha. The bop beat speeds on from the juke box. More beer please. I guess they add the disco beat so people will feel more hyped and drink more.

Our table buddy makes a phone call. He talks to his brother who he hasn't seen for six years. Our buddy buys two cases of beer and we trot upstairs into the hotel where the brother stays. The brother is a traveling salesman passing through town. The brothers argue about old times and one girlfriend they both shared. That's what originally broke off the friendship. Unconcerned, Cha, Denis, and I watch the late movies until our bar buddy leaves. We stay watching some King Arthur movie. The Canadian advertisements burst us into laughter.

As the host of the room falls asleep, Cha whispers, "Where are we going to sleep? I don't want to unpack and sleep on the oil dock."

"Fall asleep, Cha," I say. "We'll watch this movie and just fall asleep later. Our host is out for the night anyways." Cha curls up and dozes. Denis and I enjoy the old England scenery of the movie and the Walton-like family commercials.

About one ad selling soap, Denis says, "This is like a barrage of Twinkie soap operas."

I space in my mind as I watch King Arthur battle. The old gap; good verses evil. Do our words perpetuate the gaps or are they real? Black and white. Man and woman, parent and child. Man and nature. Logic and emotion. Mind and body. Is there a bridge that fills all gaps? Work and play. City and nature. King Arthur rides his horse through the green forests. We lie on the shaggy carpet. The carpet feels as nice as our moss beds. Here we camp. Maybe nothing bridges the gaps. Sleep rides over me. Denis stares into the television. Wah wah...

Chapter 8

"One Seamless World"

"The long-drawn virgin vales; the mild blue hill-sides; as over these there steals
a hush, the hum; you almost swear that play wearied children
lie sleeping in these solitudes, in some glad May-time when
the flowers of the woods are plucked. And all this mixes with that fact and fancy,
half way meeting, interpenetrate, and form one seamless world."

Moby Dick by Melville

June 9, 1981

We rise and leave the hotel by seven. Our host still rests in bed, groggy and slow. He sends us off with more than a case of beer. We hit the streets laughing.

At the kayaks we eat our way into the seats and paddle away from Prince Rupert. I sing, "Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily merrily merrily merrily, life is but a dream..."

Cha says, "I'm glad we got out of that city easier than Ketchikan."

"That's for sure," says Denis. Together we sing the row boat song in rounds.

The paddle south from Prince Rupert leaves behind the trains and the canneries. Against Cha's will, Denis stops on Grindstone Point for the smoke stash. Cha is frightened of legal apprehension. "Fear playing a role," I say. Cha asks what I said so I ask, "You ever think about that row boat song? I wonder who wrote it and what they had in mind."

We kayak on. A freighter heads towards us from the south, the Imperial Tofino from Vancouver. The bow pushes water. Cha says, "The foam off the front of that ship looks like a snow slide of fresh, wet, Alpentel powder." A ferry ship, Queen of Prince Rupert, passes in the same direction we paddle, passengers waving from the deck in the morning sun, the maple leaf flag flying above. An eagle perches on a beeping buoy. Is he deaf to the shrill sound or just stupid from eating too much fish and chips? The sun warms rapidly. I notice a floating spider web in the air. Slowly twirling and twisting, it reflects the sunlight to reveal its delicate beauty. A couple feet further and I'm blind to it. Strange how some things can only be seen with the proper perspective. I back paddle until the sun reveals the web again.

I sight down my kayak center to the eagle feather and paddle on. The feather's oils begin to fade, white showing more. We pass the factory of Oz, the stink plentiful. Cha yells into the amphitheater of rock. His voice returns as an echo. From my position, the echo is louder than the original call. This day amazes me. Blue skies with wild cloud shapes. Cumulus pile in all directions and I can perceive anything in them; clouded, obscured, vague likenesses of great idols, a naked woman, a hamburger. The water itself is cloudy like glacial runoff with lots of silt.

Passing Ridley and Lelu Islands, just off Lawyer and Smith Islands, Cha yells, "Wow. We paddle three quarters of a mile from any land and the bottom is only two feet below us."

"That makes the land two feet away," I say.

"Okay, 'shore', I mean," says Cha."

"Shore enough," I say. "And the ground is rising more. It's only inches down now."

"Or the water is lowering," says Denis.

"Shore nuf," says Cha.

The hills vary in shade with distance, lighter blue further away. An eagle squeaks somewhere and a diesel rumble whines out of sight. I reach a spot where the sand bottom levels just below the water surface. The nearest island is a mile away. I climb on solid ground, push my kayak away, and stand on my hands, upside down. I wear no clothes. Cha takes the photo, the wild clouds and blue mountains for my backdrop. Now Cha sets his camera on the tripod and the three of us join for a dance on water, this time clothed with swim suits. We hear the click. We feel like we're walking on water. The beers pop open and we light some hash we had acquired in Prince Rupert.

After sandwiches, we load into the kayaks. Cha points to a mountain ahead of us, along our route. It looms high and is still covered with snow. "Too bad we didn't bring our skis," says Denis. We pick our course through the current. A seal watches us. Around him the water churns and eddies with the rips. The water speeds us along. As the seal slips under water, he tilts his head back for a slow descent. The black nose is the last part of him sticking in the air.

We stroke past the Skeena River and into Telegraph Pass. After a twenty four mile day, we set camp on the south end of Kennedy Island. Meyer's Chuck now sits a hundred and fifty miles back in our memories.

June 10, 1981

I startle myself awake from a dream. I found myself back home in Issaquah. I stood in the police station complaining because these ten year old kids were bugging me in the parking lot. The police stood there wondering why I had come in to complain about children's play. I stood lost, trying to figure how to get my body back on the kayak trip where I belonged.

This morning my tent perches on one of the few level spots on a steep hill. I lie under one of the giant broccoli stumps of the island. Moss covers an old tree. It rots to the rich brown color of the earth here. Skunk cabbage leaves grow to a huge size, three feet long. The four inch moss on the forest floor cushions my feet as I climb up the hill to find a ceremonial spot... I ate a large breakfast.

Scrambling back to my tent and sliding my naked body into my sleeping bag, I gain appreciation again for my tent and the fabric; the tween separating the buzzing bees, mosquitoes, and no-see-ems from my tasty skin. And I still get the audio pleasure of the buggers.

I slap a mosquito and squirt my own blood from his bursting belly. I kill him and feel okay for doing so. The mosquito had full intent to bite my ass, to achieve its mortal orgasm sticking its big one into my tubes and sucking like a vampire on my blood. So I gave him the splat. The spider wandering on my pillow may bite me, but that's not its chief orgasm in life. She has other doings such as spinning a web to catch mosquitoes. I walk the spider to my door and escort her out politely.

The fresh cottage cheese and grapefruit and Grapenuts treats my appetite. But the Grapenuts seem strange. Foreign. The cereal absorbs milk and turns to sponges, unlike Grapenuts of old. The Canadian cottage cheese tastes smooth and creamy and provides a fine plastic container. It's washable, airtight, watertight, supplied as a throwaway package, but in a kayak it can be an item of necessity. I like organizing in separate containers, like all the stuff bags. Indian natives used to carve cedar boxes shaped like otters and bears to organize their ritual paraphernalia. They used cedar for anything; pillows, screens, buckets, and clothes.

I lay my chart and current book in front of me in my tent and check our schedule again for the day. Slack low tide will be about 3:40 this afternoon, which gives us flood tide in Grenville Channel, five miles away. So, if we paddle at 2:00 p.m. we should catch the tide bus through the free ride zone just fine. Okay, so if I start to pack at noon, we can have plenty of bozo time for spacing and still catch the bus.

I walk to tell the other boys. Their tents rest a few hundred yards away right above shore. Cha tells me of his dream from the night. He also found himself back at home and couldn't figure out how to get back to his kayak. "What a relief to wake up here in my tent."

Before we pack, the three of us do a bit of dealing. We trade fig bars, whole wheat ones owning highest value, for beers and peanut butter. We keep track of who owes who what. But when we climb in one tent, the treats come out as gifts of ceremony. Ah, but the economic workings continue even here. And what ever I have at one time I will consider my best, like today my fig bars are best. In a few days, my raisins will be. Treats diminish further from the city, down through the green peppers, the cheese and the bread. Soon pancakes will be the best once again... and the best is always cherished, even if it's a gut bomb.

My tent comes down. I remove the poles and stakes while smelling the pulp mill we passed twenty miles north yesterday. At least that tells me, even if it does smell bad, that the northerly wind might keep up the high pressure. The sun beams sneaking down through the trees and shining on my note pad may just keep shining. I envision tootling down the narrow passages, sitting back with spray deck off, basking in the sun, simply riding the current from one destination to the next.

We slide the heavily loaded rigs into the water on three inch diameter logs, as the Romans, Indians, Egyptians, and other kayakers all separately learned to do. The logs lessen the friction and help us to avoid barnacle scrapes.

Now, only a half hour after my fabulous weather prediction rain falls and wind blows, yet we still see a path of blue above. "I hope it will be a nice day," says Cha.

"It has been, it will be and it is a nice day. If today isn't nice then it would be not nice. And that could be a real bummer," I say.

"Okay, I hope the sun shines," Cha rewords himself.

"I wonder why people started calling sun nice and all other weather became not nice? It must be the definers fault again," I say.

"What?" asks Cha, hearing me but missing my point. "I believe in Path Theory."

"Pathery. What's that?" I inquire.

"Pathery. See the path of blue sky? Well, pathery says the path will grow and the whole sky will turn blue."

"Like the Ajax man says, shakes out white, turns blue," I say.

"No, that's the Tide man, but yah, that's pathery," says Cha.

Cha and I slide our kayaks' courses in with Denis who sips on a beer and points to a plane in the sky. "We're in the real jet set," he comments and blows a long deep toot on his near empty Molsen's bottle. "That's all a fog horn is... some guy sitting up top drinking beers and blowing in his bottle over a loudspeaker."

A slide path down a mountainside shows light green signs of regrowth, which from our perspective across the channel, we guess to be alder trees. The slide splits into two legs, like an upside down "Y", following a pathery of its own design. A small and very vacant appearing island bears a hand printed sign, "Fox Farm No Trespassing."

Cha says, "Let's go get some wild foxes." He peers down into his beer bottle. "I want to take a picture of the inside of this bottle, but I don't think my lens could focus through the small opening."

"How about backing off a bit and still focusing on the bottom?" I ask.

"Nah, I'll just have to finish this High Test and wait for the U.S. so I can get a Mickey's Big Mouth."

"Alright, there's a plan, we need more beer," I say. "Now we have a valid reason to drink more."

We paddle just past Gibson Island and give a cheer for Rob back home, painting. Cha says, with his feet relaxed on the deck, "I want to quit this and go back to Seattle and get a job."

I suggest, "Great, we can get an airlift out of here and be home in a flash."

"Great," says Cha, sipping his brew, "then we can get some Mickey's." He stashes his bottle behind his seat. "Mark, what did you do with the trash you collected this morning? There was a lot there."

"I fed the non-burnables to the stump monsters," I say, paddling on ahead for some solo time.

We ride into the mouth of Grenville Channel, sighting almost directly southeast. Hills and mountains drop on either side right into the water. Rock shows on occasional cliffs and slide paths, but most of the terrain is covered with thick treed woods. Onward we paddle, over the wake of a ferry ship, the people aboard friendly and waving. A valley opens to our starboard between two mountains. I yell as loud as I can. The arena inside the valley echoes back with a four second delay. A six second echo returns from my other side. A third echo returns after seven seconds after bouncing off the rock and snow peaks high above. A chain saw buzzes from somewhere and commercial fishing boats charge north. They courteously slow and ease their wakes for us, consistently, unlike the tourist boats do. One boat rocks out Elvis Presley music. Cha catches up to me and says, "Man. Everything comes in waves."

"Boy, you've got that right. Everything comes in waves," I say.

"No, I mean memories. I remember days from this trip and others. They just flash back to me."

Elvis's wave rocks us too. I say, "Waves, man, from the boat and the sound and light and emotions. Everything in waves."

"I just meant memory," Cha says, tired of my blabbering.

"Yes, but you're right in general. Everything has it's cycles."

"Forget it," says Cha, now mad. He paddles on ahead while I continue talking to the water and trees.

In this mile and a half wide channel, the Canard Princess bears down on our little kayaks. Aw, some cruise ship. It's giant and bright white and pushes off only a small wake. I see a swimming pool and tennis court on board. And a restaurant with smoke glass windows. Denis comments, "That ship's sole purpose is party."

"I wish they'd pull over and party with us awhile," I say.

We slide into Baker Inlet, the water now clear of silt. In this cove on the northeast side of the channel, high tide soaks the tips of tree branches hanging in the water. Birds sound from all directions, chattering tweet gossip. Denis plays the recorder. The music remains trapped in this acoustical rock gorge, reminding me of Paul Horn playing his flute in the Great Pyramid. Clouds hang low, wet and gray like rain, only not. Green grass covers the banks between trees. We paddle into a funnel. The channel narrows down, seeming to end, only four kayaks wide, then the body of water opens again into a beautiful lake-like inlet. The trees' scents waft in the breeze. Some bird lets out a woo woo woo. Water splashing with the slight surge slaps a cove and echoes. The creeping fog, rolling down valleys between mountains, hangs two hundred feet above the water. It obscures the upper world. The mirror flat water combined with the rush of rivulets and waterfalls echoing around the bay harmonize with Denis' continuing concert on the recorder. Snow caps peak out above the fog, above a mighty waterfall. Two seals swim close together and a mink scurries on shore. In a couple of miles the bay opens further back to a looming mountain. Snow sleeps on its peak and waterfalls cascade its entire width like strands of greasy hair hanging down my head.

"Let's camp in this bay," says Cha softly from a half mile away. His voice rings clear over the water.

June 11, 1981

I lie wide awake for long early morning hours, just watching the serene setting, hearing and smelling the fresh, moist wonders. My mind wanders through many dreams. I somehow feel the need to get out and wander through the trees, to look into spring pools, to search for the little furry animals and birds. But I still don't leave my bed. I see and hear so much right here, without moving. Why do I paddle to all the other places when I can lie here and watch the waterfall? Why explore the next channel? Why skip it? Is it all the same? Does it matter what channel I explore? Okay, why don't I just stay in Seattle and work at the Twinkie factory?

Each moment has to be different. So is every tree. But is every Twinkie different? Variety must be the spice... is that like Twinkies and cupcakes too?

On an old knarled stump, roots dangle like the Medusa's hair. An eagle lands on the stump. He's strong and aware. A mosquito eater flutters by my eyes so I cup him in my hands and throw him out of the tent. Before I get zipped up, the same bug flies back in. "Hey, I don't want you getting used to these flings, bug," I say, throwing him back out. "If you come back too many times, bug, and bug me, bug, I may squish you." I zip up.

Rain drips on my tent. Over the rushing of the waterfall I hear the repetitive snaps, like caps. It must be a raven. They make the strangest noises and a variety of them. A piece of moss, only a quarter inch across, lies on my pillow. Golden green hairy branches grow within the moss piece. Smaller branches shoot off on their tangents. I look for the symmetry of life in the moss. The branches turn and weigh heavier on one side. Its

tips are brittle. The scrimshaw perfect detail of the moss reminds me of a cold stellar snowflake. But a snowflake is round and symmetrical along a center line. I thought symmetry occurred within living things.

We pack and load into the kayaks. I offer Cha some lotion for his burnt and peeling nose. "Nah, I don't need it," he responds.

"It's easier than having skin cancer warts," I say.

"Ha! What'll they do, cut off my nose if I don't use the stuff?"

Many tiny crabs with half inch bodies float dead in the water. Is this a natural cycle of death or did they die from something else? I paddle up to a waterfall. It dwarfs me. I fill my water bottle from one of it's smaller trickles... Ah.

The water tastes so sweet, though a bit gold colored. I wonder if the crabs died from water pollution? I'm often leery, especially in a city, of drinking water. I pump so much of the life fluid through my system and don't even know what toxins there could be; rotting old pipes, chemicals, or whatever. Like in Mexico, the water in some places is outright poison. I guess I must trust a certain amount since I grant no solution. I sure trust this waterfall.

This cove would be a great spot to stay awhile. But there are other great spots. We paddle around a bend to see a man and lady climb down to their lifeboat from their sailboat, the Double D. "I thought we were all alone in this bay," says Cha.

"We were close enough. We believed ourselves alone so in essence we were. That was our Kayakers' Reality," I say. We paddle through the narrow funnel. The low tide reveals the high tide line along the tips of trees. Those tips are bare naked stock, the needles washed away. The trees' bottom line of green presents a perfect horizontal along the bank, like bangs cut level on a head of hair. We kayak into the traffic of Grenville Channel again. A Monrovia liner, Fair Sea, has seven lifeboats hanging over the side. Each is much larger than one of our kayaks. Cha paddles in front of Denis and me. Two Old Timer High Test beers stick out the rear of his life jacket, tied on deck. "Let's cap those High Tests and make you a beer-propelled jet kayak," Denis tells Cha. Denis imitates the roar of a jet.

Steep cliffs dive down from high rock mountains all around us. One rock arena could seat a million people. The highest seats would be all the way up at the snow fields lying under long curling cornices of the top ridge. I paddle in awe of the water valley. The water feels so fine through the touch of my paddle. The liquid parts smoothly without bubbles. I flow with the current, with birds fluttering high above. The world glows with power and I feel so magical just to be part of it. I feel as one with the air and the water, as if a floating dream. The sun hangs over my right shoulder and a raven flies over my left. A mountain on my port side attracts me, maybe just its trees and rocks. I can't tell why. It's no different really from any others, but I like it. I want to hike it, scratch it, smell it. I feel I could study the mountain every day and still not learn much about it. But instead, my paddle keeps feeding the water's resistance to my kayak and I go on. Goodbye to you tree, hello next mountain.

I travel the center of the channel now. The guys paddle close to the rock wall. These rocks look like candy corn from my distance, the layers stained in from the tide lines.

Tiers of blue-gray mountains pile back, away to the southeast. This mid section of Grenville Channel splits ahead into Klewnuggit Inlet, which tucks off to the left. The land

shades fall away, dark blue at the mountain bases. The further mountains lighten in color with distance. Their heights give the effect of a pyramid. Through this valley hums the cumulative buzz of hundreds of waterfalls. The constant whine is almost like a power generator or a billion bees. Another cup cuts into a mountain looking like the Hollywood Bowl; a giant clam shell set in with snow sprinkled on the top. I eye down my kayak's centerline, past the eagle feather, down Grenville Channel to the pyramid peaks ahead. Calm water passes below, clouds and sky above, mountains slope down on either side. I wish for the slopes on either side to mirror each other so my whole view would be symmetrically balanced. But each rocky ridge differs. The earth's breath, the wind, blows through high tree tops. And the waterfalls are like veins of the living earth's body as they move life's juices. Seems like there should be a symmetry of my whole view. There should be two halves, opposites, yet mostly the same, like in a snowflake or my own body. I grew two arms, two legs, two eyes. My left side seems the same as my right as I paddle on either side of my boat. My arms stroke and cross in front of my face in an "X". When I jump rope or ski or bicycle I like to feel that each half of my body can do the same. But when I hackysack I sure favor my right leg. And I hardly ever throw a ball or rock with my left hand. I write with my right hand. Paddling, my right hand grips constant, my left variable.

I stop paddling and squint past the lopsided eagle feather to my overall view. I search for symmetry. The water lies so calm that its like...? The mountains on either side reach on the water like the "V" guide on a gun sight, aimed down the channel at the tiered mountains, at the blue-gray rocks and trees.

I see the water line lays the axis for a symmetry... of clouds and earth; above the water line the image is substance, below that horizon the image is reflection. The perfect mirror image reflects all the figures and colors as a dream can of life. Only my kayak and my eagle feather maintains unity, like the cherry on a banana split.

Denis and Cha paddle away from their rock wall, out to the center of the channel to join me. They exclaim that I've been missing out, that the rocks along the bank are the greatest. "I grabbed a different perspective of the same thing," I say. They zoom on ahead as I daydream more and start singing "Row, row, row your boat." The song means much to me. The first line tells me to take control of my life; to do it, to row my boat. "Gently down the stream." To me, stream is the movement of time and space, and gently is with the least stress possible. "Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily," tells me to enjoy controlling my life down the stream of time. And "Life is but a dream" I'll have to think about.

After Kxngeal Inlet, where we anchored in the Marne, and not quite to Klewnuggit Inlet, we pull up to camp on the west shore under some young alders. Fresh water runs over the beach. We all fall asleep early, but at midnight Cha and I rise to party awhile. We each eat four bowls of cereal with fruit and dried milk, mixed thick and rich. By three thirty, we sleep soundly again, busy digesting food, not. Gluttons!

June 12, 1981

Cha and I skip breakfast. By eleven, we paddle with a northwest wind blowing at our backs. The sun shines brightly in our faces. I lay my shirt over my back piggy style to warm the wind chill while absorbing sun on my belly. Streamers of kelp drape in the

water like mermaids' hair waving in the current. The hair flows our direction. We guess we could ride two or three knots without even paddling.

After an hour a sailboat motors close then cuts his engine. He sails alongside of us. We say hi to the fellow and he rigs his sails better. Cha slides in behind to catch the boat's draft. Denis and I follow in and we cover up our naked crotches with bandannas. Denis calls them VD hose covers. Cha says, "I never thought I'd want to be drafted."

Jim, the sailor, says, "Ah, I'm used to guys drafting my tail. I used to drive trucks cross country and cars would always come along for the free ride." Jim left Juneau a few days earlier and he's anxious to get back to Seattle. He's lived up north for four years. He looks like the tough guy type out of a cigarette ad. "I've seen bear almost every night and morning since Juneau," he says.

"We haven't seen one yet. Found tracks," says Cha. Two porpoise flip past us looking for a little faster action than our motley parade.

Jim laughs and sits back, dragging on his cigarette. "I bet fishermen laugh at us going by. We look like a mother duck and her three ducklings." This starts us all laughing together. Heading down the channel from the opposite direction, rolling their dorsal fins over the water surface, a large male and a female orca close in on us. Us baby ducks paddle our little down-puffs away from the mother ship into the paths of the whales. We pick up pace so we can maintain the same speed as Jim. Waiting for the large dorsal fin of the male and the smaller female to return, we finally see them surface behind us. I scream a yahoo from excitement. Seems like the whales maybe skipped a breath to avoid us.

Our duck family averages close to six knots between the current, Jim's sail, and our relaxed paddling. Denis nibbles all day on nuts and fruits kept close at hand. He eats much more than when he started the trip, much closer to Cha's and my mass quantities. Jim points at Denis and asks, "Is that all he does is eat?"

Cha and I laugh, and say, "Atta boy, Denis, stuff your face." Many snow covered mountains line our route. We ducklings get excited talking about skiing and specific powder days we remember when the snow crystals lay perfectly. We talk of Alpentel's cliffs and the scary shoots and couloirs we've skied together.

I stop paddling to make a sandwich. The other ducks leave me behind, but I'm hungry. My triple-decker sandwich piles up with cheese, onion, garlic, sprouts, celery, cucumber, whole wheat bread, and green pepper. Now, before my first bite, I paddle full strength to catch up. Back in line, as duckling number three, I eat my sandwich. The extra boost for paddling feels well worth it for this bonus sandwich.

We tail Jim a total of four hours, covering twenty-five and a half miles. Our camp erects on the left side of Grenville this time, three miles from the end. As Denis goes to bed immediately, he says, "I sleep for the dreams."

I say, "I stay awake for the dreams."

"Ah," says Cha, "camp by a babbling brook."

I comment, "I wonder why people call them babbling brooks. I don't think of them as babbling, I think of idiots as babbling. Maybe a flurping brook, or poiting, or fweeting brook." Our tents sit on the beach, just above the last high tide line. I say, "Good, now we have the night's entertainment. Tonight's tide will be higher than last night so we should be sleeping on the wonder line."

"The water won't get us, I'm sure," says Cha.

"Com'on, that's tonight's entertainment. Don't give out the secret. Okay, maybe a ship's wake will douche us all a good one then."

"No way," says Cha, climbing into his tent. I stay up. A liner ship passes south as a quarter rainbow arches in the sky above it. Bugs swarm thick, yet they don't bite. Reds streak the twilight's onslaught. The current runs to the south and the wind pushes it. A red glow on the trees contrasts against a streak of blue sky above. The trees in another direction glow bright green. Our bay reflects the light in dots, dancing points of colors. The moon nears three quarters full. Now in my tent, I watch the moon refract through the screen as evening darkens. The lunar light meshes through appearing as the center of a star with light rays dispersing outward. I lie in my one pair of cotton pants, my tent pair. These grant me comfort away from the heavy wool pants. The sky clears more as the night gets darker. I watch till the water comes right up to the beach grass at my door. The bay is as a calm lake in moonlight.

June 13, 1981

A flutter noise provides ambience to me as I wake from a dream, a dream lost like a childhood memory. Above my tent, alder leaves blow and wave in the breeze. They remind me of butterflies except they aren't free from the tree to flutter where they please. The leaves would fall to the ground if set free, not meant to let go of their roots. They flutter nicely as they are. I do see a butterfly. A monarch is it? Its whole body folds to flap in the wind, to glide unguided, to follow the path of its own choosing. Denis sings some Neil Young song while stuffing his float bags with food and clothes. "I wish I could sing," says Cha. "I've never been able to."

"That's silly, Cha. Why don't you just sing?" I ask.

"I've never been able to. I had a teacher once in grade school who told me to just mouth the words when the class sang together. And a little girl, who couldn't sing much either, told me in music class that I sang horribly."

"Kayakers' Reality. You believe you can't sing so you don't sing because you don't know how, because you believe you can't sing. Cha, you can sing. You can ski."

"For sure, I can ski."

"You're one of the best skiers I know and if you can ski, you can sing. Just do it. Start singing a song like De Re Mi and sing it over and over till you feel good about it, or something."

"Yah. Or something," says Cha. We cart gear to our empty boats on the beach.

"No, really, Cha. It's just mileage like anything else. You wouldn't be such a good skier if when you started you didn't ski because you never learned how. Every turn teaches something. You have balance and harmony on snow, and balance is in the inner ear. Link your music notes like you link turns on skis. Maybe there is no missing link."

We load our boats. I say, "We could go north around Gribbell Island to hit those hot springs in Bishop Bay tomorrow. That would only be fifteen miles off our route."

"Do you think those hot springs are any good?" asks Cha.

"Well, you heard what Eva told us about them. But if we went, they'd have to be good. Otherwise they wouldn't be and that would be no fun. Kayakers' Reality; we would have a good time..."

"Are you sure?" Cha corners me.

"Everything is for sure, Cha."

"No, but are you sure the hot springs would be worth our while?" he asks.

"Cha, I know no more about them than you. Quit trying to trap me."

"I just want to make sure we don't waste our time."

"Do you know what trapping is, Cha? Our time will only be wasted if we think it is." We paddle. The first three miles pass quickly. Just as we enter into Wright Sound, a seven way water intersection, we spot a small red boat rocking in the surge by a beach. It floats empty. As we near, we see it is a nice rowing dory with two sets of oars and a mast. Two people walk down the beach to greet us, a guy and a girl. We climb out on shore and meet Steve and Mary from Orcas Island. Mary's mother runs the bookstore in Eastsound and is the lady who told Denis and I of her daughter and son-in-law rowing a dory to Alaska.

Cha says, "Yah, the park attendant at Nanaimo told me about you guys too."

"And so did Mac at May Fest," says Denis.

Mary says, "When we left on May second we heard all about you guys from the May Fest." Mary looks very strong and has dark hair. Her smooth face is very tan. I notice her wrists bear the tan line, the backs of her hands Hawaiian brown. I assume from the line she must always wear a long sleeve shirt. She also wears a shiny gold band on her wedding finger, as does Steve. He wears a red billed hat and a scraggly beard. His hair is black. He stands tall and thin, like strong wire. I don't see a watch on either of them. "Don't you guys carry the time?" I ask.

"No, we don't have current charts either. We just watch the water and go and we're usually able to guess pretty good."

"I carry a watch and check the current tables every day," I say. "But I think the watch does more good for getting us all on the water simultaneously. We could tend to be a bit lazy."

"You guys should camp here tonight," says Steve.

"Why not. We've covered three miles today," says Cha. We haul our gear up the rocky beach, walking along the stacks of driftwood. One log teeters under me but I stay standing. One log teeters under Cha and it continues rolling. He slips to his butt on the ground. "Whoa..."

With the machete we hack our tent spots in the woods. Many moss covered logs cross one another. The appearance is of a false forest floor. Twice my legs slip through hidden holes. Leg break material if I'm not careful.

I watch Steve and Mary unpack on the beach. Their gear seems very similar to ours; stove, tent, sleeping bags, lots of dried grains and foods in plastic bags. They have big waterproof duffel bags which look a lot easier than our ripping float bags. Steve and Mary tie strings around their quart poly bottles to make them easier to carry. Denis notes the string trick, and soon we copy, like so many other tricks we have learned. Sharing of ideas is the basis of cultural exchange, and this group of five people is the merge of two mighty tribes.

Our group chats on the beach. We discover mutual good friends. We trade stories. "The people we meet all seem so alive," says Mary. "Everybody's out living and doing their own lives. Out here, people seem like individuals."

Steve tells us some histories of Harvey Go, his red dory. "Two years ago I took my first water trip alone in the boat. I rowed from Orcas Island to Petersburg, Alaska.

Boating gives me another outlet, an access to the woods and mountains besides rock climbing and mountaineering. Boating has its slow days and fast days, its action and doldrums."

I say, "I'm surprised by a lot of the people who ski Alpental all winter who plan mountain hikes for all summer. After a five month ski season in the alpines, I have a super drive to get to the sea."

"Steve published an article on his solo trip in *Small Boater's Journal*, the July 1980 edition," says Mary. "Last summer we rowed the Harvey Go all the way around Vancouver Island."

"Man, you guys are tough," says Cha.

"How's paddling, I mean rowing the outside waters?" asks Denis.

"Sometimes they can be a lot easier because the swells are so long and smooth and the water doesn't get choppy as it does inside at times," says Mary. "Usually early afternoon in the summer the northwesterlies blow up and that ends the day on the water. We just got used to paddling early. Outside you don't think about currents like in the Inside Passage. You guys should consider paddling outside Vancouver Island for your last leg. We have a Scottish friend who kayaked down the west coast of North America, then back up the east side of the continent."

"That's totally animal," I say. "What do you guys do about gathering food?"

"Harvesting food is so restricted to time and area," says Mary, "and preparation and storage takes so much time that we can't take advantage of everything while traveling so fast."

"On my trip two years ago," says Steve, "I got caught in a storm with the next town still a week away. I thought I would run out of food and being by myself, I started dwelling on that and got scared. I don't think I really confronted that much danger, but you know how the imagination can go wild by yourself."

"I'd like to find out sometime," I say.

Steve and Mary talk of how they work half the year in construction or something, saving money each winter so they can venture during the warm season. Bugs start their evening attack so we all rub on Citronella, a citrus base repellent. "Mexicans use limes," I say, rubbing a grapefruit rind on my arms.

Our new friends row the Harvey Go out for sunset fishing, but return after an unsuccessful fifteen minutes. "At least they give fishing a try," I say as we sit by the fire. Everybody nods off to their tents for sleep. I find a stump monster and feed it my accumulated trash.

June 14, 1981

Mary is up early reading *Once and Future King*, the story of King Arthur, so she can pass it on to us. The Harvey Go loads for the early bus, to catch the flood tide north up Grenville Channel. Steve packs the boat using a clothesline pulley and anchor rig, hauling the dory to shore with ropes. Two sails rise; one square and one Chinese junk style. Mary lights a fire and says she does so every morning to cook a hot meal and have a nice ritual. I mention to Denis, "Paddling outside could be a good time."

"Could be. Some wild waters."

"Yah, after Portland Inlet I feel a need for some further arrangements to stay dry," I say.

Steve and Mary load the last of their gear under sunshine. Clouds float by like good times. Mary says, "I wonder about some people sometimes. People ask about our trip and say, 'How's the weather been?' I never know how to answer that one."

Steve continues, "Sure, what hours are they talking about? The weather changes as fast as the scenery does. This is a good life."

The two sets of oars synchronize and propel the Harvey Go northbound, the goal being Glacier Bay. They head for the extreme north of the Inside Passage. "They are tough," says Cha. "A fire every morning. We couldn't even begin to light a fire at times, like on Tree Point. There wasn't anything dry to burn."

"They do it differently than us, that's for sure," says Denis.

By the time we pack and put our boats on log rollers, loaded and ready, the three foot waves break on the beach. We seal up in our kayaks and push off with our hands like amputees. The kayaks slide into the water without any splashes into the boats. We check Cha's chart book, but can't tell which of the seven channels we should take. Cha's chart book divides the important page in half and perforates the intersection for book binding. Denis says, "Cha and I were talking and we decided to skip the hot springs. They probably wouldn't be worth a day out of the way. Let's just head for Kingcome Point and Fraser Reach."

We try to figure which channel leads to Fraser Reach. After changing our minds several times we decide our Kayakers' Reality. If we don't decide, that in itself would be a decision; we couldn't move except aimlessly. Aimlessness is a decision.

I charge off at a faster speed to the decided point. Cha and Denis are left behind. In crossing, the water changes from rough to calm and back to rough again. After I pass four miles, I notice Cha and Denis have turned towards a different point. I paddled so fast in the constantly changing winds, not wanting to get stuck in open water again, that I didn't even notice my partners direction change. "What?" I ask myself. I beach and jump in for a cooling swim. Once dry, I dig out my chart which is an overall view scaled to about five miles per inch. I check out my location and see how we decided wrong. I headed for Whale Channel but really wanted McKay Reach. But my crossing hadn't taken me off course very much so I hop in my boat and paddle. After six miles I rendezvous perfectly with Cha and Denis. "You're Kayakers' Reality proved wrong, Mark," says Cha.

"Well, it's better than not paddling at all," I defend myself. "We didn't lose any time. I'm not sure I'll ever lose time unless I die."

Slowly we paddle in the afternoon sun. Cha and I begin playing like trolls, arching our backs forward and wrinkling our faces with troll smiles. "Eh eh eh eh..." I say to him with a raspy voice, all in one breath. Each Eh sounds more like a hiss with the last Eh a long hiss. "We should get together all the trolls and have a party tonight," I say, rasping and squeaking in my fantasy voice.

"Heh eh eh eh eh," Cha rolls off a troll squeak. "We'll drink grog in the woods we will, oh yes, and we'll dance and sing around the fire... Eh heh eh eh eh..."

"Yes, we's will, heh eh eh eh..." I troll. "And we'll look for little wood nymphs to dance and sing with, we will, oh yes. Heh eh eh eh..." We trollishly laugh and paddle into our fantasy.

On our starboard (starboard right, right?), after Trivett Point, a huge arena of cliffs, five miles long, all the way to Kingcome Point, shows rock faces way up to snow covered ridges. One mountain rises to a huge rock dome. Water cascades down, flowing between green shrubs that cling to rocks. Chimneys, cracks, and fissures run the height of the cliffs guiding many paths of water down to the lush green valley floor. It's a rock climber's paradise. Black and white and shades of brown color the miles of rock. I float in the water like a needle compass. The semi-circle bank of cliffs surround me. I am the center point in the bay. An eagle soars above, probably wishing he too could kayak. Ravens cry, their voices echoing off cliffs that stack hundreds of feet off the water.

The land under the cliffs feels mystical. We each choose power spots for our tents. A layer of logs covers a creek and a small waterfall. The creek feeding the waterfall left its flood gravel on the layer of logs. I clear a smooth spot over the waterfall. Gathering moss, I soften the ground. My tent opens on its soft bed ringing with the waterfall melody. Below is my root cellar. But no wine... just snow flake juice.

Once into my clean cotton clothes, I gather the last of my hash and my one last High Test Beer and head out for the woods party. I climb down from my waterfall cottage. Cha's cottage rests down by the beach under a hanging and bushy cedar tree. I stop at the troll beach house to gather him for the party. My back haunches over and my face crinkles into a friendly troll smile, "Heh heh eh eh,... What a fine creek you have. And the driftwood... so artistic, heh heh eh eh..."

The Cha troll says, "I have my brew here. Oh, it's so nice of Denis to have a party, heh heh eh eh eh... Do you think he'll be ready for us with tea cakes and jellies? Heh heh heh eh..."

"Oh, you just never know," I rasp in my squeaky voice. "Oh, you just never, never know, heh heh eh eh..."

"No, you don't," says my troll friend climbing from his cottage. "You just never, never know, heh heh eh eh..." I stroll bent over with my long staff as a walker. Cha chooses his knarled and knotted staff and we hobble down the beach over logs and rocks to find Denis' cottage. We each carry our one beer, chilled in our personal springs. The beers we have saved since Prince Rupert for the hot springs. This enchanted valley now wins the ritual. Cha and I squeak and heh heh eh eh our way along. We believe ourselves slow and aged trolls... so we are. I climb up a slick log and my foot slips. But I catch myself. Cha follows, slips, and drops his brew. We watch it crash on the rocks. He says, "Heh heh eh eh fuck." His voice is still raspy.

I answer, "Oh, you just never, never know, heh eh eh eh..." We bend over, hanging onto our staffs for balance and we pick up all the broken glass. "We don't want the wood nymphs or these cute deer stepping on this, now do we? Heh heh eh eh..."

"You just never, never know," squeaks Cha, piling glass in his troll hand. We walk across crystal ball sized rocks to an opening between two stumps. We peer in and see the party cottage aglow with candlelight. The stumps stand as tall on either sides of the entrance as would kayaks standing on end. At the base of one stump, I point out a stump monster to Cha. It's a hole into the tree bottom, rotted down in the mulchy ground, a visual hole three feet deep and still curving back away from sight. For days I have been using these for putting my trash deep under the ground, hidden from view.

"We feed the little stump monsters their dinner now, oh yesss, we do, heh heh heh heh..."

Cha understands the stump monster and drops his glass in also. He says, "Heh heh eh eh. Do you think we should knock on this gate for a party?" His voice trails off in a soft shrill. We knock kindly on the stumps with our staffs and admire the garden around Denis' cottage. Large skunk cabbage leaves grow among the sparse trees. Branches hang overhead as a forest ceiling. "Anybody home?" asks my troll friend.

We listen but hear no response. Looking to each other, we say simultaneously, "Oh, you just never never know... heh heh heh ehh..."

A laugh rises from within. "Come in," says Denis in his usual friendly voice, without the voice of a troll. In his cottage we snack on raisins and apple slices with peanut butter. Cha and I carry on as trolls. Cake herbs burn in a pipe. The three of us split the two beers and Cha picks up the recorder.

Cha blows a few notes and smiles at the music. I play the basic eight notes and say, now back to normal voice. "Play Do Re Mi now on this like you've been singing it for the last two days."

Cha doesn't ask any questions and right off he plays the first few notes. He shocks himself. "Wait," he says and starts playing again. He makes a mistake and says, "Okay, I know." He plays more, soon saying, "Hey, I can do it. I can learn music. I just have to do it!"

I show him a couple songs more and show him they just vary in pattern from the original notes. "Learn to whistle a song and you'll be able to play it on this."

Cha excitedly grabs the recorder and plays more, crossing a new threshold he previously believed to be a limit.

We end the party. Cha and I leave as trolls, tripping over piles of debris in the dark. "I wonder what he's trying to trap?" squeaks Cha.

"You just never never know," I say. "Maybe a stink machine, heh eh eh eh... Or a wood nymph, that dirty ol' troll..."

Cha points at a pile of bones before the stump gates, "Ah, our friend has been a bit carnivorous lately we see, heh heh eh eh..." Two mink charge at Denis' tent. When they notice it, they scurry off in another direction. "I think he built his cottage over their trail, heh heh heh eh," says Cha.

Cha and I head back to our cottages. We plan on eating a half dozen bowls of cereal each with milk, brewer's yeast and fruit, agreeing that the Grapenuts from Prince Rupert should be called Grape Sponges instead, heh heh eh eh...

June 15, 1981

Recorder music floats in the air and pulls me from my dreams. My mind is satisfyingly empty from the sleep. At times in my life even sleep hasn't been able to empty my mind. I would retain numbers and words from busy school days. They would float through my brain like ghosts. I wake up viewing across McKay Channel to Pilot Point and north up Ursula Channel. Cha practices Do Re Mi on the instrument. I hope he furthers his new appreciation of music. Music is like a window into time for my mind, the nostalgia certain songs bring me, of a past day, never to return except through the memory. Music surges in me, rushes me, and I feel memories and plans and life.

Music is the intuitive mathematics, the rhythm of nature. But then so is everything. I have always been able to view things in their mathematical light, the

physics inherent in nature. That must be why I told Cha that music is like skiing. And kayaking is like skiing. And skiing is like mathematics. So why don't I climb in my kayak and study algebra? I can see kayaking to the next point as multiplying to the next decimal point. With mileage, skiing teaches itself, as does music or kayaking. Maybe that's how so many people constantly reach the same conclusions. To stay with one focus long enough, natural progressions, like an octave on the recorder or a carved turn on skis, reveal themselves. That must be the mathematical makeup of the universe and of man's sequential discoveries. I'm always surprised to watch buddies ski, after so many years on the snow, whole gangs of people have realized the same procedures to turning. There does seem to be best ways for most tasks.

But being so mathematical about my approaches to life, do I unnecessarily eliminate the supernatural, the fantasy? I don't think so. I sit back in my tent. I can feel the presence of the semi-circling cliffs behind me and I appreciate the wonder of them even being there. I am overwhelmed that I am even living!

Steve and Mary warned us about the next twelve or thirteen miles, that the rock cliffs drop to the water so steeply that we would have a difficult time beaching for camp. We should plan on paddling at least as far as Buttedale, the abandoned cannery with the awesome waterfall.

We load up, leave out, and paddle on around Kingcome Point to the southeast, and into the next narrow channel, Fraser Reach. This is only a section of the overall channel called Princess Royal. Rock walls dropping to the water appear to be covered with just inches of soil, mulch of rotten trees and moss, yet full grown living trees hang on and thrive. The forest is thick. We see slide remains in places where the dirt and trees climaxed down to the rock layer. Trees obviously become too heavy for the roots to hang on any longer. They're unfit to survive.

Cha paddles up to me, glowing red with excitement. "Did you see that baby seal? He sat on a rock, all furry with a tiny flipper and little fins. His whole body's only about a foot and a half long. Damn. I wish I got a picture of him. As I paddled up to him, the mother slid into the water. But the baby just sat there with no cares. He probably would have played with me. The mother surfaced and looked at me then swam back to the baby. She dove under and flipped her tail to the baby. And the baby just sat there. The mother looked at me again and swam back to the rock. She repeated the dive and the baby still sat there, not caring. But when the mother repeated her dive and tail flip again, the baby caught on and slid in."

"Training, huh?" I say.

"No, not really," says Cha. He sits back and smiles to the sky. "Ah. A new life in the world. You know, my brother will have his kid in September or October. I'll be an uncle. Yahoo."

"We're lucky both our brothers are already married," I say. "That kind of relieves us of the burden because it makes the moms happy."

"Boy, you're not kidding. Don't forget our bitty dollar bet that I'm going to win cause you'll get married first."

"Forget it, Cha. You'll owe me bitty when some cutie looks into your baby blues and whispers sweet things. You won't know what hit you."

"Ha. Look who's talking. You're almost married now."

"You wish," I say. "Remember, you said I'm just the joker off a playing card and people just point at me and laugh, like that girl in Seattle you met in the Rainbow. When I walked up and she asked if I was your crazy friend, she changed her mind about you. You hang around weird people."

"See then, I won't get married first," he says. "And you owe me bitty bucks."

"Dubee break," yells Denis. I paddle over. We hang onto each other's boats to make our raft and we float down the channel in the current. Passing the eagle feather clip, Denis says, "You know, we blew it. We really should have left our paddles in Seattle and just drifted around in the currents. Never know where we might have ended up." He reaches over to me with the feather, but before we quite connect, he drops it. The weight of the alligator clip takes the feather to the bottom. We can see it standing upright on a rock eight feet down, the feather trying to float.

"Is that a dead player, Cha?" I ask. "We've got a tide to catch if we don't want to buck it paddling into Buttedale. I can't think of a better place for an eagle feather to rest."

"Like my Peru hat that flew off the cliff and is now a blanket in an eagle's nest," says Cha. "Or my Canadian brew broken on the beach last night."

"Better memories of those things this way," says Denis, leading our trio down current. We paddle enchanted by the many waterfalls, wide ones, steep ones, some shelved, some high volume. Under the steep rocks and nearing the cascade sprays, I notice most of the places look like they too are waterfalls in heavy rains. One waterfall slides over smooth rocks a couple of trees high. Water sheets slide in differential layers. White foam slides almost friction free over a more liquid layer, which slides slower over the greater friction of the rock. At one spot the water hits a dip and flies over a lip into the air, like a ski jump. Red and green moss clings to the clumps of big trees. Many big trees hang over the water, connected to the earth by exposed roots.

Rain starts to fall, first softly, then increasing. Cha and I keep guessing Buttedale to appear around every corner. "You just never never know," squeaks Cha in his raspy troll voice. We tuck close to the shore, bucking the current. Ducking and twisting our shoulders, we paddle under the dangling trees like we used to kayak under docks on Lake Washington nights. Finally Buttedale appears. A couple large fuel tank docks float on the water. The hillside is covered with cannery buildings. The place looks like a ghost town in the rain. With a loud and constant roar, a mammoth waterfall drains into the cove.

Dripping from the deluge of rain, we waddle into the general store. Jim, our sailboat friend, our mother duck from Grenville Channel, sits and drinks coffee with a bearded, gray haired but young, woodsy type fellow. A blonde woman with heavy eye shadow knits her sweater by the wood stove. The man and woman own Buttedale. They've been here two years with their sixteen year old daughter. The mother tells how her daughter studies through mail correspondence and she finds enough entertainment through meeting the boat people who stop for gas and supplies. Their pet wolf sits in the corner eating a hunk of cheese and an orange.

Sailboat Jim and the burly fellow talk about things they could do to ease the boredom. "I wish I had more propane, we could melt some more cannon balls," says the Texan, referring to the lead weights used on commercial trollers. Another couple of old fellers wander into the store as Jim and Tex talk about our heavy wool Army pants. They talk about the war and the depression and working the docks for a dollar a day.

One of the old fellers who just arrived refers to our kayaks out on the dock, and our venture. "I admire you boys. Too many people, kids these days, just sit at home wondering what there is to do, instead of getting out and just doing..."

Jim and Tex continue their bored conversation, wondering why anybody in their right mind would travel in a little boat, like us or the young married couple in the dory two days earlier. They mention the two Puerto Ricans from last year and the two girls in the row boat two years ago.

The old feller continues his saga of bored youth of this era. Jim and Tex complain of nothing to do. The blonde Texan lady walks over to me and offers shelter from the rain if we care to shack up in a cannery building.

I follow her up a dirt road over wooden bridges. We enter an old mess hall. "You boys can sleep in the cooks' quarters. Steve and Mary slept here too. Don't turn off these lights if you don't need to because the waterfalls supply all the electricity we could ever use and the light bulbs wear out faster being turned off and on. The toilet doesn't work, you'll have to use the woods, which I'm sure you're used to. And the shower should never run out of hot water, it's a big hot water tank and the electricity heats it all the time. You can each take a bedroom and there's sheets, blankets and towels."

I thank her graciously as we walk back to the general store where Jim and Tex continue talking about things they could do. "We could go out and scrub the oil dock, except the rain would saturate us," says Jim.

The old feller is telling Denis of a woman who paddled a canoe up the Inside Passage thirty years ago. She still lives in the Queen Charlotte Islands. He continues, "Oh, you guys work at Alpentel! I've spent a lot of my days in those mountains around there. Denny Peak and Rampart Ridge and Snow Lake and Goldmeyer Hot Springs..." I really admire this old feller's energy and he goes on, "Yes, now I'm sure I'll get a kayak. It would make a great lifeboat on my sailboat."

In the mess hall, I feel its retention of ghosts of activity from fifteen years ago. Then the cannery boomed with people who worked isolated from the cities. The tender boats make this cannery obsolete. We each shower for an hour and trim around our beards to neaten up. Denis tells me, "That Texan said while you took off with his wife that he tires of the waterfall. He can't stand the constant noise. It's too much like pounding surf, he said."

"Man," I say. "Those sounds are mesmerizing for me."

"For sure," says Denis.

June 16, 1981

It feels so nice awakening on a mattress and clean sheets. Luxury can be nice. I stare sleepy-eyed around the room at the bare walls. Paper peels off the dry board. There's a dresser, a closet, and a pile of my gear; both float bags, all the little stuff bags, and clothes hanging around drying. I feel good from long sleep and the vivid dreams which slipped from me as I slid into consciousness. Something about a girl. Must be my dream girl. I finger my recorder and piece together Herman's Hermits' old song, "Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Daughter..." I play "The Fool on the Hill" and "Nowhere Man." Someday I should live in a home with a piano and learn music. On piano I could discover chords and the relationships of sounds and what is physically acceptable to my

ear in impromptu music. I would like to learn different keys and to know how tones progress through each. Music feels like a harmony tap to the universe. Seems like almost every culture of people, even groups of animals, use musical sounds for communication, to ease their minds, even for mating. Like, "Hey baby, wanna come over and hear my stereo? Huh, do ya, huh?"

I should be able to dream music since I can dream of numbers and words. But then a dream girl is like music.

Neither Cha nor Denis want to paddle today. The rain has stopped for a bit here and I really just as soon paddle, but I'm easy to stay too. Paddling has turned to routine now. We usually wake, pack, and paddle automatically. I am anxious to find those sunny beaches and stay at camp for a week at a time. Fun's ahead exploring one place a little more intimately. I mend my float bags. Denis complains his mended seams ripped again. "We need some weeks of not moving to give the gear a rest," he says.

I walk down to the store. The sun peaks out and blazes on the wet dirt roads. The blonde lady with her blue eye shadow soaks sun in her halter top and shorts. She greets me and welcomes us to stay longer if we please. I confirm we will. Inside, Jim sits munching on a cheese sandwich and feeding bites to some of the fourteen cats. He tells about the gray dog pacing the room, "Yah, Wilbur is fifth generation timber wolf from Maine."

"He sure is tame for a wolf," I say.

"If he didn't like you he'd surely let you know. Don't mess with him," warns Jim.

"I wonder if the dogs breed tamer offspring each generation?" I say.

Jim laughs, "Genetics don't work that way. Hell, that depends on the master only. If genetics worked that way we wouldn't have war. Seriously. Think about it." I nod and smile to congratulate his theory.

Cha comes down and we decide to feast. Looking through the frozen meats, we find a "pork roast" and buy it. As I leave, I ask Mrs. Tex if she had known Jim prior to this visit. "No. Not at all. He just moved in four days ago and is still here. Just one more bored person..."

I thank her for the accommodations and climb back up the hill to the mess hall. Rain falls again.

Inside, I move some of the long dining tables to the side of the room. I stretch and jump rope and sweat for an hour. My watch on a table keeps me oriented to time. And my half hour shower is so nice. During a break in the rain, I dress in my gore-tex rain gear, and head out for a walk. About twenty buildings cover the grounds. They are all painted the standard cannery white with red trim. I find the turbo room with the electric generator. Energy from NRG. Naturally Resourceful Gravity. I peek into the window at the huge whining machine which stands about belly high and is longer than my kayak. The turbo spins high speed from the water falling. This NRG used to supply fuel for three hundred cannery workers.

I walk the wooden path up the hill. The suspended bridge boardwalk climbs steeply. Beside me runs a cedar pipe, a meter in diameter and made from slats all banded together for a tight water seal. Water rushes through the pipe. I continue climbing above the lush green ten feet below. Looking back, I can see all the way down to Buttedale Cove, down strings of lights lining the pipe and path. Up ahead, the trail curves out of sight. Occasional leaks in the pipe spray out, watering the berries, blue and salmon,

which look about a week from ripe. Oh, boy! And ah, a snow peak across the channel smiles down on me as I climb higher. I long to ski. The trail climbs steeper yet. Looking up the ascent, blood rushing to my pumping legs, it seems like a roller coaster ahead.

On the summit of the boardwalk a cement block house with water gates on pulleys sits on the edge of a beautiful lake. Two peaks, rounded, rocky, and steep, tower on either side of the water. A snow shovel waits on top of the block house. I wonder if the turbos slow with winter ice. The Texan told us they had six feet of snow on the dock this last winter. That's more than most ski areas had. I hear larger falls to the north. Wandering into the woods I cross an old rotted wood trail. I find the top of the mammoth falls, the cause of the Texan's disquieting noise. The top pool is mirror flat. Its water runs over the cliff. The fluid bends, retaining the smooth glass image, rolling like a window molded over a ledge.

One water shoot slides down a six foot ramp. Its water remains unbroken and glassy. The shoot enters into the lower pool, and there the water boils and churns into a foamy white. After that pool, the water turns out of sight. The falls sooth me with their steady hum.

Walking on, I find further action of the river. This section is a perfect white water kayak run, deep with dips and eddies emptying into a clear swimming hole. The water surges forward constantly. Its future lies hidden around the next bend.

Sitting on this river rock I feel the power of gravity. It influences all I do. The sun and moon's gravities play, always pulling on our earth as we revolve and rotate through space. The oceans are drawn around the earth's surface and tides climb up the shores. I feel gravity on the seat of my pants. Seems as if my body, which contains roughly the same proportion of water as does the surface of the earth, should be influenced by the sun's and moon's gravities too. Maybe more than I ever realized.

But I am a nomad. My head sleeps in different directions every night and my body rotates constantly all day. I wonder if I slept in the same bed and sat at the same desk every day and night, I wonder if gravity would effect me more constantly? Thus, would I be more available to the effects of external forces? Maybe nomadic lifestyle can actually have a physiological effect on my body, freeing me from external constant forces. That would grant me more personal power over my life. Is that my goal? I know nothing.

I walk on and find the waterfall's big drop. The water disappears in huge quantities over the edge. It's white and wild, churning, raging, powerful, violent, and beautiful. But what is beauty? Only my perception, more of a label than a defined state, a subjective statement of quality about an object of nature. I stand on an old cement retaining wall. Pipes stick out with an old tap inserted. The air smells so clean. Below, I see the falls catching in a deep pool and flowing on. Beyond, the saltwater channel rounds Work Island. I see north, up Klekane Inlet. By my feet on the cement wall reads, "FEB 1937." Wasted cedar water pipes clutter the trail down below. I head back to the lake.

A few logs are tied together at the top of the falls. These block all the driftwood logs coming from the lake. The log jam retains enough wood to build a small neighborhood of houses. I play my recorder, random music with rhythms flowing in and out, runs up and down the scales. I jam on the log jam. Many bushes with oval leaves, pointed, red and green in color, surround me. Small white flowers with black pistils

blossom. These are the same plants I found so many of on Stuart. Now I wonder if these produce some sort of fruit. If so, it would be an abundant food.

Fern and moss cover cut stumps. Back along the lake trail I return to the dam and boardwalk. I read a thermometer at 49 degrees F. A pinhead size bug crawls up by the 100 degrees mark. It is bright orange. A gray bird shaped like a pigeon wears a white feather necklace. The bird blinks at me with black eyes. It opens and closes its orange beak as if talking. He lifts his orange claw at me. As I walk past, the bird doesn't frighten. Down I tread over the roller coaster cedar walk.

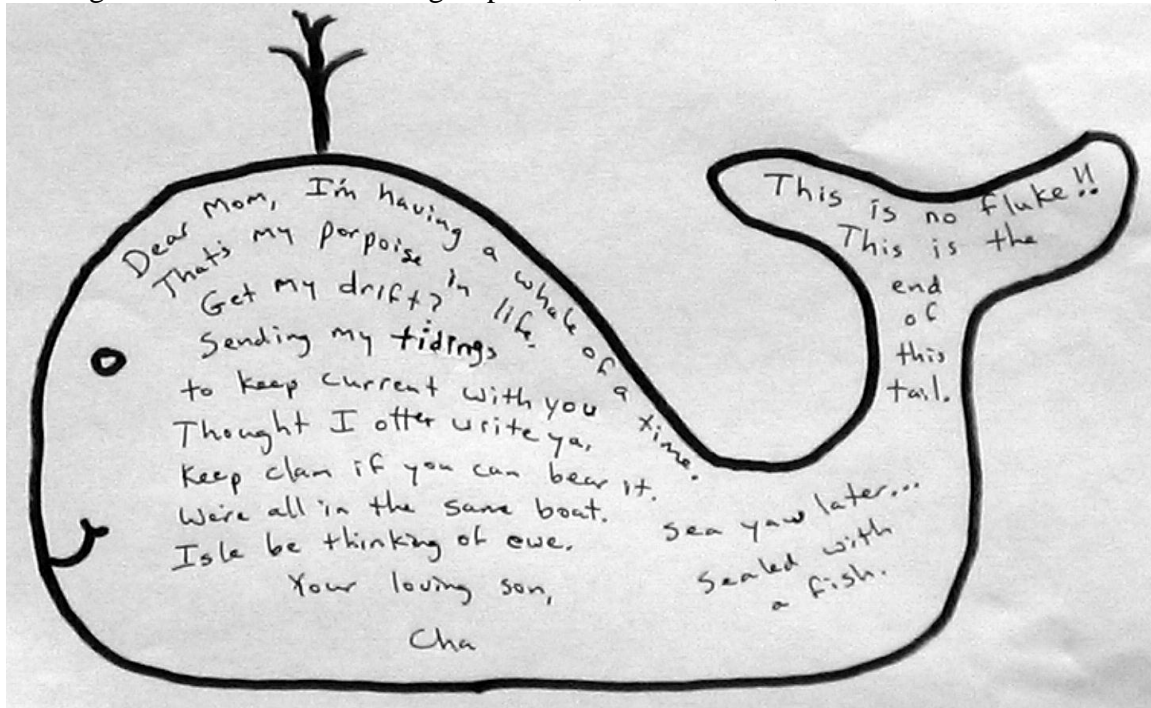
Back in the mess hall I find Denis still in bed. He hasn't moved all day. Sleep and eat and sleep and eat. Food stacks on the bed next to his so he doesn't have any need to move. And where's his toilet? ... not outside in the woods, but kind of. We have been sticking our asses out of Denis' window and dropping our plops into the weeds two stories below, piling mostly on a rock. The wind and rain conveniently wafts away the smell. I disturb Denis for awhile as I dump ten buckets of water out the window... somebody has to flush the toilet.

"Do you know why lazy people don't like M&M's, Denis?" I ask my bed bound buddy. He knows this joke because I use it on everybody. I modify it indiscriminately for lift operators, Caucasians, or buffalo lovers.

"Yah, yah," says Denis, adjusting his sheets. "They're too hard to peel. Come on, it feels good to stay in bed."

In the giant kitchen with the ten foot grills and washbasins as big as bathtubs, Cha and I cook our feast. The pork shoulder roast turns out to be ham, but with potatoes, vegetables and rice, we don't mind much. Denis doesn't feast with us because his stomach bulges from his day's consumption. "Those Grapenuts taste like they're blown from cannons," says Denis.

After dinner we gather on Denis' bed. Cha has a thin wooden whale we had found floating in the water. We write a group letter, in Cha's name, to his mother:



June 17, 1981

Once again we feast. For breakfast we eat pancakes with eggs, ham, and cheese, with fried taters and juice and milk. We pack and load the kayaks by noon. The meeting of the tides is shown on Cha's charts to be just around the bend from Work Channel. On this point of Kayakers' Reality, we assume the current's free ride to be ours.

"Oh, no," says the blonde woman. This morning she dresses in shorts and a tight summer blouse with no bra. "The current doesn't start to ebb you out south for another ten miles." I think she notices my eyes wander to her shirt and says, "I expected sun today. I planned on tanning myself."

"That would have been nice," I say, noticing Denis pick up an eagle feather from the oil dock. "What was that helicopter doing that I saw fly out of here yesterday?"

She answers, "Surf Gold Mine reopened over the hill. The helicopter is their only access which they keep on standby for seven thousand dollars a day. They come in here for their grocery orders and cups of coffee. Fifteen men work up there." She smiles.

I notice a girl sitting in the store as we wander in. She shies away from us and the blonde mother says, "We've been celebrating our daughter's birthday around here."

"Happy Birthday," I greet her. "Is Jim still here?"

"Oh, sure. He's up at the house with my husband." Denis pulls five boxes of candy out of the glass counter and buys them.

"Man, you eat a lot of that stuff," I say.

"Hey, this is MacKintosh," he says, breaking off a piece and handing it to me. Usually I turn down even a bite of candy but I bite this toffee... and the addiction instantly takes hold.

"That's tasty. I like that, I want one." I buy three boxes for myself, my first candy in years. The daughter sits in the corner and watches us. "How did you three come to move to Buttedale?" I ask the mother.

"We read an ad in Alaska Magazine about a cannery for sale... and Texas was too boring so we bought this place for a change."

"Some change!" I say, finishing my first box of MacKintosh. "Well, we're out of here. Sounds like we're going to buck the current today."

"You guys should paddle at least ten feet from shore because of the slides. One tree could lose hold and start a whole avalanche on top of you," she says.

Denis mounts his eagle feather on an alligator clip and fastens it to his bow line. In the heavy rain the black feather's oils shine and the light wind gives it spring. We paddle away into the wind and current, away from Buttedale and the waterfall, south, past Work Island and on to Red Cliff Point. "Hey, look. A kayak!" As the rain stops, we slip off our spray decks and paddle to the shore where the boat sits. It's a seventeen foot Orca design, colored green like the trees. I immediately notice the standard plastic bags with twisties in a pile of gear. Then I spot the kayaker. He has long brown hair to his shoulders and no facial hair. Cotton jeans lie flat on a wet rock and the guy wears another wet pair. Steve Dupay (last name as pronounced) tells us he bought his kayak this last spring and paddled the San Juans for a week to learn the craft. Then he left his home in Bellingham, now headed for Ketchikan. He uses a tarp to sleep under and carries very few wool clothes. He has a watch, but no current tables. As the rain starts again, we paddle on without even beaching. We are anxious for the day. We tell Steve about the dry

accommodations at Buttedale and of Steve and Mary a few days ahead of him. Adios, wet kayaker.

Onward we paddle, bucking wind and current in pouring rain. We talk of how tough Steve would have to be, with no tent for shelter from bugs, and no wool for these wet days. Cha says, "He just had his wet clothes lying on the rocks. At least he should have hung them from branches to let the wind help dry."

"If Steve got paranoid alone in his dory, I wonder what this guy gets scared of... freezing to death?" I say.

We now paddle in Graham Reach, the second half of Princess Royal Channel. After another mile, we feel foolish fighting the forces against us, so we give in to camp after only a three and a half mile day. Home today sits on a four foot raised area above a river with green marsh grass all around. From my tent I watch the rain come down, my awning working nicely, allowing the view. I breathe deeply for a long time and feel my heart pump as my natural clock. Thump, thump, thump, ticking off the moments from now to now.

June 18, 1981

Rain pours as we pack and paddle away from this camp across from Aaltanhash Inlet. Today we head south without wind and with the current. Rain continuously deluges. Water drops bounce from the salt surface. Our clothes soak up water as would a sponge. On and on, rain nonstop, drip, drip on the hoods of our coats, drip, drip, water running down our noses. Drip, drip, through the gaps between spray decks and coats, into the boats. Drip, drip, drip. I keep my sponge on my lap to catch the bulk of the water that sneaks into the boat. Pelts of fresh water splashing to the salt leaves a film as the two different saline levels mix.

We cover nine miles before we duck into Swanson Bay. Here we wait for a tide change and seek shelter in an old mill we heard lies ruined back in the woods. Paddling in, we see a 125 foot smokestack rising above the wet trees. It looks built of red brick. The scene is awesome. The ancient ruins seem almost spooky. Pilings line the water, the dock rotted and gone. We beach the kayaks and trod into the woods with our knapsacks. Shelter from this constant onslaught of raindrops would be nice. We are beginning to feel like victims of Chinese water torture. As we walk, we discover the earth here has also started a new layer of growth and rot, forming a false forest floor on top of old piers. The mulch rots and turns to soil. We step carefully to avoid falling through the pits of fear.

Inside the old mill we seek out corners where the drips drop least. But the water is still constant. Our clothes and minds are saturated with it. Denis says, after some food, "We're not staying any drier in here. I'm going to wander around the ruins." Ceaseless rain. Heavy drops. We wander over the phony forest floor deeper into the woods toward the smokestack. We find forty or fifty foot high cement walls standing against the rain. Moss coats them. Roots climb, intertwining tendrils eating up the wall, growing into cracks and bursting apart the structure. This is spooky. The tall red tower, crumbling at the top, hangs over the ruins, falling to nature's torments.

"This looks like the earth after World War III," says Cha. We explore back towards the water. Cha goes ahead to pull the kayaks up from the incoming tide. On our gradual escape, Denis and I stumble across a dead bald eagle. Meat clings to its skeleton.

The full set of feathers piles around the carcass. "Mark. Look at all the feathers," says Denis. We both stare down at the precious life gone from a magnificent creature, one we have maintained a constant respect for. And awe. Water drips off our hoods into the bone cavities.

"I don't think I'd feel right taking those feathers. Seems wrong somehow. The feathers are beautiful and perfect, but it seems wrong to disturb it," I say.

"I don't think I could take any either," says Denis. "This place is eerie."

Climbing back into the boats, we all feel relieved to escape this haunted land. We paddle out of Swanson Bay and continue south in the slack tide. Rain pours on. I bet inches of water have fallen today. We head almost directly south, past Flat Point and Green Inlet. By Quarry Point we swing left where the channel splits. Down the other route is Tolmie Channel, the route we traveled on the Marne with Chuck and Eva. After two more miles down this Hiekish Narrows, we give up for the day, after a very wet eighteen miles.

Now I sit in my dry tent in dry cotton tent clothes. My water-pruned hands still release moisture from the saturated pores. All day I looked forward to this dry moment, this luxury. I just relax, cross-legged, watching out the half mile across this channel. Rain pings my tent, ceaselessly. This trip wouldn't be the same without a waterproof, self-contained shelter. Cha has named Steve, our lone kayaker friend from Bellingham, "The Cotton Kid." I now think of him and congratulate ourselves for planning our gear as well as we did. I wouldn't want to deal with a visqueen tarp and wet jeans right now.

We camp on the sand and hope the tide won't get us. We'll know by 2:30 a.m. Sleep overcomes me now. I'm sure that between the constant wetness and our energy output, we burned many calories today. Goodnight.

June 19, 1981

Rain falls steadily. It is still the dark of night. We wake for high tide. Denis has been watching the water slowly approach his tent. A dead, yellowed kelp bulb dangles eye level from an older branch, telling us past high tides would have covered our sleeping space.

Denis gives in and climbs out from his warm, dry space into the rain. He excavates a higher spot, piling sand, gravel, and rocks. By 2:15 his tent is moved and he relaxes again. But I still wait for the 2:30 high tide. The water laps inches from my eyes. I have my sleeping bag all stuffed. I'm dressed. My gear is all packed. My candle burns, a dubee burns, and time burns. I feel I am clear of the threat.

Cha never even wakens to check the tide. His boat starts to float and leave from the drift log perch, but Denis saves that. The water still rises. I am only three inches from submersion. I watch my candle and wait. The rain falls. The waterfalls fall. Rain and tide; we are the water. Next to me piles the wet clothes I wore yesterday. Wet, wet, wet...

Now 2:45 a.m., I hear Cha yell out, "FUCK". The word echoes loud and seems purposeful. I guess he's paddling in his tent. The water is still rising, though very slowly now. I'm convinced I'm safe. I feel fresh and quite aware now. I guess when we pitch these camps for ease of action and convenience on sandy tide flats, we only ask for trouble. We play on a threshold. What a night. Denis gives into sleep and says, "Hey man, see ya in the future."

My candle melts down. The flame and its reflection off the metal top of the peanut butter jar flicker as the wax readies to pour out and end the candle's life. The tide is now safe at 3:15 a.m. Goodnight popsicle.

Daylight now. Rain still falls. We do not paddle today. When we do exit we must be timely and leave early. There will be several tide changes to catch. S and M (our reference to Steve and Mary) don't even time those changes. But my fuss seems to pay off with free rides.

The rain actually breaks for a while so I dress in my wet wool and go walking. This should dry my clothes; from the inside out. I feel strange. Real appreciative. I feel so good, my life feels so right, even in the rain. At the river's edge, the water floods with the forest's dirt, a toffee brown color, like the MacKintosh candy. The river joins the salty channel and again I see the film, the joining of different salinities. The two consistencies swirl and join in the fluid. I think of joining too, of sharing my life with a woman. One woman. Away from the river, the two saline solutions have completely merged, the current moving water back out to sea. I dream of a simple home with a child or two, with a garden, with that sense of continuance, a flow like the river. I know not the time, nor the person, but now I feel: Ah... the future, whatever it brings.

Cha moves his tent off the beach onto the hill; higher and dryer. Last night he moved boulders in order to set up his tent on the beach. Unknowingly, he uncovered a stream which eventually gave him the modern convenience of running water in his home. Complete with leaky plumbing. So his stuff is all wet. In his new tent location, Cha sits burning all his candles trying to dry his things. Mostly he's concerned about the foot of his sleeping bag.

Denis and I stand in front of the half dome tent on the beach. We appreciate the grayness and uniformity of the color around us; in the water, in the air, and even the trees through the mist. We talk of the nice textures in the shades of grays that we can't see on clear days, literally like water colors.

Cha joins us on the beach. He looks burdened. He says he hopes we can get to Bella Bella soon because he only has three days' worth of quick food left. "I need candles and fuel, too. I'm burning it all drying my things."

"Put your wet clothes on. Mine are almost dry now." I say.

"No way. I'm totally soaked up there. Everything. Will you come help me wring out my wool blanket, Mark? It's totally a sponge."

We climb up to his tent. Inside the green home flames dance away drying Cha's life. We each grab onto the wool blanket and twist it into knots. Only a few drips fall. "Stand on a log and shake the blanket," I say.

"That won't work," he says. I leave to the beach feeling negative energy vibrating between Cha and me.

After lunch, Denis and I party in the half dome. We talk of sewing personalized tents and designing them to suit our needs. Cha wanders back down to the beach with a dirty pan. Denis asks, "How's it going, Cha?"

"Fucked," he responds in a whine. "This trip isn't as fun as it used to be."

"What's up, Cha?" I ask.

"Oh, I just hate fucking being wet; my clothes, my tent. This is fucked."

"I kind of enjoy it," I respond, wondering if I shouldn't have. At this moment I just don't feel like being pulled into Cha's spiral to hell. The environment isn't so bad. It's his attitude. Cha marches away, up to his hill camp.

Denis and I make a list of important features for our ideal tent:

1. Double ended openings.
2. Ability to have doors open even in rain.
3. Structurally designed to support interior clothesline, and rings sewed in for that purpose.
4. High enough to sit up straight in lotus position.
5. Freestanding, so can be set up on rocks or a barge and for ease of mobility.
6. Easy assembly, like the pole segments joined by interior elastic.
7. Aerodynamic for storms.
8. Color inside; light blue or yellow for psychological comfort. Light beige exterior for proper light absorption and camouflage.
9. Small packaging.
10. Pockets inside tent walls.
11. Gore-tex to enable no rain fly (less material, quicker assembly).
12. For super luxury; have attachment so two tents can zip into a tunnel, thus joining to make two rooms, or three or more.

Denis and I dream on, talking about mounting solar cells on the kayak deck and installing a battery so we could mount on waterproof stereo speakers. We'd have lights for night paddling and all other modern breakables. We dream on of our vans for winter living, of joining them under snow so the homes get snowed in together, for neighborly action.

Rain continues, and night falls.

June 20, 1981

"The general remedy of uneasiness is change of place, almost everyone has some journey of pleasure in his mind, with which he flatters expectations. He that travels in theory has no inconveniences; he has shade and sunshine at his disposal, and wherever he alights finds tables of plenty and looks of gaiety. These ideas are indulged until the day of departure arrives, the chaise is called and the progress of happiness begins." Samuel Johnson

We awaken at 6:30 a.m. for departure, but rain falls so hard we decide against the insta-soak. Rain continues all morning like a shower of pea gravel or hailstones. Cha wanders down from the hills and talks about how many miles until Bella Bella, and the number of miles to Namu, and how many to Campbell River. He tells me how many miles to home and the locks. He tells of his plans for all our friends and family to greet us and the party they can throw for us. Denis responds to the idea, suggesting maybe meet everybody in one of the bars by the Government Locks. They talk on like a cheering band and flags and fancy toot toots will meet us on our return from vacation. I remain silent, actually despising the whole idea to myself. Couldn't we just remain quiet about our return instead of yelling out, "Hey, we're home, look at us. Are we neat, or what?" I prefer to remain, "or what."

I lie in my tent on my stomach and watch an eagle fly. He carries a fish gripped in his strong talons. The fish remains still, paralyzed by the sharp claws. It is unable to help itself any longer. What if I ever lost a limb or an eye or became paralyzed with a severed spine? I used to think if I became an invalid I would have to just die. Unable to ski or play normally, life would be different. But now, I think I could maintain this state of satisfaction. Appreciation of a flower doesn't require a leg. A smile is a smile, no matter if the rest of the world walked and I couldn't. I wouldn't have to cease my life just because others had something more than me. Maybe I'd consider suicide if I didn't have a Corvette and a Suzy Home Bake Oven and a hair dryer.

I inventory my food: seeds for alfalfa sprouts, short grain brown rice, millet, buckwheat, red beans, pinto beans, lentils, split peas, corn nuts (too much salt), soy nuts, wheat nuts, wheat pancake mix. My dried fruits consist of prunes, peaches, raisins, apples, apricots, pears, figs, and dates. I have Grapenuts, granola, shredded wheat, peanut butter, grains for hot cereals, soy curd, bread, cheese, fresh fruits and veggies, mass garlic and onions. My spices include cayenne pepper, oregano, ginger (to take the fart out of beans, which it proves not to do, and neither does it take the stink out of farts), garlic powder, thyme, sage, poultry and Italian seasonings, bay leaf, and cumin.

I hear the strange and ancient call of a raven. No wonder the early Northwest Indians worshipped the mystic bird. It sounds like a hollow wooden box being hit by a rubber drumstick; tonk, bonk, ponsk, tont.

My dishes lie under a tiny waterfall behind my tent. It's my automatic dishwasher. I wish the rain would intensify some more because my dishwasher needs more volume to scrub the mess kit correctly. This morning's torrent gave a good scrub. So here I am, stuck on the beach in the rain, wishing the rain to fall harder. But sun would be nice too, for my alfalfa sprouts. My two jars are stuffed with the fresh grown vegetables, but without sunshine they don't turn very green. Life's a beach.

A sailboat motors through the channel. My daydreams excite me. Long had I anticipated such a day as this, here, unobligated in my tent. I think of my future; of Alpentel, of writing this book. I start singing. It's an impromptu song about sunny beaches and lying here in my tent, the living room of my heart. I beat on my clothes bag, my palms cupped for pop. My heart feeds its rhythm into my hands. My memory takes me back to the twenty-first year of my life. I stood on the corner of Second and Marion in downtown Seattle. I dressed in a light blue corduroy three-piece suit, my tie still snug around my neck. I waited for the bus, after passing the day trying to sell commercial real estate. That was my life, I thought. The routine lasted only three months. Waiting for the bus with me were two strangers, a guy and a girl who dressed in worn jeans and loose Mexican shirts. They carried backpacks. I rid myself of my knapsack, so in my hand I carried a briefcase, a special one from Goodwill. And I envied the couple next to me, feeling myself homesick for Mexico and longing for Alaska, where I had never been. I stepped forward onto the bus and I could feel my knee wobble. From skiing. I had lost an anterior cruciate ligament and I needed cutting open. And time passed. After a knee operation and the physical therapist's warning of me maybe never skiing again, I packed up and left for Mexico in faded jeans and a loose shirt. I swam and ran and flexed my leg. Ha, and now I laugh at the spark which triggered me to quit real estate. I had friends over to my Capital Hill apartment. We played poker and smoked bongos and partied. The phone rang. I answered the phone in laughter from somebody's joke. The fellow on the phone

wanted to buy an apartment I had advertised. I laughed so hard that I excused myself and hung up. That was that. Real Estate fulfilled very little of my heart's desire. It was a wrong path for me, but now with hindsight, I see it as a great stepping stone.

I drum harder and sing louder in my tent. Soon my excitement jumps me to my feet and naked out my door. In the rain I clap and sing and dance. For part of an hour I clap, varying pitch and beat. My flat right hand slaps against the cupped left. Then two cupped hands in front of my mouth. I open and change the "O" shape of my lips for hollowness. I stomp my feet and pop on my water-locked rock, my isle of isolation. I pee into the water. My body fluids mix smoothly with the ocean's, the saline and mineral contents being much the same. Bubbles foam up and ring away from the rock, making a perfect circle, white on the dark water. Rain beats down the bubbles. The circle entrances me, the ring growing, expanding outward, like the search for an eternal truth.

The rain pelts my naked body so I return to the tent. I lay on my back and stare up through my visqueen awning at the trees above. Big cedars grow up, seeming perpendicular to the earth's plane. But my perception is distorted upside down. I stare until I loose my mental definition of the way things grow and where gravity pulls. I close my eyes and lie wide awake. Neither of my partners have peeped for hours. I hope Cha is controlling his attitude. Denis sleeps through the day. Occasionally I hear him stretch and yawn. He goes, "Rrrrrrr, ah." Row, row, row your boat, Denis.

My stove's blue flame heats the bottom of a pot full of split peas and beans. These have been soaking in water for two days. A speck of earth heats out of uniform from the rest of the pot's bottom, causing the blue flame to glow orange. An aura of orange light emits, a dome, a halo, fading in and out, probably like Denis' sleep. The orange shows me the presence and essence of heat, of fire. I allow my imagination to wander to esoteric fires, then back to this earthly element. Once science considered fire to be one of only four existing elements of our planet. What a nice and simple reality; earth, air, fire and water. Our ancestors believed that truth. But I've read of all the elements subdivided beyond a hundred. But everything can still be subcategories of the original four, if I choose.

The orange flame flickers into a small burst. I can envision the orange glow as a U.F.O in the blue sky or a spirit or a strength of God... It is! Existence is... and I love it and I play in it as a child, trying to maintain my naivety and simplicity. Carefree. All is one for a child. He doesn't even bother with the four subcategories of earth, air, fire, and water. That is one great achievement to be had on this planet; the grand unification. I think turtles have already figured it out. But they don't have to think about it.

As I've grown up people have asked what I plan to do with my life. I feel that I can't answer that. How could I? Do? What's do? Everything I've done is now incorporated into my present being. My experiences have unified. My past makes my present. Now I lie watching the flame of my stove, all blue except the one orange burst. Tomorrow I will live today as now is tomorrow's memory. I am doing. This satisfies my needs. I need to live my life merging and separating like the universe, living in fire and snow, learning to live with love, hate, wealth and poverty. And my best memories come from vacations in my life, so I decide my whole life can be a vacation. Why not?... Why not!?!

But my future. I consider it, like rinsing my dishes so I don't have to scrub them later. My plans direct towards a simple life tomorrow. What do I need? Not much. What do I want...? Depends on everything.

During a moment of lighter rain I place my eating plate under my automatic dishwasher. Whistling a rhythm and blues song, I stand and turn from the waterfall. My eyes come face to limb with a hemlock tree. Hanging down with the weight of wet moss, the earth pointing tips of the branches show me their needles. Each one contains a reservoir of water, one crystal clear rain drop on every end. They cling and reflect the world. Clear and bright, each drop contains a whole world, tiny and insignificant in a way, since the same view shines through each drop, yet very significant in that they impress me and make this moment. Each drop holds the sky and the tree, the channel and the rocks. Each globule of light and surprise bears no mention of future or past. I realize water flows its cycles through time. But the drop shows its optical regurgitation of the present. In the present, live and in color... it's T.V. That's Tiny Vision.

Denis, Cha and I join in the half dome for a game of rummy 500. The Home Jammer wins, being Denis. The Stump Dweller flies in for second, and the Hill Man Cha runs in third. Cha says things are better and he's sorry for his bad attitude. He spent the day reading and feels much better. We wander back to our own spaces.

I walk in the night rain feeling like a rock; just here, stationary... I am experiencing a life. Mine. I live with waters and mountains and rainbows and twilights. And the earth has volcanoes, earthquakes, and lightning. Stars explode in nuclear reactions, like a death of nature. A tree dies and becomes mulch; earth. Stars are born and they die. The death of a species is not the end of all. Time tells in the movement and flicker of water. It tells everything, yet it tells nothing. Now is, and always will be, and always has been. Yet earlier today I ate beans and got rained on. My own emotions and sentiments are those of the universe. A star explodes, a star twinkles; a star in my lover's eyes.

Waiting is okay.

June 21, 1981

"Prove you are not a camel" A Russian Proverb

Summer solstice today; the longest daylight of the year. And a wet escape morning. With his boat tilted on a log, Cha says, "Oh. It's full of water. Mark, help me empty it."

I sit on my tent floor, naked. My float bag straddles my lap and all my gear scatters around me. I respond, "Just lift up one end and let it drain. Leave that other end resting on the log." This is a standard maneuver for one person.

"Does that mean you won't help me?"

"Why use me when it's easier alone? I am busy for a minute," I say.

"Forget it. Denis, want to come here and give me a hand?"

"Sure," says Denis, ambling over amiably.

I continue packing and remain silent, feeling a constant friction between Cha and me. Sometimes I feel like he must have a Mark voodoo doll and constantly sticks pins through it. Denis, if he is even aware of Cha's and my problems, keeps to himself. I wish I could. The urge to continue solo emerges in me.

We load the boats and tootle down Hiekish Narrows in rain towards Finlayson Head. I watch a parallax to judge my movement; a shore side tree passes the more distant mountain. The parallax is like two sailboat masts passing each other on the horizon or the sun going down behind a hill casting its' shadow going up on another. Our trio strokes past Ohio Rock into Sheep Passage. We dive a quick right by Lime Point and enter Griffin Pass. Cha's chart book tells about this pass, "This uncharted passage has three narrow and shallow areas, generally thick with kelp: one to the north, two to the south, making the pass navigable except for small craft at higher tides."

The water is calm like a quiet mountain lake on an early morning. There appears to be no other boats. I look back and see white caps on the main cutoff from Sheep Passage.

The channel narrows and a mist of rain falls. We flow with the current into one of the finest places we have ever paddled, among the sounds of birds and waterfalls. The banks close in on either side. Sun tries to break through. It illuminates the submerged kelp. The long whips attached to the bottom reveal the bulbs and streamers dancing in the fluid, dangling downstream, looking like Mermaid Godiva's lovely long green hair. We paddle up against some slight rapids, the current having switched. The kelp is now held six inches underwater by the strong water flow. Six geese take off. An eagle swoops the water, searching. Another, its white head glowing in a ray of sun, carries grass in its talons, probably to its nest. Sitting in a kelp bed, we watch Mermaid Godiva's long locks switch directions of flow with what seems to be another current change. I dance sitting in my kayak seat, saying, "Swoooie, do the tango..."

Denis stands up in his boat, the most stable of the three, and says, "Hey, this is just like surfing." He sings, "Everybody's going surfing, surfing in B.C..."

Every bend in the passage leads us into what seems another alpine lake. We round one dogleg turn and see ahead a couple miles to a vertical rise in the water. We paddle on, trying to get the gist of what the current does. It seems to flow with us, yet as we near the vertical rise in the water, that flows towards us. What? Kayaker Reality boggles my mind. The current keeps changing just like I didn't think it would. Capricious sunny beaches!

When we arrive at the white water we find a boulder drop of about three feet, just like a swift river. Denis starts paddling up the far side while Cha and I hang on to shore and watch. He looks for an eddy. The current sucks Denis into the main flow and he flies sideways, tilting into the rush of water. Sideways and backwards he rotates until he's back in the calm water. The three of us beach to wait out the tide change. The half hour of sun passes away behind a cloud and rain sprinkles lightly as we duck under a mossed spruce tree.

A family of ducks, the mother and seven ducklings, approach the rapids from above. The birds spread out, but on close approach, the mother, with her long beak and reddish head like Woody Woodpecker's, quacks. On the cue, the gang lines up and hits the rapids. Might be these ducks' first white water lesson. They bob and bounce on down the boulder drop with no worries. I say, "I name this Duck Rapids because of those cuties and because we had to duck out of them."

Exploring a rock ledge, I discover a shell. It's white like a clam shell, it's very brittle and it's formed into the symmetrical shape of a butterfly. Could nature have ground this shell so perfectly? It has spreading arched wings and the circular patterns swirl to the

center point of each wing. The shell shines like the beautiful white of ivory. This would make a nice pendant on a necklace, but it is too delicate. I want to keep it for a personal object. But it is so delicate. Maybe I'll just share it with my buddies and play with it but then leave it on the log. I can retain the memory. I feel that this shell, at this moment, has no equivalent value on earth, yet I must leave it behind. And it is probably destined to be smashed by Mother Nature.

A soft young cedar tree, fresh and springy, bends under the weight of moss draping each branch like a horse blanket. I find another shell like the first and name them Papillon Shells. Now with two of them, I no longer believe the shape was randomly ground out. I show Cha and he guesses right on. "Maybe it's the back plate of a chitin or something like that."

I brighten with a flash, "Ah, yes. Not erosion, but growth. Not subtraction, but addition! Symmetry!" Like to most of my comments, I get no response. Either my ideas are always too obvious or they are not obvious enough... or maybe just too silly?

As time calms the rapids, we paddle up. Water still flows down but we fight against it like a struggle to get into paradise. And what a place we find! So reflective that the mountains and sky jump out of the water as perfect images of the surroundings. A duckling paddles alone... maybe his first solo outing. He leaves a wake behind his waddling tush, a wake roughing up the mirror water. His wake, on this untracked glass, is as roughening as a storm.

A rock face hangs above this serene moment; vertical, wet, foggy, ominous. We all paddle quietly, absorbed in the enchantment, like in a wakened fantasy. And I can fly, with my eyesight, into the dense woods which I long to be part of, under the thick evergreen trees, dark, shaded from the sky. I fly up the sunny hillside, a blue clearing overhead. Alders of light green among darker spruce, cedar, hemlock; they pass below my flight. Through small fog clouds I fly, over the cliffs. I find no feel of danger as I loom over their ruggedness. And I fly over the calm ocean lake and look down. I see three kayakers stroking below. "V" shaped wakes crack the fragile glass surface behind each boat. Fly...

I glance over my shoulder to Cha, and ahead to Denis. I focus completely on the moment, the beauty. This present is timeless. Only our plastic kayaks give clue to the twentieth century. A dead tree hangs horizontally over the tide zone. It looks like a dinosaur skeleton, the spine and ribs being all the bare hanging branches.

On through the last narrows, we enter Mathieson Channel. A huge waterfall blasts. Here too, the water is calm, but nothing like the perfection, the dream we just left in Griffin Pass. Already we have covered a timeless twenty miles on this longest lit day of the year. We all agree it chalks up as one of the finest. Around every bend we found new excitement, like skiing an untracked trail through the trees of Snake Dance and Elevator Shaft.

We paddle quietly along Roderick Island. I flew today. My imagination allowed it so, and my serene state of mind. When I dream and meditate, are those like imagining? Don't I escape, with my mind, the physical bounds of my body? Maybe my body doesn't limit my mind. How far could my imagination take me? When I flew, I believed it so, thus I make it truth. I flew. I couldn't take my body, it contains too much mass. My thoughts are free to fly through time and space.

We set camp at Miall Point, overlooking Rescue Bay. Snow peaks, rounded and picturesque, rise to the north. The two mile wide Mathieson Channel remains calm. My tent spot, a dip in the forest floor, yields me two yellow tent pegs, from someone's recent camp, I guess, seeing the flattened moss. At Cha's camp he finds a cracked sea urchin shell, the food inside already eaten.

So after our twenty-five mile day, I join with Denis to express a need. I suggest we separate for at least three weeks when we arrive at Desolation Sound. I explain my need to be solo, my need to explore my own energies, alone. Will I continue to sing and dance as I normally do? Will I fish more? Hike or eat more? Smoke more? What?

Denis feels the idea to be "A full on bonus."

June 22, 1981

At 5:30 a.m. I wake the others. A wind, fifteen to twenty knots, blows from the north, pelting rain against the tent. I'm not enthused with paddling so early so I don't push packing. But I do wake the others in case one of them can motivate us.

And Denis does take charge. He says, "Let's blow this popsicle stand."

"I guess," I moan, still half asleep. "Yah, okay. The waves will give us a free ride." This morning my gear is as wet as ever. After continuous days of packing the tent wet, and having water under it and rain soak it each night... I'll never buy a down sleeping bag again while I pursue the wet Northwest sports. So there! During the night I slept in semi-wet clothes curled up in a damp sleeping bag. I stayed warm all night, feeling the same warm wet I used to when I was a baby and peed my bed. Ga ga, goo goo...

All packed, I lie in my tent waiting for word from Cha. He'll say when he starts to fill his float bag with gear. Puddles saturate the tent since I rest in this dip. Times are wet, but life is good... It's the contrasts, man, the contrasts!!

In wind and rain we cover miles fast. South by Buckly Head on Dowager Island and onward. We round a bit westward and paddle past Arthur Island. "How's the book going, Denis? Is King Arthur the cool guy?" I ask referring to his new book, *Once and Future King*.

"You'll have to read it, for sure." Paddling over kelp, we notice white splotches.

I say, "That might be herring roe. Or the remains. Mijou used to harvest kelp with the herring roe on it. But I think that's an April harvest." A bird whistles above, seeming to say the sun is coming, the rain is stopping. What are the white triangle markers on shore? I bet boundaries for fishing zones for commercial boats. Cha cruises today. His constitution is in order. He shoo bop shoo waas, rocken and a rollen in his kayak, chirping and singing to the world.

A loud exhale by Jermaine Point draws my attention. Sun rays streak down from the clouds and land on two porpoises frolicking in the water. Cha points out a big window through the clouds to the blue sky beyond. Sun, I must admit, sure seems to add power. The sun is nice, so the day must be too. A nice day. Now a pod of maybe seven porpoises, each about four feet long, black and white, play and jump in one spot. They frolic there for a couple of minutes then disappear.

We swing further west, then turn left to find the narrow channel behind Lake Island. We find what looks to be an empty bay so we turn around. After further confusion, checking Cha's and my charts, we figure the bay has to open into a channel.

Both charts show it that way. So, altering Kayakers' Reality a couple times, we finally just venture ahead into the cove. At low tide, we round the bend and find the fifteen-foot wide channel. The current rushes water through and is only two feet deep. On the rocks we find giant mussels, the size of our leg calves. We discuss the steaks we could have off those, but us nomads paddle on. Maroon, red, and orange colored sea urchins glow on the passage bottom. The rain starts then stops constantly. Each change of the weather has us putting on or taking off our raincoats and spray skirts. I scream, a common habit of mine. We listen to the echoing off tangent coves. I count eight separate returns of my original call. That must be octophonic? Sure, it is. I define it that way.

And this is still a nice day, even though the rain deluges on. And besides that, the word "nothing" is significant! I yell again for echo. The sound reverberates through little coves. I hear a chain of "Ya ya's".

Behind Lake Island, the water lies calm like another alpine lake. Here I find reflections of rocks, trees, and memories. Ahead I hear roaring. As we round a bend, suddenly ocean waves crash on jagged points. Big swells roll against cliffs. Such contrast! We have reached Milbanke Sound, a minor exposure to the mighty Pacific Ocean.

Ahead, blue skies dominate the southern sky. Such a beautiful sight; the summer we wait for. We are now the same latitude as Ocean Falls where Carol told us the rain would cease for the summer. Breakers roar and crash over a reef further out from shore. We duck behind Cecilia Island, past Port Blackney, and down Reid Channel. We expect civilization here, but none appears. Back into the swells we paddle, continuously sliding our hoods on and off with the undeciding rain. These raincoat decisions must be my major thought efforts of the day.

We enter Seaforth Channel for a three mile crossing. The ocean swells push us east, our desired direction. The sun becomes steady now and ocean liners and freighters move with us down the channel. After a twenty-some mile day, we paddle up to Idol Point, sun steaming wetness from our cockpits. I call the shot, "To the beach. Now we get to dry out the gear." The trees already look drier with some brown and less moss. Maybe we have reached a sacred latitude for sun worshiping. This is Idol Point!

Now all of our gear drapes over branches and driftwood. Sleeping bags steam in the sun. Wool, raincoats, blankets, and everything soak the heat. We dance around naked.

At nine o'clock when the bugs attack, we climb into our tents. The fabrics crackle with dry crispness. Only the foot of my sleeping bag is even slightly damp. At 10:00 p.m., the sun still shines above the trees. Paradise. Goodnight.

June 23, 1981

We rise in sunshine and pack. Our paddle takes us around Horsfall Island then between Campbell and Denny Islands. We stop at Bella Bella for supplies. This seems a typical Indian Village with fishing boats and painted box houses. We wander up to the general store which is packed with people, because the new shipment of food has just arrived.

With our last two hundred and twenty-five dollars between us, we charge through the store taking the last of many items. Cha grabs all the cottage cheese for us, Denis hoards our Grapenuts. I score the bonus fruits and vegetables for the gang. With kilos and

kilos of peanut butter, all of the store's fig bars, bags of garlic, we finally line our three carts up. Some of the ladies eyeball our carts and give us snide looks since we hogged many of their favorite foods. And left nothing. Survival of the fittest, I could tell them, but I don't. We're rude, what else can I say?

An old Indian man talks with us. He complains that "tests" in the states are the cause of all the rainy weather in June. He tells me his fears of the pollution from the States, and the acid rain, and the oil tankers threatening to use the Inside Passage. I ask the man about the herring on the seaweed and he laughs. "That's just the spot where it was, boy. You're late for herring, boy, you're very late." I ask him about the sea lettuce and he says, "No, too much iodine now. You're too late, boy. May is the time. You're late."

The store overflows with the locals. Aaaaah... let us out of here... ching... ching... \$222 dollars, please. Ah, three dollars to spare.

As we each carefully pack the new groceries into our boats, a seven year old Indian boy named Jerry befriends Cha. He climbs into a near boat and emerges with two seven-ups, which he hands to Cha. Cha doesn't usually drink pop. So, on with Jerry's plan. Seeing me eat banana and cottage cheese, he asks me for two bananas; one for him and one for a friend. I give them to him. We continue arranging all of our gear, which spreads all over the dock. Locals ask us questions about our trip. Soon Jerry returns. He asks for fish line. I give it to him. He asks for a hook. And I give one to him. Then he asks for a hook for his friend, whom I've never seen yet. I give the hook to him. Then he asks for string for his friend. Now I don't share any more. But Jerry asks me to reach in the water and grab a worm for him off the piling. I do this.

Jerry fishes for about thirty seconds. Then he runs away, without a word.

I surprise Denis and Cha with a secret twenty dollar bill. This is the last of our money for the next two hundred miles. The banks in Campbell River hold our next stash. I say, "Let's buy beer with my emergency money. That's good medicine."

In the bar we buy some beers to go, and some to stay. We each call home and hear the news of eleven climbers killed in an avalanche. They were ice climbing on Mt. Rainier. We are told more word of climbers; a couple months earlier some died by Source Lake. That's near Alpentel where we work. "Better than dying in a car," I say to Cha and Denis, though I doubt that would console the surviving families much.

Leaving Bella Bella in the sunset, we sneak up to a big freighter that heads our way. We attempt to paddle up behind and draft the moving ship but he moves about five times our speed... And is a million times our size. Forty feet above us, on the flying bridge of the Star Indonesia, a man looks down at us. He's dressed in his suit and tie, and he yells, "You guys look like a bunch of crazy Indians." The sunset reflects off his wake and casts ripples of light across to the trees on shore. The light stripes spread twenty feet apart for a quarter mile band.

Denis says, "And because we finished our Bella Bella spree... I have hash still!" He pulls out his camera case and shows us the dark chunk of herb he's been saving quietly for two weeks, for just such a special occasion. Rolling it into a dubee with some leaf herb, we watch a fishing boat swerve drunkenly down the channel from the south. A big liner charges from the north, trying to anticipate the drunk's moves. We stay stationery to decrease the variables. The ship veers to pass on our starboard, but he veers back to our port side. Then due to the swerving drunk, the ship finally decides to pass on

our starboard. Right? From the ship, binoculars line up on tourists' eyes, all focused on our three kayaks. Nobody waves, just like they're watching T.V. Finally we wave and everybody around the ship's decks waves.

Our kayaks ride low in the water, weighed down with food. Denis turns around in his cockpit on his knees. Facing the stern of his boat, he pulls out two kilo and a half jars of peanut butter. All three of us simultaneously yell out, "Yahtze."

Kind of shocked, we sit back quietly. Seconds later our echo slams back at us, three simultaneous voices, "Yahtze." We burst into laughter, then continue smoking. The drunk fishing boat finally reaches us. The Captain points out his window at his wake. Laughing, he says, "Eayah ohh bockloshtiwawa..."

We crack some beers and Denis and Cha head to a choice beach for camp. Twenty feet from shore I say, "Let's keep going. All night." Without conversation, both Denis and Cha turn and we paddle. The sun drops down, darkness follows.

In the twilight a canoe paddles slowly along the shore. I say, "Nice to see the locals paddling. We haven't seen many yet. I'm surprised more Indians aren't in kayaks anymore."

Cha says, "The Indians these days are trying to be white men, and us whites try to be Indians."

"That's about true," says Denis.

"Except Indians still claim pride in their tribe," I say.

My fresh soft loaf of sourdough bread falls out the back of my boat, my food being stacked too high. Denis quickly grabs it. "Salt water dough," he says. We eat the whole loaf so it won't mildew. Good boys. We paddle on and continue drinking our twelve bottles of beer into the night. Stars shine above. I smile at Cassiopeia in her throne. She twinkles down on me. I sink an empty beer bottle. Down, down, I can watch the bottle sink, the phosphorescent glow sparkling from the movement. For twenty feet or more, the bottle stays in sight but then disappears into the dark depth.

"We have to keep paddling till we see whales," I say. We couldn't beach or set camp very easily anyway. The night is too dark.

Paddling down Lama Pass, we avoid any boats traveling in the night as they can't see us anymore than a log. We guide our way with the point lights and channel markers.

June 24, 1981

We travel slowly through the night, not set on making mileage records. By the time the sky glows, bathed in morning light, we sit quietly in Fisher Channel. From behind us, at Kaiete Point, I hear the sound of porpoise breaths. I feel totally relaxed. My mind almost hallucinates from the enchanting morning and lack of sleep. Cha asks me, "Think you could play, 'I'm Being Followed by a Moon Shadow'?"

"I think so, it's in my head." I pull out the recorder and play the song easily the first try. It sounds nice. "I think it's about time for the whales, now," I say, returning to my music.

Cha stands on a rock and pees. "Whales," he yells. Now we hear the familiar "Pooosch woo." Soon many whales surround our three kayaks. They inhale and exhale all around us in the dark light. We see few, only the ones surfacing within paddle's length. No words pass our lips.

A leading male breathes just next to me. Two females dive together just under Denis' kayak, then surface three kayak lengths from Cha. I mumble to myself, "Ah, nature is God. God is nature. Man is nature. Man is God. All is One." Colors wave in my mind. I tire, ready to sleep. Staring at the trees, the clouds, the water, my mind runs it all together. Everything is fluid after the long hours of exercise and the night of fasting. We had no need to eat. Being conditioned to daily meals, we easily paddled all night without care of food.

"Pooosch..." We listen to the pod of whales swim north towards Ocean Falls. Finally, we paddle into a cove which sits right on the 52 degree latitude line, on the west side of Fisher Channel. We camp on a hundred foot diameter round island, at 7:00 a.m. after a twenty-seven mile day. And a long night orgasm.

I awaken with intense midday heat on my green tent. Crawling out onto the short grass, I notice Denis sitting close by on his bed, outside. His Vuarnets cover his eyes. He smiles contentedly, his excellent good morning bidding. Ah, sun... hot sun. The first this hot for a long time. Cha crawls from his islet tent and we charge into the water. The bay lies calm. It's shallow. It actually feels warmed up. I kick slowly on my back and flap my arms by my side. Cha dives in with his mask and gunny sack for the crab hunt.

Many creeks empty into this lagoon so the water feels more fresh than salted. Snow fields shine down on our blue lagoon. The water all around glitters with sun reflections. Today is for warm hearts. My feet even tickle with imaginary skis on as I stare up at the snow fields. Cha returns after a half hour swim bearing one five inch male rock crab. The crab has been christened as Charles. Cha shivers from so long in the water. We decide to throw Charles back because he isn't worth building a cooking fire for.

On our backs, we lie and watch the upper clouds move south. The lower clouds come from that direction. Bees buzz us. One is particularly interested in my red bandanna headband. Occasional shade from the passing clouds cools us. The clouds are dynamic. They roll. Some explode into rapid expansion. One layer looks like the scales on a salmon. A lady bug and dragonfly pass over together. The clouds dance wildly in all directions. Swing your partner, do-si-do. I stare into a blue spot framed by the clouds. I stare long and the blue darkens. And it grows darker still. Soon I stare beyond the blue atmosphere, beyond into space. The hole darkens more. Now I'm beyond, through a black hole...

Maybe a half hour, maybe an hour. I don't know how long I stare; I have no temporal parallax to register the movement of time. Staring into the black hole, to the beyond, the emptiness entrances me into long, unnoticed moments. I am powered from my emptiness. Vacation Dynamics, naked in the hot sun.

After a long play day, we decide to paddle in the fine evening. Our body schedules are on a jet lag, being the jet set and having stayed up all night. We paddle towards Fog Rocks at 7:00 p.m., southeast across Fitzhugh Sound. This is the extension south from Fisher Channel which will take us right into the Queen Charlotte Straits. Puffy clouds suspend above. The hills and water all vary in shades of blues and greens. After passing under our kayaks, a ferry wake blasts on an innocent beach. Insta-action showers of spray fling into the air. A seal slides from his rock as I round the bend on Kipling Island.

We stop for a map check. I point out to Cha where I believe we float, which rock is Kipling Island and Walker Point and the unnamed rocks his chart shows. "That's not where we are," says Cha.

"I believe it is, see, this island is that one on the chart, and that over there is..."

"No way. I'm sure that's not right. My map doesn't show those rocks." interrupts Cha.

"'Sure' is a pretty strong word, Cha. Let's check out behind that island, your map seems to show a neat cove in there..." I say.

"I'm sure you're wrong, my map..."

I paddle away the direction I choose, no longer interested in group decision. A narrow entrance opens up between some rocks, but still looks impassable. I sneak in and find a nice, secluded lagoon. Logs hang over the water five feet up and the passage stretches only a kayak length across. I stop. A white beach, of I assume crushed shells, sleeps at the end of the lagoon. Denis keeps paddling on, so I follow. We break out into Burke Channel as rain begins to dribble. The time is now 9:00 p.m., so we turn around and slip back into the lagoon. Our new beach is like the tropics it's so white. Denis and I each have sunburn butts as we both stayed naked all day.

Excavation begins. I pile logs high on the beach and cover them with crushed shells. Our camp seems plenty high enough to be out of reach of the tide. Rain now falls hard, and I stand with my shirt off singing in the night. My dancing takes me back and forth down our fifty foot beach as I stage a play for myself. How else do I deal with time?

Cha still sets up his tent and starts to get wet in all his clothes. He cusses his tent then growls, "I hate the rain." I feel an invisible tension line tighten to near breaking point between us, like it's not the rain he really wishes to direct his hate at. But it might be something beyond me too...?

I don't want to lose my fun to his bad mood. My song and dance continues. I strip off my pants and shorts and dance through the air naked, singing, "Water... water... oooh we are water... ooohh, the whole world is water... La la la la. And thank you so, ol' rain, for without you... this body of earth, and this body of mine, would be raisins, in a little time... Oh, water... life..."

Cha climbs in his tent and peeps no more sounds for the night. After playing on, I soon build a welcome mat. The cedar boughs lay down first then I line those with clam shells. This is all raised on my driftwood platform. Water runs down my burnt skin but my energy output keeps me warm. Two huge cedars, their roots exposed on the rocks, hang over our beach. Stay put, trees! With my welcome mat finished, I admire it. I am a guest of the rains as well as the rain is our guest. As I climb into my tent, the rain dies... as I do.

June 25, 1981

"Thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep
the open independence of the sea." Melville.

Awakening to the loud rasps of many ravens, I realize I burnt my white whale butt to a rock crab red. Sun already shines on the white shell beach. Piles of white foam float in the lagoon. I'm surprised the suds don't disperse and disintegrate.

With our wool blankets lined up on the beach, we take the day off. Denis and I keep our rosy reds away from the great rosy red maker. I name the beach Shell Shale Beach which rests on Three Tent Lagoon. Two mink scurry in front of us. They run rocking like teeter totters; first front legs down, then the back legs. One decides on a morning dip just as the second mink notices us. He stares a second, then he backtracks high speed like a kid would heading off to play hide and go seek. The first mink sees us and follows the same game plan. "VD minks," I say.

Denis and Cha sew velcro on their towels to make VD apparel. The idea we formulated on Mother's Day is seeing reality. The smell of low tide tickles my nose. Now land appears where water had been on arrival. No longer is there a fifteen foot passage. I walk out on the tide flats and take pictures with Cha's camera of Three Tent Lagoon, minus the water, of course. The day passes with reading and thinking.

The afternoon sun casts shadows down on Shell Shale Beach as I pick up my blanket. I dress in my white cotton painters pants. Cha and Denis each have their wraparound VD towels, fastened with... yeh, velcro. Cha says, "Since you sent Laura the VD logo, and she said she'd silkscreen some t-shirts, why don't you write her and tell her to have them waiting for us in Campbell River?"

"I don't think I want to ask her. I'm sure she doesn't really want to be rushed. I'd rather wait," I say.

Cha is mad again. "Now look who's sure," he says. I feel the voodoo pins sticking into my heart. I grab a light wool sweater and climb the hill behind the camp. The ground feels nice on my bare feet. At the top I sit in the arch of a fallen cedar tree and dangle my feet fifty feet above the water of Burke Channel. Across the water, the sun still shines on the hills which block my view of Namu.

I feel like I hid all day in the confines of Three Tent Lagoon, in much the same way our kayak trip keeps us from world news. Our total view of the sky stayed limited to the small circle above the camp where no wind, waves, or outside views could reach us. A breeze rustles through the trees, shaking the alders and the great cedars. I sit in my tree. A raven perches below me. "Augh," I say to him. He tilts his head up and looks at me, blinking. "You must think my accent is obviously foreign, eh?" The raven flies away.

I thank the blue sky for being with us lately. The northerly winds have done the trick. My mind burdens me. I'm not clearing it of Cha. Leaving my tree, I trample through the brush to camp. I jump in my kayak, paddle out of the cove, and around to the south for sunset. Climbing on a rock and pulling my kayak out of water's reach, I stand and close my eyes. I stretch my muscles, reaching to the sky, then for the center of the earth. I sit, and rest.

I try to empty myself, try to reach into my mind to the calm lake. I need its serenity of existence now. I'm in the presence of the most beautiful scene, yet I do not see it clearly and calmly. My emotions are tight. They block my release and keep me from my ultimate relaxation. The sun hangs low. A sailboat passes miles away. Birds chatter in the light breeze. I rock slowly and breath, feeling my diaphragm lifting with each inhale. I exhale slowly. I chant the Om with my exhales. I feel good, but I still need further release. I feel the tension between Cha and me, the way we mentally claw at each other. I feel I can't handle his ways.

But how insulting I am to another human being, thinking I can't handle him... If I say I can't handle Cha, that's the same as saying I can't handle the rain... rain falls, no

matter what I do. So it's not Cha I need to work on... it's me. I need to deal with my acceptances, not Cha's ways. I must accept others, and be able to control myself. I must have enough tact to speak properly and to not say things which are in bad taste. I am a spontaneous person and I ramble on and on sometimes. I try to be fast with words and good with those words, yet I am not always. I have faults, I make mistakes...

I notice a spruce tree on shore. It grows at a slant, bent half way up. Somehow during its life it gained the handicap. Cha and I are not so different from that tree. All nature has its handicaps. I live in, part of, and as one with nature, but I must ultimately rely on myself. The spruce is a beautiful tree, even though handicapped. And who am I to decide. Maybe the bend is actually an adaptation and protects the tree in storms.

I mustn't put down other people's dreams. I mustn't destroy their future presents with my own bad attitudes... their future is theirs. I must treat others as I would have them treat me... and this is my dream.

Feeling much stronger, I close my eyes to the sunset. I rock slowly, trying to let go of time, trying to empty, reaching for the nothing. But in essence, as long as I live, I can never really do nothing. My heart always keeps beating... I feel it. Breathe deep... slowly. My heart slows. I need more purging. I move my fingers over my skin and clothes. With my mind, I finger and pull under my skin. I gather the mucus, the slime gripping around my bones. I fling the mucus into the sea and call it "hate". I gather more, rocking slowly, eyes closed. The mucus pulls from my tendons and muscles. I chant, melodiously, over and over, "I... love... the... world... I... love... the... world." I sing the chant as a moan in the wind, as a wisp of a tree and the buzz of a bee. I feel good. I pull the mucus "hate" from inside my toes, from my eyes, from my brain, from my penis. I throw all the "hate" into the sea.

I rock slowly, sit quietly. My chant continues, "I... love... the... world..." My breath slides easily in and out. I'm slow. I'm whole. My mind quiets. It's empty and relaxed, floating above the calm lake of serenity. I am One. I am Nothing.

I finger my belly and generate heat. My fingers pull the heat outward. The crystal ball of heat spreads its energy. I pull the heat outward, stretching it. Suddenly an instant rush shakes and quakes my whole body in one burst. I am pure. Time stops.

In the dark of night I paddle home and sit in front of my tent. Cha and Denis are in bed. On my recorder I play the simple notes I chanted, of "I love the world." Over and over, long and slow, breathing easily. My eyes stay closed and I understand the chants and dances of Indians and people of the Far East. This is a trance. I even understand the slow rocking and chanting of an insane person who's stuck in his own mind. My mind is a strong power. My song on the recorder is relaxing, simple, and repetitive, like existence. All is very quiet, though I do hear sounds; like many tiny suction cups sticking and releasing. That is the water lapping the shore. A bird whistles. Somewhere bugs buzz. My heartbeat pounds, slowly. All rhythms continue, the sameness. "I love the world..." I feel clean, in and out.

The tree tops stick up bare against the night sky. I play "Sak-u-rah" quietly on my recorder. And "Hey Ho Nobody Home..." I play them over and over. They stimulate the same harmonic response in me; the resting of my soul.

I am the calm water of Three Tent Lagoon.



Chapter 9

"Bears and Wolves"

"If you would foster a calm spirit, first regulate your breathing;
for when that is under control, the heart will be at peace;
but when the breathing is spasmodic, then it will be troubled.
Therefore, before attempting anything, first regulate your breathing
on which your temper will be softened, your spirit calmed."

Kariba Ekken, 17th Century

June 26, 1981

With the morning already warm, Cha and Denis dress in their VD towels. We paddle away from Shell Shale's Three Tent Lagoon under blue skies and over blue waters. Namu lies under the hills, a couple mile cross. My first impression of the town from this distance is Mexican. I picture the red roof to be nice ceramic tiles on white washed buildings. There's what appears to be a huge archway as the sea gateway to Namu. A duck, the Woody Woodpecker type again, buzzes on us four times. "Quack, quack," says Cha. "Hey Duck, can I have a job?"

As we near Namu, my kayak Mexican image drastically changes. The cannery reveals the standard red and white buildings, like Buttedale's. And the archway is really just a big warehouse. The long roof reads, NAMU, printed maybe ten kayaks long. We dock and walk to the store. I wear shorts, but Denis and Cha walk in their VD towels, and nothing under those. Their legs slide through the slits of the towels as we pass workers along the wooden paths. The locals bending over carts of fish stare up. Denis and Cha look practically naked. One Indian asks, "Hawaii?"

"Tropics, huh?" says another worker. In the sea store the two girl clerks signal to each other to check out the tourists' costumes. They laugh and my buddies smile to them. I still have about five dollars of emergency money. We had planned on beer, but the liquor store will still be closed for a couple of hours. Instead we go for Sultana cookies and, like the dairy licks we are, some ice cream.

Our exit is quick. We paddle out of Namu Harbor and notice what looks to be a kayak off in the distance. It heads for us. Approaching closer, I perceive two rotating paddles, not just one. They stroke in unison but just out of phase enough to reveal two. Soon we confront a Klepper kayak with a mast rocking side to side with each stroke. A girl sits in the bow, a guy in the rear. They are both heavily clothed in rain gear, their spray decks in place. Flesh colored sun protection covers their noses and she wears zinc oxide on her lips. He wears a red sun visor. His jacket is blue gore-tex, his beard and mustache are brown like his hair. She has California blond hair. She smiles and glows and looks very healthy.

We wear nothing, so we cover up. Everybody bids hello. John Ince and Heidi Kottner come from Vancouver. They left from Bella Bella and have paddled out to Goose Island, through other islands, and down to the Koeye River. They speak of the river's beauty, the crabs, the ling cod, and even fresh water trout. We'd heard of the Koeye River's beauty from Buttedale and from S and M. John and Heidi met S and M in Hawaii.

John and Heidi travel and gather information for their book of kayaking the west coast of Canada. John says, "I like to call these boats 'the people's yacht'." They tell of their travels on the outside coast of Vancouver Island and of the Queen Charlotte Islands where they will fly next week. Their last trip to the Nass River, up Portland Inlet, they found the riptides that Art and Carol warned us about. Their descriptions of the bouncing waves sound just as crazy as the day we paddled with Deano off Spieden Island.

John practices law for a career. He must go home for a case between this vacation and the next one, in a week. "I don't work real often and I'm not the stereotyped rich lawyer, but I kayak a lot."

Heidi plants trees three months a year to earn her annual wages. She travels to Prince George for the work. "I just returned to Vancouver last week," she says. "I've been living in a tent since March. I love sleeping in a tent. Even on hard ground I sleep soundly. I flew from the tree farm in my work clothes to Vancouver, then I flew immediately north to Bella Bella with John."

John hangs onto a piece of kelp. We raft the four kayaks together so as not to drift with the current. I tie my paddle string to the kelp. "You guys feather your paddles. We don't," says Heidi. Their paddle blades face the same directions, while ours twist 90 degrees to one another.

"So you don't cock your wrists with each stroke?" I ask.

"John Doud, he owns Eco-Marine sea kayak store in Vancouver, wrote his sea kayaking book. He analyzed the benefits of feathered versus non-feathered paddles. He says our paddles are a lot more efficient. Actually less effort," says Heidi, taking off her spray skirt and rain coat.

I say, "The only problem I would see would be heading into the wind. With a feathered paddle, the wind passes right by the upper blade." I try John's paddle and find out how I have grown used to the cocked wrist and slipping grip. My regular pattern is hard to break. I would need to paddle some miles to really get the feel.

Exchanging kayak stories, we tell John and Heidi of the drug connection we suspected in Foggy Cove, near the Canadian Border. John tells, "Well, you know, a recent Vancouver court case set a precedent. Some boat with tons of dope was caught in B.C. and the American owners were caught running through the bushes. A brilliant Vancouver lawyer got their case acquitted because they claimed the storm, like the storm you guys had that day in Dixon's Entrance, blew up on them and forced the boat to land. The owners claimed they headed for Alaska and had never meant to land in Canada. By pleading a defense of necessity, that they had to beach, and the drugs weren't meant for Canada at all, they were set free."

"So the deal we watched could have been planned to occur during the storm. That's kind of fun," I say.

John tells of Chino and Miko, the legendary Puerto Rican kayakers from last summer. John and Heidi camped with them during the first week of May, 1980.

Heidi's stripped down to her T-shirt now. John takes off his coat and spray deck. She tells a story. "Last week we met another pair of people in a Klepper. They carried three tents and claimed they were living off the land. We camped with them one night, and that was hilarious. They were so hungry as they trudged off into the storm. When they came back, hours later, they had limpets and gumboots and some barnacles. They ate, but they didn't enjoy it much."

"Living off the land is work. That's the trick," says John. "If that's where you want to focus your energy, you can do it. I would pull out my sandwich for lunch and eat while those clowns scrambled on the rocks for hours."

The talk flows to bears, and to no bears. John tells of a Klepper found vacant on a beach in Glacier Bay, with a Grizzly nosing it. The spotters notified the ranger station, who buzzed the kayak with a helicopter. They shot the Grizzly and landed. In the woods they found the ravaged tent, a hip bone and a leg bone.

Regarding paddling outside waters, John says, "I tire of the constant noise of waves crashing on the beach. It gets to you after awhile."

We all paddle back to Namu, to play and buy beer. As we kayak we talk of the capture of Namu the whale. A man named Ted Griffin bought a gill netter's net for eight thousand dollars, complete with Namu the Killer Whale inside it. Griffin decided to tow the whale from Namu to Seattle. So, in a steel cable pen, Namu swam, towed by a thirty foot tug boat, south through the Queen Charlotte Straits. They towed the four ton whale inside Vancouver Island, through Seymour Narrows, changing boats along the way. Namu followed pretty much the same route we plan to paddle.

A cow and two calf orca whales followed Namu and the boat. With Namu locked up in the mobile jail, Oil Can Harry, another male orca, tried to steal the nomadic family. But the caged killer whale thrashed and complained enough to show himself still in charge. One Alert Bay woman scolded the men in charge, "Shame on you for breaking up that whale's family like that." The whales squeaked to one another through the mesh.

A purse seiner, then a larger tug boat, finally delivered Namu to the Seattle waterfront where he was put on display. At that time Namu generally frightened people due to his murderous reputation. American Natural History had attributed such reputations as, "The appetite of a hog, the cruelty of a wolf, the courage of a bulldog, and the most terrible jaws afloat."

Seattle loved Namu, but not in the record breaking numbers of people that Griffin had anticipated. Namu's "owner's" concern was for the whale's survival. He said, "One thing I will not do is jeopardize Namu's health." He pumped a constant flow of seawater through Namu's pollution free vinyl lined sea pen. Namu ate a generous feast of salmon, overriding a Fisheries law that salmon can only be consumed by humans and for bait. Some people in Seattle tried a "Free the Whale" rally, but that fizzled. Reporters claimed Namu "happy" in his sea pen.

But with time things changed. Namu retreated to a corner and staged a hunger strike. Griffin reported as he laid tarps over the whale to shade him from the sun, "He's just registering a protest. Everything is okay." The crowd stood back, reportedly pleased with the whale's bird-like chirps and squeaks.

But as a beautiful butterfly dies when captured, Namu died trying to escape through the cables. At first Griffin covered up the death, claiming Namu had escaped. But the truth emerged and the sad Griffin announced, "My relationship with Namu was without parallel and was indefinable." He also said, "Namu's loss will be a severe financial blow."

The word Namu comes from the language of Bella Bella Indians and means, "many winds," or "whirlwinds." So the twister grew. Griffin went to capture some hundred killer whales and he caused a great debate over the whales' rights. Meanwhile, the controversy introduced the species to humans, discrediting the fears of killer whales

killing humans. And science benefited from Griffin's monetary motives, learning about whale vaccinations, their infections and dehydrations, and whale transportation. Griffin's studies of whales' reactions to cold water, namely the decrease in heart rate and blood restrictions to the heart, brain and lungs, became an adaptable theory to all mammals at birth and living. Griffin started the current interest scientists have in whales and their reaction to man. After all, man has been killing the creature for many years for such crimes as eating salmon from fishing nets.

So how did Moby Dick react to Ahab? Not very forgiving.

In hindsight Griffin's motives may have been exploitation for financial benefit, but both species of man and whale seem to have benefited from Namu's capture.

As John and I enter the now open liquor store, we find a six pack of Chinese beer. We buy the Tsing Tao beer along with some High Test. A poster on the wall advertises the town's weekly entertainment; the list of first rate movies shown on Saturday nights. John explains as we walk to the kayaks, "Namu is a cannery no more. But they still receive fish for freezing." After a moment of silence he continues, "Isn't it great to live like kings, yet not have to be rich?"

"Vacation Dynamics," I say.

"I love the rapid changes," he continues. "Bang, in the bush, then Bang, in the courtroom, and Bang, back in the bush."

"How do you like law? I've considered it as a profession."

John tells, "A lot of freedom. When I'm in court, my adrenalin pumps like when I kayak in standing waves. I remember once, paddling with another fellow in Knights Inlet, in a Klepper, an instant wind caused by cold inland air rushing out to the warm air outside hit us. Waves whipped instantly and my foot controlled rudder cable snapped. These Kleppers, I don't know about your fiberglass boats, but these don't turn without the rudder. So we are stuck. But reaching back with my paddle I could steer by pushing on the rudder with my blade while my partner paddled us to shore."

By this time we are back on the dock. Heidi adds to the story's point, "When trouble comes up in a kayak, it comes up FAST! I call that kind of paddling, 'wave dancing'."

Denis tells of the dance we call "the kayak".

John relates familiar stories to us. "We love getting back to the rhythms of nature, more than just the night and day, but to the moon and tides through a month. We pitched our tent too close to the tide line. The tide visited, stopped politely at the door, then left, like another being."

"That's nice," says Denis swigging down Chinese beer. "To be able to fish from your bed. Oh, do we need a fishing license here in Canada?"

John answers, "The way you guys live you could always plead on that law of necessity and claim hunger."

The northwest wind blows. Anchored boats in Namu Harbor move around to be protected. We continue sitting in the breezy sun, drinking and eating and bullshitting. Cha mentions wanting to take a shower since we haven't since Buttedale. I ask Denis, "Do you have any soap easy?"

Heidi asks, "What's that?"

"What?" I ask.

"Soap Easy," she says, as if it's a brand name. I do a little song and dance imitating a Soap Easy commercial. John responds, "One thing about Americans; they're really into commercials." I dance on making up the advertising for a non-existing product. I realize John is right, remembering back to many of my bad one line jokes. Oh well. Doo day, doo dah.

Cha, Denis, and I borrow a mail return guaranteed twenty dollars from our new friends to buy the gang more beer. We stop by a noisy building as we head up towards Namu Lake. People scramble off to the store and bathrooms, leaving Denis and I sitting on some grass. Six pairs of huge intake tubes roar the noise from the building. Denis says, "That's the music of our future. We've had our jazz and country and rock and punk, and next will be The Buzz. It will be a constant noise. People will just get out on the dance floor and shake and spazz..."

Another fellow walks up as Denis and I laugh. Julian Paul says maybe he'll join us soon up at the lake. So with Heidi and John and Cha back, we walk up the hill on the wooden boardwalk. Three cute Indian kids sit in a wooden crate in front of a house. A dozen empty Labatts beer cases lie all around them. John asks where the lake is and they smile and point. "Is there good camping there?" They shake their heads no. John asks, "Why not?"

One child tells his answer slow and easy, "Bears and wolves."

We follow the boardwalk trail up, passing old rail tracks which head off to the left. An overgrown river access trail branches off to the right. At Namu Lake we walk around to the west end to a true sandy beach. We notice huge dog tracks, the claw indentations deeply engraved. Four toe pads per foot lead us to guess wolf. Lying on the sand, VD style, we talk bears again; how a black bear will climb a tree after you and how we just play the odds by taking our chances with bears.

"I like to play," I add.

John explains about the near extinction of Chinook Salmon, "Commercial and sport fishermen fight over what percentage of the fish each can catch." He tells of restrictions on coho salmon, that if one is caught, it must be thrown back. "It's ridiculous, the cost of inspectors who must be paid to board boats and check for coho. Once as I ate on a boat, a coho fish spread on the platter in front of us, an inspector came aboard. After searching the whole boat for cohos, he left us a clean bill and we kept eating our coho dinner." John tells of more kayak sights. "We've seen sea lions get real mad at us when we approached. Maybe one of them was wounded or something. They gathered into big balls on rocks, like a harem."

Julian Paul wanders down the beach towards us carrying more beer. As he breaks into our conversation, he asks John, "What would you do if you flipped your kayak way out in the middle of a channel?"

Without hesitation John answers, "Drown."

At the water's edge I gaze into the clear lake. Polliwogs swim like sperm racing for survival. Behind me, Julian Paul tells us all about his new BMW 1977 motorcycle. He tells of his fishing boat down in the harbor. John dozes off. Denis and Cha sit back, staring off into beerish oblivion, and Heidi plays in the sand. She sculpts a naked lady with full breasts, a bush in her crotch. The naked sand woman sprawls out in the sun. Around the lake the familiar bushes with the red and green leaves and small flowers grow in abundance.

After hours of space time, the group sluggishly drags off back towards the cannery. I stay behind. This lake intrigues me. There is a high tide line on the sand a couple of feet up from the water line. What could cause a tide zone in a lake? Could the sea have an effect, or is it wind tide? Could there be a dam they release water from, or has the water receded that much since the last rain?

I walk quietly and alone down the wooden trail from the lake. This trail follows a wooden pipe like the one I found in Buttedale. Only this one is smaller and newer. Water pumps up from the lake. I eat a handful of tart berries, the first of the season. I'm excited for more. I cross a place of fallen timbers from an old bridge and boardwalk. Here the pipe is neatly patched with a cloth bandage. I walk a bit tipsy from the day's brews, or is that the brew's yeast? My lazy walk swings me back and forth over the centerline of the boardwalk.

As I approach the village, a helicopter lands. The people thank Jack, the pilot, as they climb out. A man takes pictures of the chopper as the blades rotate slower and slower. The only words I hear after, "Thanks," are, "What are the costs to get a chopper's license?" Walking on I make a list to myself; costs in time, risk, money, alternatives...? What are the costs of VD? Nothing. Born with nothing, die with nothing. What costs are accrued? The cost of a crude?

The wind appears to be calming. Maybe we'll paddle today. Who knows?

At the docks I join as John tells Julian about bush pilots. "Tough breed. A one type group. A lot of planes go down."

Heidi says, "Oh John. We forgot to soak the beans."

"Isn't that just like a kayaker?" I ask. "Tricks of the trade. Seems like words; they've all been voiced before, but we each say them one more time for ourselves."

John and Heidi excuse themselves so they can go set camp. Their plane leaves about sunrise tomorrow. Heidi's parting words are, "Don't paddle too hard. Don't make work out of it."

Julian and I watch birds fly; so pretty... unweighting and playing with gravity. We sit next to Julian's boat, Sea Haze. Pentangle plays on the cassette player. The music sounds so nice to hear after our period of no tunes. And the sunset...

A seiner captain from the Ocean Star wanders over and says we must be tough to be kayaking this trip. He tells, "I took a trip in a boat like yours, only she had a sail and was forty two feet long. My wife and I sailed down the Pacific to Acapulco, then to Tahiti, Hawaii, then home again. Fishing has supported my travels for twenty-three years."

Julian's captain, Roy, jumps down from the Sea Haze. He's a stocky fellow with a boulder nose. His home was South Africa. "I'd like to be home but the politics make it unreasonable."

Unreasonable? What? I see haze in my brain. I don't feel drunk. Not I said the little red hen as he lie flat on his face in pig shit. Sitting on this pile of fish net, I feel all meshed up. The booze and the day has turned me into a slug; intergalactic slug-mo.

Roy talks on, of Nurf. That's the official game of Philadelphia. It's a nurf ball on a string made into a strenuous sport. I tell of hackysack, which we haven't played for awhile. Roy pulls out his Tarot cards. I'm not familiar with these. Symbolic pictures decorate the face of each one. I find the game interesting for introspection, seeing my life

laid out randomly with the deal of the cards, supposedly portraying my personality, past, present and future.

After awhile Julian and I sit back against the web pile and talk of lifestyles. He had never conceived of living at a ski area or in a kayak. He says he is flashing on whole new scopes of possibilities. I explain the unexplainable nothingness of our VD label.

Soon Cha and Denis return from their boat visits. We paddle out of Namu Harbor to a small islet and we sleep in an abandoned wood shack with spiders and slugs.

June 27, 1981

I awaken to a slug three inches from my nose. Since we slept in this shack we left the boats packed, unloading only sleeping bags and ground blankets. Cha and Denis sleep twisted into corners.

Last night Cha quit talking to me.

I stuff my sleeping bag before the sun rises. My kayak partners slowly let wakefulness trickle into their heads, brushing away nearby slugs and spiders. Soon it is apparent Cha still chooses not to talk to me, or even register my presence. I am totally unaware this time of what triggered his hate. We didn't even converse together much yesterday. So much was happening all day.

With haze and clouds in the sky and our heads, we paddle south, the sun still hidden behind the mountains. I fight myself from being drawn into reciprocal emotions with Cha. His uncontrolled feelings seem to emit a force into the air. Sometimes I feel emotions somehow tie all life together, like extremes of power that humanity has yet to become aware of.

The sun lifts from its cradle. The fog blanket spreads back, and the Northwest breeze blows lightly, as predicted yesterday. We paddle by Koeeye River, the reportedly beautiful camp and fish ground. We decide to pass this paradise up in favor of covering some miles today. For us; no lingcod, no crabs, nor trout, nor freshwater bath. Instead, I munch a sandwich and watch two porpoise at the river's mouth. "Pooosch," the sea mammals exhale.

I play my recorder slowly, the several notes which I had discovered in my heart, "I... love... the... world..." This enlivens me, I feel better, less drained by Cha's mood. Why, if I can so easily please myself, why... why can't Cha tolerate me? Why can't he even share a smile this morning, as he does with Denis? I play the soft notes over and over as the other two paddle south. "I love the world..." I purge myself of hate. If I let a spark of hate grow, the fire can spread. Initially my hate can be focused on one thing, but that fire grows fast, spreading my contempt to anyone or anything, without true cause. Once it starts, it doesn't stop, until it starts to stop... I stop it. I control. And as one spot of hate can grow in me, it can in others, in a family, a nation, or a world.

I paddle on chanting, "I love the world..." The water ripples and reflects light and colors, entrancing me. The mirror image of the world is pierced, moving, segmented, flowing. Shapes of each ripple bend the pictures into their fluid reality. Obsessed, I paddle on for miles, my eyes focused on the distorted reflections of white clouds, blue skies, and green trees. I love the world. A bubble with its picture window reflection floats on the water, reviving in my mind a childhood dream. I used to fly over the world in a bubble, with view all around. I'd float on the winds and live in the flow. Now my kayak is

that bubble, with the endless sky above. All this beauty is endless, limited only by my imagination. Below me is darkness, the wonders of the deep, a source of endless awe.

The sun and moon now separate by only 40 degrees. The moon still leads, but the sun catches up daily, as it will until the new moon. We pass Fish Egg Inlet, inside Addenbroke Island, and on to Penrose Island. The Pacific Ocean again reveals herself, the naked open sea through Charlotte Sound. Endless by sight. I feel the expansive ocean again, like a relief, a memory, a love, a longing reached. High peaks soar above clouds south on Vancouver Island. We've come a long way.

We paddle past a Caribbean white beach of crushed shells. I watch its white contrast with the blue sky. A seaplane flies low overhead, dipping its wings a couple times. The signal tells us it must be John and Heidi flying home, their kayak folded and packed into a duffel bag. The sun is hot now so our pee pees are exposed to the seaplane as we paddle naked. The Northwest wind still blows steadily. We stay away from shore, exposing ourselves to the wind's power as much as possible. Ah, free ride. The alternate route we would have chosen in less advantageous winds would have been through tight channels out of the waves. But we are naked and exposed, riding with current and wind.

Crossing River's Inlet, a southeast wind pummels our faces, splashing us with white capped ocean swells. After a thirty mile day, we stop just outside Goose Bay for camp. We duck into a cove, quack quack.

June 28, 1981

I lie in my tent watching rain fall in our cove. A hummingbird buzzes me, his wings a steady whirrrr. The next noise to hear is Denis yelling, "Fucking rain."

"What's the matter, Denis?" I inquire, since rain usually doesn't bother him.

"Oh, I'm just lying here dreaming on my back and the rain fell in my eyes."

We load early and paddle away. Just at the mouth of Goose Bay, which seems so far away from anything, many yellow skiffs float. "Must be a camp," guesses Cha. I paddle closer to read off the side of a boat, "Big Spring Cove." About a dozen boats carry several people each, everyone fishing and dressed in orange glow jackets.

We paddle two miles across a big bay. Sliding around Cranstown Point we confront a southeast wind blowing up some wild waves in the Queen Charlotte. Dugout Rocks and Paddle Rocks explode under the ocean waves, the white spraying high in the air. We duck back inside and pick a long sandy beach for our home. Unsure of the available water, we fill our jugs from an anchored troller, the Rip Tide, from Vancouver. The guy and girl aboard claim their radio predicts thirty knot winds today.

On the beach we find plenty of fresh creek water, tracks leading away. My book shows the animal to have been a Canadian Lynx. After scanning the beach for camp spots, I finally modify a spot which someone has excavated for a smaller tent. I move dirt and pile logs, then I add dirt and build a nice raised platform for my abode. Denis excavates into the hill and builds his home just feet from mine. I lay logs out to a giant stump on the beach. And crossing beams and joists and laying floor planks, the veranda soon takes visual shape. Our porch spans the beach ten feet in the air.

Cha cuts a spot with the machete into the trees, a couple hundred feet away. I borrow his plastic tarp to hang over the party deck and our tent entrances. Soon we join with the four beers we each have saved from Namu, from the borrowed twenty dollars.

So now we sit and view the soft sand beach, my Mexico Dream come true. We watch the storm progress. "How entertaining," I keep saying. I still retain my childhood delights in forts.

I have several Papillon shells placed about our living room. One set still holds together as a whole shell replica of a chitin. "This proves your theory, Cha, that Papillon shells come from gumboots. Papillon shells are full on bonus!"

Sipping his veranda beer, Cha tells, "Boy, when I saw that ocean yesterday, my heart just exploded. I got so excited. I haven't spent that much time at sea, but from now on whenever I look out there, I'll feel that twinge."

"I felt it yesterday too," I say. "It's that extra blood surge, the same heart warmth I feel hearing an old song." Two small birds, we think sanderlings, peep and walk together in the surf. They pick out sand fleas or worms or something. Several more join and they fly away in a group.

I walk down to the sand. Last night's high tide rose much higher than today's. Between the two lines of kelp deposits lies the clean sand; smooth and untracked, a consistent beige color. I walk and skip my barefoot heels, hoping to get the familiar squeak I remember so well from walking Mexican beaches. But I stir no noise. I walk above the higher tide line, in the dryer sand... and I achieve my goal. EE EE EE EE.

Looking back at the veranda, I feel pride in the work. It's like a hand crafted art object, or the beach, and the Papillon shells. An old cedar tree knarls its burls above the veranda. Next to that a spruce tree looms higher. An eagle's nest lies in the top of that tree and looks more carefully built than our veranda. Sticks and twigs intertwine in a neat bowl. Is Eagle home? Wanna play?

The tree tops verify that a southwest wind blows. Tongues of gusts lick at the water in the bay. Some northwest ripples meet the southwest ripples for the battle on the waterfront. I watch one foot waves roll onto the beach; nice right curls, with tube. This would be a perfect place for a hobbit to surf. I imagine myself on my small surfboard, riding inside a curl. Light beams through the back of the wave, my hand skimming along the wall of water. Yah! Again my mind travels, not anchored to the beach like my body, but free as a wind blowing over all the Pacific beaches.

Sea gulls arch and bank and fight in the shallow surf. Each dives for fish and squawks and tries to take food away from the others. Naughty birds, but such is. The view up Fitzhugh Sound fades into the north. North is behind us. Yesterday's miles are already hidden in the distance. As original plans went, we wouldn't even be to Ketchikan yet! The little birds zoom in their groups, flashing white bottoms, then gray tops, then white bottoms. They all move in unison, like a cheer squad flashing cards from the grandstands at a football game.

Cha calls me over to a bush and shows me a unique little flower. It has a wild burgundy rich color on the petals, six yellow pistils, and three green sprouts in the center. The leaves are long and shiny and light blue. Cha and I look out to the bay. The lighter colors in the shallows remind me of the Caribbean. They remind Cha of the Mediterranean. Cha explains a telephone call he made home from Namu. I begin to understand his preoccupation which I felt directed at me all yesterday. "My mom said Mammoth Mountain wrote and said if I wanted to work on the ski patrol I would have to go down there now and apply. That means I can't work down there then. I don't know

what to do. Maybe work at Crystal Mountain. I'm going to be broke after this trip. I'll need a job bad."

I keep my thoughts to myself as Cha finishes. How can he expect to be hired anywhere without showing up? Talking to the boss and showing interest to the boss is the base line. People don't normally make a habit of hiring from a hand scribbled note. Especially on favored jobs like ski patrol.

I leave and walk over the strip of land separating our cove from the ocean. With the western view I find another sandy beach. A mink scares as I walk by and he dashes to twenty feet away, then stops and checks me out. A little while later, the same mink, maybe, is being chased by a darker colored one. A tackle and a roll. They wrestle; in play, anger, or sex, I don't know, but I smell their disrespectful odors. The juicy fight continues, both squealing and seeming to desire more. Ain't that the way?. Stop, don't, stop don't, stop, don't stop, don't stop... oooh. The minks finally see me and both scam in different directions.

Back at camp the others are tent bound; Denis catches up on his sleep, as normal, and Cha counts miles on the map, also normal. Gusts now reach about thirty knots. The tarp over the veranda whips in the wind, throbbing up and down like a loose flag. Then, POP, the plastic tarp rips and blows away. It wraps around a drift log. I sit still in the evening twilight on the wind's lee side of a tree. I appreciate the porch, the night glows, and the hobbit waves which still curl onto the sand. I name the beach, Veranda Curl Beach.

June 29, 1981

We wait to paddle away to Smith Sound and around Cape Caution. Our patio is too great to leave. Besides, the wind whips a good one. We don't see many bugs but I must have over a hundred bites... which itch. In only a shirt, I go to wash breakfast dishes. Upon return, thirty blood spots cover my exposed thighs, pecker and calves. Too much. Each bite leaves a blood mark; Mark's blood.

Denis and I walk down to a beaching skiff. We meet a mother and her two daughters, from Montana. They had gone to Ketchikan to fish but the season closed. The husband stayed on board the boat. The mother tells us of gale warnings, of up to forty-eight knots predicted today. To add to their shell collection, I run back to the veranda for the Papillon shells. The girls seem pleased with my collection. Stripping down to our shorts, Denis and I wade the boat out from the beach so the ladies don't get swamped from the hobbit waves. Bye bye.

Denis and I walk further, to the south end of the beach. A larger creek flows freshwater over the sand. We find appropriate rocks to sit on and observe the day. The water looks clear and cold. We look down the tubes of the waves from where we sit at the end of the beach. Some waves hit these rocks and bounce off again at a right angle to their approach, like an eight ball bouncing off the side wall of the world's biggest pool table.

We run turns back on the sand. I cross Denis' turns a half turn behind him so that we weave a figure eight track.

Eating my triple decker sandwich, I tell Cha that we found three women. He doesn't believe me. "I will have a bite of that sandwich, though," he says. "Yum, what's in that?"

"Oh, sprouts, cheese, onion, garlic, carrots, raisins, soy paste, and three slices of bread."

We wait out the day. By night the high tide and the coming new moon and the bigger than hobbit waves all team up to sneak water towards camp. I wonder where these big waves come from. Well, from the east, yah, but that seems odd. Can the wind build up these waves from River's Inlet or do the big ocean swells bounce off the cliffs across the way and return with the eight ball action from open sea. Today those cliffs did look a bit whitewashed.

I sit on the veranda watching the wave action. My mind flashes with a recurring dream from childhood. All I remember is the light, the blinding light which hurt my eyes like snow blindness. I could only squint, unable to see anything except brightness. The dream had occurred several times. I remember them lucidly, as I do my flying dreams. I'd jump from a mountain top and soar, over the land and trees. Down and down, until my controlled landing and awakening.

The high tide pushes the huge driftwood logs around, slamming some against others. Pockets of air under the folding waves explode with a thunder and a shake. I hope my tent, the bulkhead, and this whole veranda doesn't wash away. Itching wildly with bug bumps all over my body, I walk out with Denis in the night. The big logs float easily, clashing and turning. Drift trees which would otherwise require a crane, roll free. We walk in the dark to Cha's tent. He lies awake viewing the night's spectacles also. "What's the matter?" I say to the night. "What? Oh, mass? No, it's energy now, thank you. Unharnessed, yet rhythmic energies," I answer for the night.

I turn to Denis and Cha, who learn to accept my oddities, and explain, "Energy conversion joke. Or is that perversion, or just a new version. What?"

June 30, 1981

We sit eating breakfast and watch the wind swing around from the northwest again. A helicopter buzzes over low, heading east. Denis and I light up a morning ritual as the same helicopter returns, flying over lower this time. He makes a circle and comes down to land. We throw on pants for hose covers and go to talk.

The pilot says, after climbing down under the whop whop whop of the prop, "Hey, you guys are in kayaks!"

"Hey, you're in a helicopter!" I say.

"Where you from?" he asks. We tell him the regular story. He asks how long we've been out. We ask him for a ride. "I might not have enough fuel to get back to Port Hardy, but I had to land and check you out to see if you were okay." He says the water outside is calm. He flies his orange-ish brown, white, and green whirlybird for Vancouver Island Helicopters. The young pilot, about my age, rises, banks, and flies away like a bird. We take off down the beach, the three of us, for a sandy jog, then return and pack. Goodbye Veranda Curl Beach.

Paddling amongst the many bugs, we excitedly charge through the hobbit waves and around the bend into the exposed and beautiful Pacific Ocean. Huge rolling waves

break and explode on the rocks, the swells from the west-northwest. The sun is out, and hot. Our plans call for reaching at least Protection Cove, this side of Cape Caution, so I yell to the guys who spend their time taking pictures, "Hey, we better get going before this afternoon wind picks up."

Cha says, "Oh, is that the weather forecast from the helicopter?" They take their time.

"No. It just seems the northwesterlies like to blow up bigger after noon."

After a mile the wind picks up. The waves grow and break on us. The drenching white caps force us ashore after only two miles. Camp lies sheltered in a cove. We name it Save Ass Beach. On the sand and gravel, under the lee side of a log, I carve a spoon since mine broke from bending into my mess kit. The wind keeps the bugs away nicely. The spoon head rubs smooth under my thumb and releases the smell of hemlock. Carving doesn't win my time much. Nor fishing. Such is.

Cha lies near as I carve. He mumbles something about no job this winter. I tell him my thoughts, that he expects too much for the amount of effort he's put out. We talk a bit and he gladdens, saying he knew that to be the case, but he had just forgotten and became discouraged for a few days. "Now I won't give up. To Mammoth," he says. "I won't believe anybody if they tell me I can't have a job. I'll give it a try, and a second try, and a third. I've had bosses tell me no before, then still hire me."

"Atta boy, Cha," I say, looking through my telescope. I watch two purse seiners miles out in Queen Charlotte. The boats rock in the surf, waves crashing over their bows. The northwest winds are nice and dry but they sure blow.

On the sandy beach, I stretch all my muscles and jump rope and sprint in shallow water. I swim and do it all again. After the good heart pump I go to my tent, away from the onslaught of evening bugs. Our cove sits quietly but the roar of the ocean outside echoes in. My tent screen blocks most of the wind and the mesh is fine enough to stop no-see-ems. I space. Wahh wahh...

July 1, 1981

After not falling asleep until after three, I wake the others at five thirty to eat and pack. The night is still dark.

By six thirty Denis and I sit in our boats smoking and waiting for Cha. As we paddle away, I clip Denis' eagle feather on my bow line. Cha's mad at me for something. Today is Canada Day, their mid-summer celebration almost equivalent to the Fourth of July in the United States.

Paddling out of our quiet cove into ocean swells, breakers crash on certain rocks like geysers, white foam flying. I put on my spray deck, and so does Denis. Cha's still behind in the cove. The sky glows clear blue. A few clouds hang in the west and the sun is just rising with no wind. Denis and I choose a passage between the cliff and a rock thirty feet out. We paddle slowly, watching waves break over the rock on our starboard. Slowly, leisurely, joking, we paddle. Denis lags behind a kayak length.

As I pass between the cliff and rock, a wave, huge and rolling smooth, reaches its crest, ready to break over the rock like the rest had done, but this wave grows so big it passes over the rock. It curls and piles water up so high that all I flash on is Deano rolling in the surf on Easter Day. I remember. The wave curls and topples over me. I'm in the

tube, my paddle extended into the wave. The right blade is gripping the water, digging in. I brace my whole body sideways, laying on my paddle. Behind the wave is solid water, without the airy foam. I think only of the cliff towards which the wave shoves me. My rudder is down.



I'm out of the wave. I turn for the next wave. To pull up the rudder seems to take so much time. But no other wave attacks. I am completely soaked. I paddle clear of danger and check around for Denis and Cha. I see them both shocked, but safe.

I say, removing my wool and cotton shirts, "Emerged in sea emergency."

Cha says, "Man, I saw your adrenalin shooting. Instantly your paddle whipped like a windmill."

I put back on the wet wool and stow the wet cotton. Denis says, "Missed me completely and broke over your whole kayak. I thought you were a goner."

"We're only testing thresholds. Lesson number 6215. No, Mr. Wizard, I don't want to be a kayaker anymore." I laugh.

Cha says, "That's a lot like skiing through the woods and flying off a cliff unexpectedly. Like Heidi said, 'Trouble comes up fast in a kayak'."

I guzzle my tannic acid colored water from my poly bottle. My thirst is grand. Does adrenalin do that? "Your water looks like apple juice in sunlight," says Denis, bringing the risen sun's presence to my attention.

"Tastes as good now, too." We paddle in big, smooth ocean swells. The waves from crest to crest span many kayaks apart. The sea appears as giant moving pillows of water.

Cha says, "Sure glad it was you and not me. Lucky you learned some white water paddling this winter. There was not one part of your kayak visible. The whole curl engulfed you. I've had waves come over me completely, but never like that."

"Lucky we put on those spray decks," says Denis.

"Ooooooh," I conceive the horrible effects if I had not. "My digestive system seemed to have shut off for awhile there, reverting energy elsewhere. Now my beans and rice and cereal are finally digesting again. This is like a second breakfast. I was wishing my rudder was up. I couldn't paddle away from that cliff."

Cha says, "You were closer than five feet from the rocks before you got the rudder up again. Waves still broke too."

"Lucky there was only one big one."

Cha laughs, "Ha, that's what she said."

"Sure glad the eagle feather was clipped to your bow," says Denis.

"Yah, probably supplied the extra resistance I needed."

"Physics, man, physics," says Cha. We paddle on for awhile in the swells.

As we reach Smith Sound Crossing, Cha paddles over to me and says, "Mark, I get pissed off at you and everything, but I'm really glad you're here now."

"Yah, and not down under there," I point. "Thanks Cha."

Reefs, rocks, and several islands break up the five mile Smith Sound Crossing. Even though we ride ocean swells, they are glassy smooth and we feel safe. The waves just roll under us. I comment to Denis, "I wonder what water skiing would be like out here. The boat could run down a trough. With a long rope I bet we could get big air over these swells." A salmon jumps clear of the water just feet off our bows. We pass Table Island, Alexandra Passage, Egg Island, and Macnicol Point, then on through Hoop Bay, by Oar Island. Indian Cove and Blunden Bay look almost tropical from our distance, with beaches and palm trees, which are really evergreens. There's volcanic looking mountains in the background; Mt. Robinson, the Coast Nipple, and Flat Hill. A shipwreck, just a rusted pile of metal, looks like a mammoth elephant on a prehistoric beach.

We round the infamous Cape Caution into Queen Charlotte Straits, and soon find a long sandy beach where the ocean swells roll and break like a surfer's dream. We sneak in behind some rocks on the south end, sheltered from the surf. I figure we have averaged three and a half knots so far, and we discuss traveling on to clear the ocean section sooner, with good weather. But this beach lies too inviting. We all feel drawn to it.

The woods harbor easy tent spots, each tent private and with a view down the beach and out into the open Pacific.

I wander from camp to find water. A river empties into the bay, so I follow it. Salt overpowers the water's taste. My mind flashes back to this morning's wave as I wade up the river, wearing nothing. The wave was a monster, and it engulfed me. It swallowed me whole and spit me back out. And during the emergency I thought about... my notebooks. They are my creation, my art, my life. Can creativity be so important in life that at a moment of potential death they obtain utmost value? Seems like all cultures found need to express themselves with art. Creating something. I taste the river water again. Still too salty, unsuitable for drinking, but perfect for...

I dive in and swim under water until I need more breath. I emerge and walk to the river bank. What? Vibram sole tracks. Fresh, walking towards the beach.

I wander further, wishing a little that I had worn shorts in case I find someone. There's a cabin, only about eight feet by eight feet, clothes hanging around blowing and drying. A small old wooden sailboat ties up in the river. Suddenly I feel I am trespassing.

I return to my tent for a swimsuit, water bottles, and Denis. We walk back up the river, past the cabin, and eventually find a drizzle of water running out the bank. "Let's go surfing in our kayaks, Denis." He doesn't jump for joy at the idea.

Back at camp I dress in just a wool shirt, nothing else, and put on my life jacket for the first time of the trip. Denis helps me carry my empty boat down to the surf waves. I paddle out, ducking my head down to break through the waves. Soon I reach the outside breakers and I wait for a good one. Yah! Here it comes. I ride the wave, sliding forward fast. The wave soon turns me till my kayak rides sideways. I brace my paddle into the wave, laying my body into it, and I ride in control to the beach.

I paddle out for another ride. This time I fight the wave's desire to turn me by paddling hard to keep straight. But soon one stroke just flips me with the wave and I roll. Bail out, empty boat... Again I try the same trick, to keep the bow forward. Again I flip. The wave wants me sideways. So if I flow with it, it will work.

Denis comes out to join me before my fourth wave. I give him pointers of what I've learned today. He catches the first wave, rides and instantly flips, trying to brace on the wrong side. I ride this wave, a big one, steep down the smooth water before the curl breaks. As I start to turn, I further the turn and paddle right over the back of the wave. I am clear of it as it breaks with exploding force on the beach.

Denis soon gets the hang of riding the wave sideways. "I get it now. I am glad that was you this morning and not me."

Cha returns from his jog down the two mile beach. He joins us and again I explain my theories I've figured so far. Cha spills his first couple tries then he flashes and rides them all in with ease.

Ah. Surfers relax on the beach. As we talk of the tracks of vibram soles, we notice a person trudging down the sandy beach from the north. He carries a large pack on his back. He notices us as we start towards him. With his pack on the ground, he lays back

on a log and crosses his legs, watching our approach. This man has long reddish blond hair and an untrimmed beard. His eyes sink a bit and wrinkle, I guess from years of sun and smiles. Closing in, I see the backpack to be a heavy wooden stove strapped to a frame board.

"You guys come in a helicopter?" he asks, first thing.

"No, kayak."

"Oh, I saw that red," referring to Denis' towel drying on a rock in the distance.

"And I thought the bloody helicopters had landed to paint the beach red."

"We found tracks," I say, "and a cabin. We wondered who lived here."

The man looks down at our bare feet. He looks at Cha and says, "I found your tracks down the beach too. Looked like you swam a couple times, and ran awhile."

"I saw wolf tracks down there, I think," says Cha.

The man says, "That was the big wolf, the one that drags his left hind leg. He's usually alone, but today he traveled with a girl. Those wolves have cleaned out the grouse, the mink and the otter and the deer. I sometimes wake to the cry of that big male wolf. A hundred yards from my cabin. And the two tone song of a thrush."

He points to his stove, "I just hauled that down from a lake two miles up there." He signals north and draws a map in the sand. "I got a clue from a buddy, of a man who moved his wife and kid out to the wilderness. I found the 'kid's' size fourteen shoes. Seems they flew in all their life belongings in a Sea Otter and landed on the lake. An island sits in the middle of the lake. He never built more than a visqueen cabin, which is now collapsed and still full of treasures. The family apparently couldn't make a go of it and the seaplane couldn't take off from the small lake loaded with gear. So they left everything. There's a foot pedal sewing machine, guns, ammunition, enough tampons for a lifetime, 'how to' books and everything. The family just abandoned ship so I gather all the wet and rusted items and refurbish them. The fellow wanted to watch the world collapse from his lake island retreat. He even had a short wave radio. I can listen to boats with it when I'm up there. I can get weather reports and the radio receives that year old station from Port Hardy. It's a real kooky AM FM station. Seems the family only lasted up there one summer and called it quits. The fool didn't seem to know a thing."

The fully dressed man stands and heaves his pack to his back. He looks at us in only our shorts and says, "Why don't you guys get some warmer clothes on and come back to my cabin. I'll show you my things."

"Great," all three of us say.

After bites of food and warmer clothes, we wander back towards the cabin. The man walks towards us with his fishing pole. "Oh, I thought you guys forgot or something."

"You catch a lot of fish?" I ask.

"Every day," he says. "And I eat a lot of herbs, too. Look at this." He digs up one of the pretty burgundy flowers which Cha pointed out on Veranda Curl Beach. After cleaning the root, he takes a bite and passes it on. "This is a real starchy root from the Chocolate Lily, also called Stink Lily."

I find the root very tasty and satisfying, but he says, "Don't pick too many of these though. They're becoming kind of extinct. The world wouldn't support people if everyone became gatherers." He shows us the plant I'd seen in such abundance along our trip, the smooth green leaf and small flower. "This is salal. It's berries will be ripe in about a

month. You can mash these berries and dry them into a leather. Cape Caution roughly divides this region between north and south. You'll start seeing these wild onions more, and this monkey tail plant. It grows berries too. This is Labrador Tea," he says, pointing to a plant with green leaves with white fuzz on their bottoms. Small white flowers bloom in the center. "This plant has a poisonous look-alike with bluish flowers instead of white."

We walk back towards the cabin and he says, "Come October we see signs of Grizzly Bears. I came face to face with one once in Knight's Inlet. It groaned and moaned. Those are dangerous signs. I didn't have my 303 rifle then. I found the rifle at the lake cabin; a military issue converted to a sports rifle. I only carry it now when I walk with someone who prefers it, like a lady, a Danish lady especially. Male Grizzlies have a habit of attacking women during their menstrual cycles. Bears smell blood."

We enter the small cabin. The new stove he brought today sits next to a smaller pot belly stove. Cedar shakes line the inside and books and magazines lie around. "I haven't talked to anyone for thirty days. That's why they call me Hermit John, I guess. Actually I'm only a part-time hermit. So you guys are in kayaks? Nineteen years ago I rowed my old boat from Vancouver to Haddington Island, then later up around Queen Charlotte Islands. I was a hippy before anyone else even dreamed up the idea. I recently lost the rowboat when I towed it behind my eighteen foot sailboat. But it was too heavy for a dinghy anyways. Now I use a traditional Canadian canoe. I've been in Canada half my life but I was born in Egypt, and I lived in Libya, and Great Britain, where I was drafted into the British Army for two years. My sailboat's done so good. Its hull is fifty-two years old. The nails are starting to go, but it's still seaworthy. I can only bring her in or out of this river with a high tide of at least fourteen feet. She only disperses a foot or two of water so when waves hit it coming into the river mouth, she just skids."

"The river is too salty now to drink. I saw your tracks head up to the trickle for water, but there's better water over that way. Easier to fill your containers. In the winter, the river freezes and saltwater floods over the top. Twenty foot swells crash the beach."

Our friend wears the same clothes he did on the beach today; levis, a heavy wool shirt, and long underwear. He swears away the bugs and says he wears clothes as bug protection.

"I occasionally do work for logging camps and take the pay out in trade. The owners trust me. I'm real fair and like to keep a nice balance. The owners never even want to know the details." He tries to give us all sorts of books, kerosene, or whatever we want, but we say no. He says, "Seems like everything I ever need comes my way."

"In winter I caretake a sport fishing camp for room and board and thirteen dollars a day. I can save two thousand dollars from a fun winter and they stock the freezers with salmon and orange juice, meats, potatoes, and vegetables."

"If the fellow that left all his gear at the lake island, he calls himself 'Able Enterprises', ever wants to reclaim all his gear from me, I'll charge him a hundred bucks per trip for hauling it down the mountain. It rips the hell out of my clothes climbing up through that underbrush. Today, backing down a log, I did a complete back flip with that stove on my back. I just lost my balance and flew off a log down hill, head first."

I don't want to interrupt the man, but I think how gutsy he is to live alone so far from any help if he ever needed it. I write constantly in my pocket notebook as he talks on, something I usually don't do.

"What the hell are you writing?" he asks me.

"Oh, I'm keeping a journal of our kayak trip."

He shakes his head and says, "Must be one hell of a journal." He shows us a pressure cooker and a fishing reel. "See where the mouse piss eroded this? Almost everything up there is eroded. I figure its okay to loot the place since the stuff is ruining anyways. It's all wet and rusty. I dried out the books. I sand or oil any moving parts. It's just salvage. I found this." He shows a *Japanese Home and Garden* book. "Next time you visit expect a Japanese setting. And look at this that I found up at the cabin lake." He pulls out a lady bug shaped battery record player from under his bunk, then a stack of records, each with a 'Special \$1.00' label.

"There's a raft up there that I row back and forth from the island and a whole crate of sardines in cans. I leave those up there for my lunches on excursion days." He shows us some aerial photos of the beach and lake and lake island. The lake is circled on a map with an arrow pointed to the fantasy island. "They must have just chose the place from a plane. After they left, snow collapsed their dream cabin. What I can't understand is all the 'how to' fish and gather seafood books. The lake is miles through rough terrain to ocean."

Hermit John continues his stories, knowing Latin names for all the local vegetation. He knows names and dates of wars and guns and events and people. Physically he is very strong and big. He shows us more of his valuable things. "This is my *I Ching* book, the book of changes. These are some of my recordings." He refers to the hexagon shaped graphs of daily coin flipping. He claims this the link between chance and fate.

"Many religious people get away these days, becoming self sufficient, waiting for Armageddon. But the fellow from the Lake Island Camp had no religious books or philosophy books, except maybe one native herb book. Unless he hauled them out on escape. The guy collected way too much junk he never could use. They must have had a hell of a good summer though. Their only summer up there."

"Now I just stash the junk here. And what the hell, if I never come back, all it cost me was sweat to haul it here." Outside he glares at the evening sun, a ring circling it. "Looks like a southeast wind may be coming. I'm sailing down south real soon to meet a lady, a friend, a Danish one. She's in real high demand. She just sailed across the Atlantic and is now in Utah working this way. I miss that lady."

"In Knight's Inlet the Indians allow me to stay in their shacks because they think I'm a crazy man and they like me. They give me Ooligan oil, from the candlefish. It's high in Vitamins A, D and some E. You never get a cold with that stuff."

"You guys should venture into Echo Bay and Marijuana Bay and to Hansen Island to see the whale watch labs. Go find the local doctor. He's got a few rumors about him. Seems that when he reached the magic age of forty, he suddenly had the need to reproduce. He conned a couple local ladies into having his children. Find some of the other locals. Kayak Bill lives around there somewhere. He lives off the land and uses herbs."

I point to a greeting card on the wall, a Rolf Lindberg copy; a Norwegian painting with mountain backdrops, a lot like the scenes I often view from my kayak. The peaceful picture is of a man with long red hair and a beard. Troll like, really. And a blond child sits next to him. He drapes one arm around the child and points to the blue sky and white puffy clouds. They sit on the grass and the child looks up also. Hermit John says, "A

blond haired girl gave me this and claimed we are the two in the picture. She said she envisioned me as her guardian angel. Whether I am or not, I can't say."

The four of us walk back out to the beach. He shows us his favorite fishing hole. Dropping his lure between the rocks, he instantly pulls up a fish. I am surprised to see fishing so easy. He catches another smallish fish, and trying for a third small fish to make his dinner, he catches a big one. We don't want the small fish so he throws them back. He tells sasquatch stories. "They're supposed to have mental telepathy and can hide from man. They can even affect a man's mind to make themselves invisible. They're isolated beings, maybe even superior to man, who don't want to be tampered with." I wonder if this hermit is a sasquatch. What else can hide from man?

After he fishes he checks out our tent set-ups. Denis offers him a smoke, which he turns down. I show him the charts and he marks dots of fun places to go. Cha offers a hand and says, "I'm Cha, what's your name?"

Hermit John tells his name, then says, "The name really doesn't matter. Actually, you should be careful about asking names around this country. Some people have secrets. Well," he says, walking away, "I'm sure glad you guys didn't land in a helicopter. I don't like guns, but I keep them around for insurance in case the helicopters get too thick."

Hermit John leaves back to his home. I sit in the sand under the stars wishing I could hear more of this man's stories. He's a walking education. He lives such a creative life. Maybe I don't need to create artful projects. I shouldn't feel lacking if I don't carve wood. Maybe learning to write, or sing, or even paint aren't the most important things for my life. Creativity should be unlimited. Do or make anything. Like in Spanish, hacer is a word combining to do with to make. It's enough just to have creative thoughts and do creative action, like Hermit John's life. In a half day he inspired me so much. To do or to make. To make do. To be. I am.

I climb into my tent and slip into peaceful sleep.

Chapter 10

"Independence Day"

"A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest."

Simon and Garfunkel

July 2, 1981

Ah. Third moonversary. The Sand Beach. We leave as if rushing off to work, leaving the surf and Hermit John behind, paddling out to large soft swells. We come to Slingsby Channel. The wind blows harder now and the waves threaten us. My map, I recall, shows Slingsby opening into a maze of inland fjords. We consider stopping to camp but we choose to paddle on. Vigilance Cove would be a nice camp spot though.

Past Fox Island and Bramham Island, we paddle between Deloraine Islands and find sheltered kayaking behind the Southgate Group. The narrow passages and shallow water lead us amongst rocks and islets. After filling our water bottles, we tuck behind a long arm of land, then suddenly find ourselves back out in open water. The swells roll smoother than earlier but our next direction is to cross the Queen Charlotte Straits. Hopping several islands, our longest stretch across the ten miles of water will be only five miles, across Gordon Channel.

We discuss whether we will start across now or wait, having paddled only twelve miles so far today. Cha decides to stay, so we do, since someone cares. He finds us a narrow sandy beach with sheltered landing. We name the camp, Cha's Beach, here near the entrance of Shelter Bay, 125 miles from Campbell River.

Denis and Cha set their tents on the beach, the only two spots just above the last high tide line. I climb the hill above Cha's Beach, over stumps, salal bushes, and up to a ridge. The view looks over hazy Vancouver Island and all the water between here and there. Rain falls a little but I sit dry in my gortex coat and rubber boots. These wool pants are warm, wet or dry. I feel we have been traveling so fast lately, just touching and going from each place. I feel I'm leaving the whole world behind. I am. But I guess I have the same whole world ahead too.

I wonder about Hermit John. I don't know what I wonder about him, but I do. Maybe he is just a wonder. He is such a contribution to my trip. Being so isolated he doesn't daily involve himself with the social give and take that I grew up knowing so well. It seems that I have become so dependent upon others. But what do I contribute? I don't add that much to mankind, as I was brought up feeling I must. But being taught to contribute, I still don't feel guilty for not. What does Hermit John contribute? I guess a lot. He sure made me feel good, and he apparently makes the Indians, the loggers, and the girl on Haddington feel good too. What better contribution to mankind could there be?

I climb down from my view spot, rain now falling harder. The beach seems the only reasonable place to set camp, even though it will be on the tide line. I pitch my tent and climb in. The others are quiet already. I wonder if NRG will get me in my sleep. High tide will be three a.m.

July 3, 1981

I am awake, 1:30 a.m. The water approaches very close to my tent. By 2:30 I'm outside in a wool shirt, gortex jacket, and nothing else, piling driftwood and splatting that with grass and sand. This trick beavers figured out long before my time. Frogs hop this morning and sand fleas jump about, millions of them. I keep my tent screen zipped close while I work so the fleas won't flip their way into my bed. The flooding tide charges my dam. I continue packing more materials, higher and thicker. My tent now sits below the water level, but still dry. I dig a protecting moat inside the dam. Cha and Denis stay dry, having set up first on the driest ground.

As the threat retreats, I am a proud victor... and wide awake. I say, "Let's get up and go now, guys, to make sure we cross today before any wind blows up."

"It's not even light yet. And it's raining," says Denis.

"So?"

"You really want to go now?" he asks.

"I sure do, but I'm already up and awake. We should only sleep a couple more hours anyway, if we do this right. It's four now, by the time we eat and pack we can paddle by five-thirty. It should be light then."

"Well... Sure, I guess so."

"You awake, Cha?" I say.

"Yah."

"Did you hear the plans?"

"What are they?"

"Eat and pack. Let's get out of here." Cha doesn't respond. I pack quietly. Denis' tent glows and chewing sounds come out. A little while later I ask, "You up, Cha?" His tent is still dark.

"Yah. I'm coming." Cha is now upset with me.

We paddle in fog, leaving Cha's Beach in morning light. As we start away from Wallace Islands, the fog lifts enough to make out the first group of islands we want to touch in the crossing. After a couple miles, we pass the northwest end of the Millar Group, a mile to our port. Crossing Ripple Passage, the unexpected strong current sucks us out towards open ocean. Deceived by the water flows, we end up further northwest than anticipated, but we slide through Shelter Passage and cross Gordon Channel. The water lies smooth for us as we near Gordon Islands. Many eagles fly in groups, low over the water. Others sit high in tree tops. Across Goletas Channel I watch one bald eagle sit, then spread his enormous wings and float across the water. Another eagle, a female maybe, with more gray than white marks and bigger, swoops into the bald's zone. Baldie turns and speeds towards the female. She swings up her feet in flight and karate kicks toward baldie. They both land on separate rocks and stare, as two fighters in their ring corners. Once again, they spread wings and fly at one another. A repeat karate kick, then both pump into the northwest wind and slowly fly away.

We paddle past Hardy Bay, the first town we'd seen since Bella Bella. Cruising with current and wind, we kayak inside Masterman Island. Around Dillon Point and into Daedalus Passage, nice homes line the shore. We paddle between Cattle Island and Deer Island, inside Beaver Harbor, then out around Thomas Point. We pass Fort Rupert, an Indian village, then on by the Port Hardy Airport.

I pull out the compass from my pack and figure just where the sun will set. I choose an appropriate camp, facing sunset and sitting inside Keogh Shoals. After the twenty-three mile day, we have made the last major crossing of the trip. Now only fast currents, such as Seymour Narrows, could give us trouble.

Denis and Cha set their tents on the beach. Denis says, "I sure hope those sand fleas don't get us here. They were wild last night. They're strange creatures. Seems like they have no control over their bodies. They just bounce around like random boingers."

I choose a spot on a bank in the thin woods. In soft dirt I clear a smooth spot with a special view through alder branches, looking north across Queen Charlotte Straits. Unpacking, I look for my compass, having set it alongside my kayak seat on the blanket. Setting up my tent, I search all my gear for the compass. And I rush around, searching my boat and in the water. The tide has risen since we landed. Damn. I lost my compass. It must have gotten hooked to my pants when I climbed from the kayak. That's the second one I bought for this trip, the first being stolen with other things from my kayak in Kirkland before the trip. And now I bozo the second one. I have a bad attitude right now. Mellow out, Mark. Why do I care so much about a compass? It's not like I'll even miss it.

Well, once again my tent lies on Vancouver Island. The last and first time was on Penalakut Spit where we first started hitching to Alaska. Tomorrow is Independence Day. I'm tired now. The tide got me up too early this morning.

As I search for my compass again I find an old piece of garden hose in the water and rocks. It works great for a one note trumpet, a foghorn for my kayak. About a ten in the morning exit tomorrow will give us a four knot current. I love going out in my kayak every day, but I think a little part of me says no each time. The sea is a rough place and we've seen the dangerous times; rocks, breakers, and cold water. Several times I could have lost all my gear, my notes. So what is a compass?

I build a driftwood porch and pillars for adornment. The branches get pruned for optimum tent view. This is still wilderness so I don't feel wrong for trimming a few greens, though I no longer feel I can use stump monsters for trash. There are towns now, they get my plastics, glass, and metals.

I sit in my tent and quiet my mind. Now I am cooled off from losing my compass. I'm glad to breathe so easily. Sometimes I lose scope that I still have my health. That is what I'm thankful of. What if I lost my health, or my mind? Well, I would hope to live as painless as a vegetable. But I've never asked a rutabaga how it felt. Or a turnip. They seem happy enough to me... VD rutabaga.

I'm so tired. That's probably why I got so mad at losing my compass. I wonder where it is. Damn!

July 4, 1981

Now at six a.m., after a long night's sleep, I watch the sunrise over Queen Charlotte Strait; a rich berry red. This is a rare treat for me, a sunrise over a large body of water. My screen refracts the sun so that I see out my tent through a red lens. Two seals swim the kelp as I swim out of my sleepy dreams. The rock skipping squeal of an eagle warns above my tent, his voice clear in the calm morning. No wind and clear skies. A bluebird type fellow sits on a branch a paddle's distance from me. He watches me eat my hot cereal with raisins and honey. A hummingbird flits by, buzzes my screen, then

continues on. Sliming up the outside of my tent wall, a slug spies on this earthling specimen. Spacyman and specimen. The slugs here slosh everywhere; over the water bottles, in the kayaks.

I feel so rested now. Last night my mind was slipping, like algae brain. Maybe the slugs are getting messages to me. Ah, but today is Independence Day. I'm free. Yeah.

We walk out over slippery rocks and kelp to pack our boats at low tide. Tiny crabs in tide pools scramble for cover as I approach. One crab rushes towards me over a big rock, and threatens me, his pinchers out and pointing.

As Cha shoves his rear float bag in, a motored skiff with three men aboard approach the beach. Fishing poles point up from the boat. One man says, "What's with all these cement blocks with buoys, fellah?"

Cha, not hearing correctly, answers, "Oh, this? It's a kayak."

The man returns aggressively, "What do you think you're doing putting those white buoys out there, fellah?" He points out to the thick kelp shining in the morning sun. Several white buoys float about.

Cha says, "I'm just paddling south from Alaska. I don't know."

"Oh. You just got here last night? You're not those whale people or anything like that?"

"Yep. Nope." says Cha. The man backs his boat out and roars off. That's that.

We slide into the kayaks and out to the kelp beds. Two seals, a mamma and a baby, rest on a rock, both arched and basking in the sun. "Orr Orrr?" I ask them. "Whale people?" I ask Cha.

He says, "Paddling this seaweed is like skiing slush."

"Let's ski," I say, poking my paddle between green tubes of kelp. I pole my kayak along. Cha bounces with a beat and watches me. He chants a tune. I say, "Remember that day at Alpentel when the north winds kept blowing and snow kept falling down from Disposal Ridge onto Sideslip Shoot?"

"Yah," he says, keeping his beat. "And Zen Duck had us keep skiing that run all day to cut off the new snow. We cut off three inch slabs every time around, then we'd jump into shot six and turn the trees. Yah yah yah yah, mmm hmm, yah yah..." Cha bops on.

I say, "Yah, and remember the day we skied the first tracks down Knoll One."

Cha laughs, "And I kept cutting off the slides when I jumped first and you'd follow right behind and get the moving snow."

An ocean liner heads our direction a mile off this beach. His smoke races ahead faster than the ship's own speed. We paddle on, approaching the lighthouse of Malcolm Island. The ship's smoke changes direction, now following its path. Down Boughten Channel, off Ledge Point, a man in a skiff stops and invites us to his lighthouse. He's a nice fellow, but we move on, past Haddington Island. Here's a beach community with only four or five houses visible. One resident watches us through binoculars. We wave.

Paddling into Alert Bay, we approach a ship named Odessa bearing a Russian hammer and sickle on the smokestack. A lifeboat floats by the hanging anchor. A crewman swings in the giant hook, while another sits in the lifeboat holding a paint roller against the ship. He just lets the surge of the water roll the paint up and down with the boat's movement. "Maximum efficiency," I say. He answers in, I guess, Russian. "A fish in sea," I tell Cha.

Another lifeboat with about thirty people aboard, mostly elders, motors out to load the group aboard ship. We paddle to the dock simultaneously with a guy and gal in a wooden rowboat. They are loaded down with gear. He wears a thick stubble of a beard, like a goat, and his hair is dark. She has straight, long, dark hair. Her hands are very tan. Both look very healthy. "You going long distance?" I ask.

"Yep," he answers. "North to Meyer's Chuck, in Alaska."

"Ha, that's just as far north as we went," I say.

"Were you guys at May Fest on Stuart Island?" he asks.

"Yah," I answer, thinking. "Yah, and you're the guy that played hackysack with us. You were the bare footed guy." Old folks stand around drinking tea from a ship thermos, listening to and watching us five. We all stand bare footed.

Paul and Thea explain they are brother and sister from Waldron Island in the San Juans. They row north, delivering a friend's boat. Cha sits by his kayak making a sandwich. Some of the tourists from the Odessa watch him in awe as he pulls ingredients from his boat.

One lady whispers to her husband, "Look, honey, he's got mustard." Cha lays the next layer. "Look, he's got cheese. And look, he's even got sprouts!"

The husband says towards Denis and I, "I just grew up at the wrong time. I'm twenty years late."

I ask Thea how brother and sister get along in the small boat. "Well, we just do. Kind of. And don't."

"What do you use to sleep in? You both share a tent?"

"We usually just anchor and sleep in the boat, putting this tarp over us. We've taken the tarp and slept on the beach a couple times." Paul and Thea have a month to row north. They will head into the predominant northwesterly winds. "We hurry," she says, "because I left loose ends at home, and Paul needs to find a job. We've both wanted to do this for a long time."

I ask if they fish. Thea says, "Quite a bit, but we've been disappointed. We've only caught one rock fish and a salmon." We bid them good luck and walk to town.

After each calling the family at home, we decide beer on Independence Day to be a must. But we have zero cash. "Visa Card time," Cha tells me. I try for cash with my card first at the fine arts store. I'm told no. "On principle," the owner claims. He sends me to the dime store. She tells me credit cards don't work that way. Then in the marine store I tell the lady, "We're paddling to Seattle and our next money is in Campbell River and we need groceries..."

"The grocery store will take your Visa," she says.

"Well," I say, intent on cash for beer, "actually, the groceries we need is beer."

She makes us read a poster on the wall about the evils of man and alcohol, of ruined homes and lost lives. But she gives us the money. "You know there's a Postal Strike," she says. "You may never get money in Campbell River. You better buy food."

"No, they'll wire our money," I say. "We need beer."

We paddle into the evening, looking for a shack that Paul and Thea described to us. We don't see it as we continue in the fast current flowing us along. Snow fields glitter on mountains high above on Vancouver Island. The wind blows us, pushing waves over our sterns. One sloshes in my boat. Putting on my spray deck, I think of Hermit John. We rushed by him too fast. I wanted to learn more of the things he knows and does. And the

dotted line he drew on my map, through the islands up ahead. I want to see Gilford Island and Echo Bay, Hanson Island and Kayak Bill. But Denis and Cha are anxious to get to Campbell River. Maybe now is the time to split up. I don't need to rush south so fast. We have so much time left on this trip.

Passing Beaver Cove on our right, Denis paddles over to me. Houses and a Post Office sit on shore. He says, "Let's paddle down the other side of the channel."

"Could. But it's getting kind of late. Maybe we should camp and drink some beers. Tomorrow we could slip into those islands a bit, away from Johnstone Strait. I feel like I'm being sucked down a funnel to Campbell River."

Denis says, "I'm going to be in Campbell River in a couple of days. But sure, let's camp."

We pull up to Blinkhorn Peninsula and plop down on the beach without unloading our boats. We open beers. Denis says, "Maybe we should just paddle into these islands in the morning and check out the whale watch house that Hermit John told us about. We can paddle down Johnstone Strait from there."

"I'm ready to just hammer the miles to Campbell River so we can get more food. Then we'll have all that time around Desolation Sound," says Cha.

I throw rocks out towards the sunset, and say, "I need to at least peek into those islands. I'm not in that much of a hurry to get to Desolation Sound."

Cha gets up and takes a walk. I tell Denis, "You know, I'm ready to slow down about three knots. It's only July Fourth and I'm going to split off from the group now. I need to stay up here awhile. These islands seem special and I'm tired of passing up all these special places. A week would have been nice on the sandy beach, surfing and talking to that man. We could have visited the lake cabin and he knows all the herbs, fish and animals of the area. We just flew by. I don't need food. Man, we're packed with grains and we haven't forced ourselves into needing fish yet. I want to check out Echo Bay and go eat berries on those islands. And all the whales are in this place..."

Denis opens us a couple more beers and says, "Yah, I think you're right. Maybe we should just call the split right now. I guess I want to spend a couple days up here too."

We sit quietly, watching the sky's red increase through our sunglasses. I try on Denis' Vaurnets and feel the relief of their yellow lenses. A visual orgasm. Denis wears my ten dollar specials and says, "Your glasses are gray. They're Phonets."

Cha returns, "Hey, there's a cabin here. I think this is the place Paul and Thea told us about after all."

We walk up to the edge of the trees. The cabin sits waiting for us, empty of personal belongings, but with tables and a wood stove. We head into the woods along a creek bed. The three of us sit down next to a bubbling pool, viewing sunset through the growth of thin alders. "Cha," says Denis, "Mark suggests we split up now. He wants to paddle these islands awhile, and I do too, for a couple days."

Cha looks surprised. "Well, how long will a couple days be? I might go with you guys if we just take a day out of the way."

"I'm tired of trying to get 'there'", I say. "I need to slow down and be here and not say what day I'll be where. I've got to slow down and quit counting miles and explore what's here for awhile."

"So, do you want to meet somewhere in a couple weeks?" asks Cha.

I say, "I'm thinking about six weeks. Like meet in Powell River, say August fifteenth at five in the afternoon. Your map book shows a Shell Oil Dock on Powell Lake. It looks like we can paddle right to it."

"What if someone doesn't make it?" asks Cha.

"Be there or be square," says Denis.

"We'll all make it, but if someone doesn't, meet the same place at five the next afternoon. If no show the second night, call the folks for a message center," I rasp in my squeaky troll voice, "You just never never know... heh heh heh eh..."

Cha asks, "You're just going off Johnstone Strait for a day or two, Denis?"

"No idea. Probably at least a week." We finish more beers and walk out to the beach. A wooden bridge arches over the beach, spanning a gap between two random rocks.

I say, "That's bridging a gap that wouldn't be there without the bridge. I name this beach, under the no-laws of Kayaker's Reality, I christen it Playa de Puente." I throw my empty beer bottle high into the air. After a moment we hear the crash down next to the water, on the rocks of the low tide zone. "To Independence Day and to my share of the destruction of mankind."

Both Denis and Cha guzzle and throw their empty bottles into the air. We hear the glass shatter in the twilight.

The cabin, with burnt siding, rests on floats and 2 x 6 boards. A beached float home. Inside is lined with tongue and groove siding. A huge eagle passes close to the window, his shape outlined through the clear plastic against the sunset sky. We light a fire in the oil drum fireplace and Denis begins drumming lightly on the table with sticks. I join in, hammering on the floor with two pieces of driftwood. Cha pounds on the wood bench. We gather a beat and each play variations off it. We hammer louder and harder. The drum rolls gather with crashes and booms. We beat and bang any emotions into the wood, hammering out the beer which we hammered so much of, pounding. We swing a full tilt boogie, a log jam supreme. Time becomes irrelevant, though I'm sure the clock continues to turn. I'm sure under Kayaker's Reality. We finally stop when Denis screams, "I got blood blisters on my fingers..."

We sit back, sweating and sipping on new beers. I feel relieved, now lying on top of my sleeping bag, on top of the picnic table in the front room. Ah, freedom; Independence Day.

July 5, 1981

"A matter that becomes clear ceases to concern us." Nietzsche

I sit quietly on the beach, deciding to stay a day at the cabin and let Cha get on his rushed way. Denis decides his plans too. I feel alone in my decisions finally. I actually feel apathetic to group cause. Maybe that's a generality for me. I find too often I just don't want to take any stand, even to save whales or check nuclear safety. Politics, organized religion, even clubs I find hard to take. How do I decide anything now? I don't know what any outcomes will be in the future. But some decisions must be made, or else no decision stands. And that is a decision. Maybe a stagnating one, maybe not...

Cha and I go fishing, he from his kayak, me on the rocks. Many purse seiners bob in the channel. One fisherman tells Cha that this is the only zone the Fisheries opened, so tomorrow their nets will be set, along with their hopes. We fish for an hour and neither of us get a bite. "Oh, well. Beans and rice for this kid," says Cha.

We laze around all day, nobody packing to leave. Cha asks if Denis and I will stay together for awhile, but we don't know. He decides to paddle with us for a couple of days, but then changes his mind. He sets his mind for a solo trip and admits a fear of being alone. "On my Europe trip I couldn't take it any more. I had to go back home."

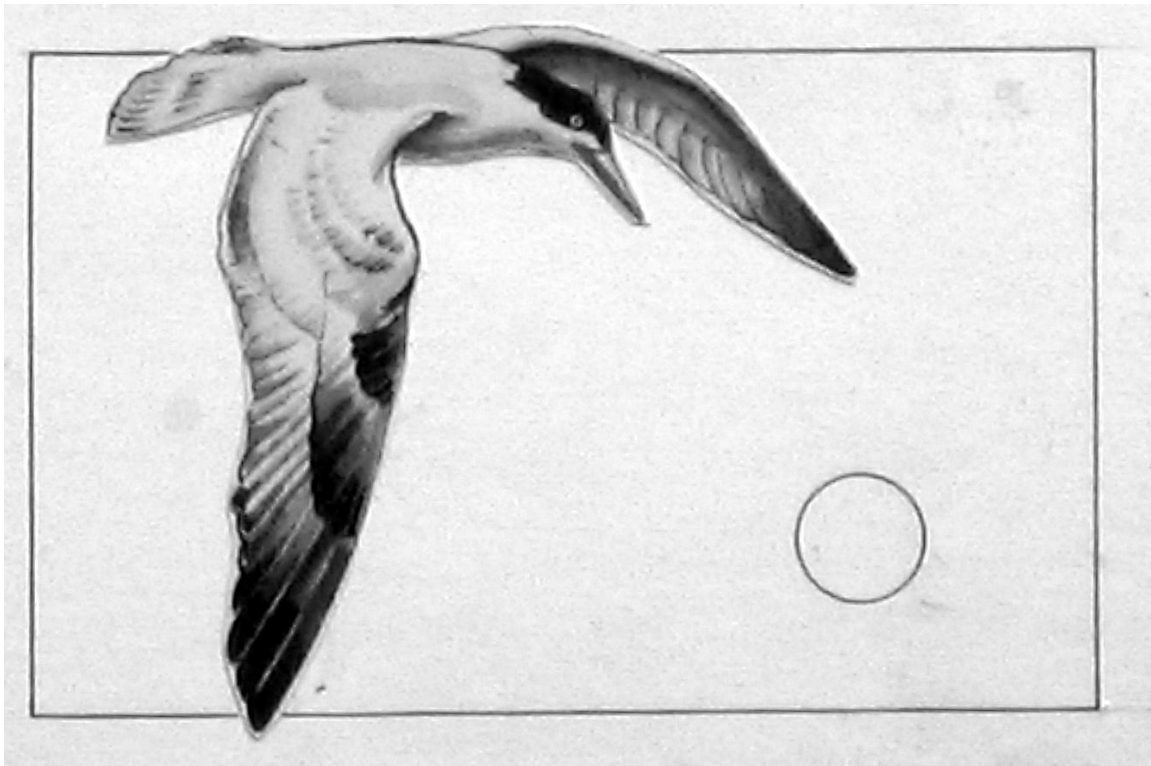
"This isn't Europe," I say. "No bombs will go off in train stations around here."

Cha says, "That's true." We hear a shot like a gun and something hits the cabin. Cha and I run outside shouting Tarzan yells. Two fishermen run for their boat.

Cha talks to them. They show a desire to get away fast, saying, "We were only shooting at trees."

Back inside, Cha and I watch out the clear plastic window. Denis is out on a walk. Cha says, "And here we are again. Looking out our waterfront window at the water and the tree. This is the same as every beach."

"Yep, no change," I say.



Chapter 11

"Space Blanket Over the Brain"

"We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all.
Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't.
You feel mighty comfortable on a raft." Mark Twain

July 6, 1981

Denis and I paddle away from Blinkhorn, both yelling as Tarzan. Cha has been inside preparing pancakes for his first day's solo paddle. He bids a Tarzan goodbye, "Ah aaa ahh aaa."

Starting across Johnstone Strait, we dodge the many purse seiners who jockey for positions. Some boats set their nets in the middle of the channel so we just quietly weave through the mesh mess. Denis and I head off for adventure, to seek out the local characters who our Hermit friend dotted on the map. We plan on first visiting the Hanson Island whale watch where they are supposed to have aqua-phones set up for hearing whale conversations. "And in weeks to come," I tell Denis, daydreaming aloud to him for a moment, "we will be hearing rumors of the famous Paddle Cha, the man living from a kayak in a green tent in green trees and living on cottage cheese and beer." Bald spots along the mountain sides on Vancouver Island show the signs of clear-cut logging.

Rounding from Johnstone Strait into Blackney Pass, between Hanson Island and a little parasite island, the current grabs us and whips us through faster than we've ever sped in kayaks; maybe eight knots or so. Small whirlpools funnel into holes at their center. Our kayaks speed so fast we pass right over the spinning water. I see the whale watch house; two round buildings with glass fronts like sun castles. We beach and see people putting on clothes to come greet us. Two kayaks lie on the beach, one the same model as Denis'.

The caretakers offer us tea. Joel and Linda tell us the whales haven't arrived yet, but they were spotted once last week near Port Hardy. "Once they show, they'll be here every day. We don't have the hydra-phones working now though. Dr. Spong should be here next week."

We are introduced to a third person, Bill, who remains quiet. Inside, many whale photos and drawings line the walls. A photo of a grizzly bear swimming a channel grabs my attention. The fireplace stands on rocks and the whole house builds around the rocks. Outside, vegetables grow in abundance.

We only stay a short while. They send us off with fresh yogurt culture and some herbs. Joel plucks some fresh lettuce from the garden and hands it to us with a smile. The crisp leaves taste sweet.

We paddle into Blackfish Sound and stop to munch lettuce and smoke in the sun. "I like the feel of this area," I say. "It's different than all the islands we've been to so far."

"It is a good one," says Denis. "Wait... listen..." I hear it too. Suddenly we both turn to the sound of, "Pooosch." Orca exhale.

"Whales!", we both say, paddling back towards Hanson Island. About a dozen whales head southeast in front of the whale watch center. Denis shoots a half dozen

photos while we try to paddle on top of the pod. Groups of three and four orcas roll over the surface, breathing, three kayak lengths away. A big male, his dorsal bending to the side it is so heavy, breaks surface on my starboard. "Pooosch." The exhale spray dampens me... hot whale breath.

Motorboats follow along with the pod, blue smoke pouring from their idling engines. Denis and I munch and generate our own smoke as the stink machines roar to keep up with the whales. "Hey, wait for me... me too, me too..." I say.

At Freshwater Cove we meet the wives of divers who chase the whales underwater to photograph them. The ladies say another kayaker from Washington camps here, on the same beach, but he's out paddling for the day. "He's different than you guys though. He wears a wet suit in his kayak and carries all sorts of lead weights. His kayak is homemade."

We paddle through West Pass, past Berry Island and down Village Channel towards the fabled berry paradise. Our travel is relaxed, feet on the deck, or even dangling in the water. Sun, no wind or rain, and very few miles to cover, I already feel slowed down from the speedway rush.

We follow the group of islands to a shallow bay and a beach covered with broken glass. A ghost village stands above us. Ten years ago the inhabitants of this island moved away to Alert Bay. They needed to join other communities in order to attain more government money for education. Costs and benefits. Denis and I climb a bank on slippery mud and find a totem pole looming over us. A whale is carved in the top, then an eagle, then a bear or an otter, then a beaver. Below the beaver another figure remains disguised, slashed beyond recognition with initials carved by the visiting tourists. The wood cracks and fades, having nobody to care for the art any longer.

The bushes surrounding us grow thick with fruit. We pick ripe cherries, and thimble berries and raspberries. On the beach I find currents, red huckleberries, unripe blackberries, blue huckleberries, and salal blossoms. "This is paradise," I tell Denis as I stuff a hand full of thimble berries in my mouth. "I'm surprised nobody lives here."

Purple lilacs and white Himalayan blackberry blossoms line the trail. Uncountable bees buzz the plants and around our heads and limbs. We walk slowly, picking berries as we please. The collective buzz, the insect hum, mesmerizes.

We wander through old buildings. Many hummingbirds whiz by, in and out of broken windows. I see Denis at one window sweeping his hand around and talking. He tries to free a hummingbird which is stuck between two panes of glass. The bird flaps his wings, excited, but he can't get enough draft to rise from his encasement. Another hummingbird lies dead on the window sill between the panes. When the lively bird stops his wings to contemplate his entrapment, Denis picks him up by his beak, like he would a cherry stem. The bird flies free.

Other hummingbirds whiz by six inches from our faces. An old comic book, *Chamber of Darkness*, lies among broken couches and cupboards, piled with other debris, rotting on the floor.

We clamber into another building; the old school house. The chalkboard is now just rotting cardboard. One window contains a robin's nest with two peeping chicks the size of my pinkie. The mother cheep cheep cheeps her panic, so I leave the room.

We walk the trail through the woods to a pier. It too rots with holes and age. Overhead flies a blue heron, looking ancient, even prehistoric. His neck extends and legs

fold under the giant six or seven foot wing span. His raspy call is loud and echoes off the bluff. "This island is paradise, Denis. Why don't people stay here?"

"Maybe they don't know about it."

For dinner we pick about a gallon of berries and munch them with milk and granola. The taste sends me into ecstasy. The air smells of pollen and mint. I relax in my tent and read until late, enjoying my senses, the smell of flowers alive in the air.

July 7, 1981

After high winds in the night, the morning sky clears. I don't think rain fell. I feel awed by the ghost town where we camp. Do we trespass on sacred land according to the Indian's customs? Is our presence here sacrilegious? I pluck a sliming slug off my tent screen and a hummingbird stops on the red string on my tent awning. He sits still, his chest sparkling green.

I wander to the beach. There is broken glass everywhere. Maybe the town's folks broke all the bottles here when they moved out. A rotting boat sits half in the water and half out, lying on its side. An old dock crumbles out from the bank. I lift a piece of plywood and thousands of ants work. They each carry eggs, or grains, or some sort of white module. They all rush around with some common goal, like the bees working for their hive. I notice a single ant wandering off with one grain, heading off to some bushes alone. Does he act with a single mind, has he been coded, or does he act on cue to some greater signal from somewhere. Why? Do I? The ant drops the grain and wanders on, turning constantly, searching. Another ant picks up the same grain and continues moving.

A kayaker paddles towards the beach and I greet him. His fiberglass boat looks rough and homemade. Richard is the kayaker from Washington the divers' wives told us about. He's a fourth grade teacher from Lopez Island. He climbs on shore wearing wet suit bottoms and feet.

Richard finds us some strawberries, then pitches his tent next to ours. We kayak out and fish in the bay. Denis and Richard both catch some dinner. I enjoy the porpoises' company. Mist floats over the reflective water. Mountains distort in the water image, trees ripple, clouds dance. Raindrops start to fall, further distorting the mirror image.

Richard says, "I kayak to school almost every day, about a mile. Then I jog the rest of the way. Kayaking and bicycling are so nice on the body because they're like the heart beat; constant and not too strenuous. So you can pump for hours." Richard smiles under his thick brown mustache and says, "Let's paddle out to the burial island. Have you been there?"

"No, I didn't even know about it."

"I'm not sure if we're supposed to know," he says. The three of us paddle side by side. "Do you guys drink the water?"

"Sure," says Denis. "We drink it straight from the creeks. People tell us the cedar makes the water bad and will make us shit a lot, but we haven't been bothered."

"I've been boiling mine because people make me worry. Maybe I won't. At home, in the Olympics, the beaver shit in the water causes Beaver Fever. Hikers have a lot of problems with the fresh water up there."

We stroke into the mist towards a very small island. It's actually more of a rock, with trees and shrubs growing." Denis says, "It doesn't look like you could put a spray deck on that boat, Richard."

"I can't. The mold broke."

"What about storms?"

"I haven't had any problems yet. I wear the wet suit and just go to shore if I need to. I only launched from Port McNeill. I drove my car up Vancouver Island. Did you know the mold from your kayak came from Bellingham, Denis?"

"No. We haven't known anything about this. Nobody has known."

Richard says, "They made the mold for that boat as a double kayak. After making so many, they cut out a section to make that single kayak. I don't know the company's name. They might have manufactured the kayaks in Canada."

We climb up on the burial island and crawl through thick bushes. I find a couple salal berries almost ripe, then I find wood boxes lying crushed from age and tourists. Human skulls and bones scatter about. Some have been gathered into piles, some are neatly lined up in the dirt. It looks like originally four or so corpses were laid to a box, like maybe one family. Death lies all around, yet it feels just like the dirt or rocks. How would the tribe like us here? Do I walk over somebody's grave? Is this wrong? Richard says, "When I die, I want my body returned to the sea and devoured by life." Wild flowers and berries intertwine the Indian bones. One pretty flower grows out the eye of a small skull.

For dinner we grill fish and drink fresh mint tea. We boil brown rice and dandelion greens, which prove too strong to eat. Light rain sizzles the fire. A southwest wind blows. For dessert, we split a gallon of berries.

July 8, 1981

More berry picking. We become experts. Berry picking seems like the feast and famine of life; mostly the feast. For awhile a vein of big red juicy plump berries appear, so I pick like mad, filling my mouth and bucket. As the vein runs low and I search for another, I can eat the berries from my bucket. But picking berries is like life. It must be, everything is. After the juiciest berries have been picked, apparently depleted, all I have to do is sit down and relax. From the new perspective I find a whole new rich resource of fruit.

I somehow store up a gallon of berries and head back to my tent. A totem pole leans over the trail as I round a corner, like an idol to scare trespassers... BOO!

More totems are down, covered with growing grass, un-cared for, rotting. A lady appears from behind a totem pole. Mrs. Kirk boated down from Glendale, in Knight's Inlet. She answers, "Yes, Hermit John caretakes our fishing camp in the winter. There's big fish up there this year. He will get a full freezer."

I eat berries with the yogurt I cultured from powdered milk and the starter from Joel and Linda. Yum, a sensual orgasm. Explosions fill the air and I figure them to be the loggers over on Vancouver Island dynamiting stumps. "Fire in the hole."

Richard paddles away in pouring rain, anxious to cover some miles during his two week vacation. Denis and I sit in our tents. My clothes hang-dry inside an abandoned house.

I sit eating my berries, the milk purple. I taste something bitter and instantly think of a bug. Looking in my bowl, I see tiny legs crawl out of the purple milk. The bug unburies itself and crawls up the side of the bowl. It's a dripping earwig. I chew the berries in my mouth real well.

July 9, 1981

I sit as a space cat in my tent, appreciating nothing... for if my tent didn't contain all this space, the nothing, then it wouldn't be so big. It'd be just a collapsed pile of material. Sure, air is here, but it doesn't hinder me. And my tent doorway is just nothing, empty space waiting for me to crawl through. I'm just a space cat. I just sit. And do nothing.

The island sounds are so alive. I hear birds sing and bees buzz. The eagle squeaks a laugh; he knows it's nothing, so he might as well laugh. Pink roses and red rose hips shine outside my door.

If a tortoise goes slowly and lives a hundred years, and a fruit fly lives so fast that he knocks up a mate and dies forty-five minutes from birth, then how long does a hummingbird live compared to an eagle? Or a star? Is Tweedle dumb?

Three blue herons fly over as we pack. The morning is humid. A northwest wind blows small clouds through the blue sky. We paddle, leaving our berry paradise and head north by Midsummer Island, by Seabreeze Island, and Health Bay. "I wonder if these are the Harmony Islands we heard about in the San Juans?" I say. "Richard called this area the Gilford Island Group."

"Whatever," says Denis. We paddle past Bonwick Island. A boy watches us from shore, behind him an Indian village with about ten houses and a school. Through the Fox Group I become entranced looking inside my boat. The sun reveals the water line through the plastic, projecting ripples on my leg. I would like a kayak with a clear base for watching fish.

The current sweeps us through Cramer Passage. A kelp string with a clam shell hanging on its end dangles from a tree. The kelp must have attached to the clam on the bottom at one time. Denis and I stop for lunch, eating berries with yogurt and alfalfa sprouts.

We round the corner into Echo Bay. Float houses line the north shore. On our starboard lies a floating store. The resort sits on the hillside behind the store.

Seven adults and two kids reunion on a giant stink machine, the Fantasy Isle. One man, his hands folded comfortably on his protruding belly, tells us, "The couple that own this boat live in Spokane. The rest of us just flew up today from Southern California. I finally escaped my office, that jail. Now I'll try my hand at fishing. Four days from now I'll go back and fight the high interest rates and all the foreclosures."

The two boys from Orange County had never been north of Oregon. I point out an eagle, the first they've ever seen. A deer walks out on the dock and the California kids feed it jelly beans from their hands. The mother captures the memory on a movie camera.

Another eagle swoops down next to them and steals a fish carcass off the dock. I sit with my jig in the water, bobbing my hand line. Soon I catch a rock cod, then another. In the crab trap I set, I find two dog fish; baby sharks. The big bellied man laughs, "What are you doing? Catching dinner?"

"I sure am," I say, secretly proud of the first fish I catch on the whole kayak trip. Soon I have a total of six cod. The Captain of Fantasy Isle comments to his impressed guests, "He's just eating the poor man's fish. We'll catch us some salmon." He chuckles loudly.

A work skiff pulls up to the dock. A family of Indians get out and run to the store. The kids return with candy. One boy, called Bucko by his friends, comes over and introduces himself as Frank. He smiles and looks me in the eyes. I pull up my crab trap and find another dogfish. Frank says, "I like dogfish best. They're yummy for my tummy." I offer him the fish but he says dinner is already caught. He sucks down the last of his ice cream bar and throws the wrapper and stick in the water. He says, "I hate trash. We throw all our trash in the water and it goes away. I saw you paddle by today. I was by the dock."

"Oh, by Bonwick Island," I say, recalling a boy.

"Yes," he says, throwing a candy wrapper in the water. "What are you?"

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"I mean, are you Indian?"

"No, I'm white man."

He smiles and points his finger at me like a gun. "Cowboys and Indians... Pow. I'm going home now. Mamma's frying fish and chips tonight."

"See you, Frank." The family leaves, everyone in the boat waving goodbye. The older California boy now fishes with a hand line like mine. He pulls up a dogfish.

"Throw it back, that's not edible," says the captain of the stink machine.

Denis and I paddle across Echo Bay and set camp in the school yard. Do we trespass again? We cook grains and fish for dinner and sleep at sunset.

July 10, 1981

"dude; an Easterner who vacations on a western ranch."

American Heritage Dictionary

We awaken under cloud cover. Denis announces from the half dome, "One hundredth day out!"

Outside my tent a spotted fawn milks from its mother. A raven lands on my tent. "Shooo," I say. "Don't shit there, the health department wouldn't like that."

Denis says, "This packing sure is easier these days. More relaxed. And it's all attitude."

"I wish I could always remember that," I say. He pulls the tent poles from the nylon, folds them and rolls his tent into the stuff bag. I cook us hot cereal and fruit.

We paddle back to the store dock and meet the owners. I follow the woman up to her home to borrow the phone. She says, "My husband and I bought Echo Bay Resort two months ago. We moved up from Kent, Washington and left behind our T.V. Now we don't hear much news. We've never been this isolated." She explains the resort was built in 1930, "And just now we're finally getting hot water, and the mice are gone."

I call home on their radio phone. A note next to her desk on a bulletin board reads, "Wa wa do wa and this is the way we work."

John, the grounds keeper, working the store, says he's from Des Moines, Washington. I guess him to be about my age. He says, "I want to get mobile like you guys. Only I want to do it on a bike and peddle to Arizona to see my sister." Two couples pull up to the dock in a small stink machine. They scream and trip around the boat. I notice a blue heron sitting calmly on the dock, closer than I'd ever been able to approach one on Lake Washington. This area is tranquil, deer and birds aren't afraid.

The apparent drunks clamber onto the dock and ask John, the grounds keeper, if they can get a drink this morning. The whole crowd climbs the steps to open the cocktail lounge. A fisheries man and his wife start a conversation with me. "You boys camp around here last night?"

"Ya, we slept over in the school yard. I hope that was okay."

"Oh, sure. That's Provincial Park. Last year some Puerto Rican boys who paddled through stayed there too. For three days, I believe."

"Chino and Miko?" I ask.

"That's them." The man talks about the general locale and mentions Hermit John. "Oh yes, I've known him for fifteen years. He's quite a character. The Indians have a lot of respect for him. Have you gone over to meet Kayak Bill?" I motion no. "He's more Indian than the Indians. He actually lives off the land."

The fisheries man mentions his own health. "I once had arthritis in my back and my health was bad. Now I feel great and I'm convinced I can cure anything with nutrition. I swear by nutritional yeast, fresh cultured yogurt, Vitamin C, and garlic. Sundays my wife still cooks a big bacon and eggs breakfast. I don't have arthritis at all any more and I've never been healthier." He asks if we've met Judy across the bay. She's building a cedar kayak inside her float home.

I ask the parks man, "Do you work through the winter?"

"Oh no. We own an R.V. and we drive to Mexico every winter." I want to tell him he has VD, but I refrain from the explanation. He and his wife motor out of the harbor. The drunks come back down and scream aboard their boat. Denis and I paddle across Echo Bay to meet Judy.

She greets us on her dock. Long straight brown hair falls around her shoulders. Her eyes shine a glowing green. We ask to see her kayak, and she's delighted to show us. Richard kayaked by two days ago. Her float home living room is her shop. The orange cedar strip kayak spans the room's length. It's an enclosed boat, the cockpit yet to be cut in.

Judy tells, "It's a baidarka design. George Dyson gave me the sketched plans. I nailed and epoxied each strip to the frame. Next I'll fiberglass over the wood, a clear finish." She points out the nose on the bow. Red and white cedar sandwich together. And the artist points out the flaws, mistakes which seem so minor to me, but Judy is sensitive to the quality of her creation.

Outside on Judy's porch, we watch her two blue heron friends. "We talk with our eyes. That young one will come close to me and sit near while I read or work. But the older one stays away. Those two fight all the time." She talks of her deer friends of Echo Bay as if she's responsible for their safety. Judy tells of the local people, of Jim and Muffin next door who own a seaplane and hire out for fly jobs. They were married recently on a nearby sacred island, in a tepee. She talks of Bruce and George, not George Dyson, a different George, in the next bay, and of Bill and Laurie, in another float home

in another bay. Everybody lives in float homes around the area because the Province owns the land. Only commercial endeavors can be built on dirt, like the Echo Bay Resort. She knows Hermit John too.

Judy shows us some paintings of the area by a friend named Stuart Marshal. The fellow paddles his kayak around with paints and produces great art. "He's starting to be known now, people are buying his paintings. He's the guy that painted George Dyson's forty-eight foot baidarka."

We climb back in the kayaks and say goodbye. "Where're you off to now?"

Denis answers, "Just going to wander." The big blue heron lifts his legs as he leaps to flight. His head launches forward with the long neck. His sharp wings whoosh the wind. Paddling out of Echo Bay, we encounter another kayaker. He paddles out also. The blond fellow smiles from the red fiberglass kayak, his shirt off, his spray deck on. Freckles cover his sun burnt face, his hair tied back to a tail. "Hi, nice day, eh?" he says.

"Howdy," I say. "The rear of your kayak is sure loaded down."

"Oh, that's two cases of beer. Where have you come from?"

We mention our trip then follow up Bruce's invitation to his home for beers. Paddling into the next bay, through a chain of logs, we enter calm water surrounded by rock cliffs and steep hills. Five houses float on the north side.

Bruce says, in his gentle way, "Just I live in this one. George and Suzie live there. This little float home is my woodshed and George has two homes and the third building is his shop." We sit on Bruce's deck in the sun and drink some brews. I hear a whining noise and look up to see an eagle still high in the sky, in a full dive... straight down, wings out to the side, faster than any animal I've ever seen. Down... down, until he disappears outside of the bay, below the horizon. I say, "I've heard that eagles can dive for their prey at 180 miles an hour."

Bruce's home has an adjoining shop. "I've collected all the tools I need for now. I've just returned from planting trees; my work for the year. Last year's earnings went for this home. I bought it with all my money. But now I'm set to start projects and make this a nice home. I just stocked up with bulk grains and food stuff. Want another beer?"

Next door George scrapes away at his dry docked boat. After watching us sit in the sun and hammer beers, he walks over the plank bridge, to shore, and comes around to the back of Bruce's home. George, black hair and no facial hair, slim but solid, used to live in Austria. He has house guests now; mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and two kids, all from Costa Rica. He says, "Those kids are so entertained here by the shells and the starfish and just nothing, for endless hours. Suzy, my wife, originally comes from Costa Rica."

George explains his process of using the tide to lift his boat onto the float. He and Bruce talk about finding new logs. "Logs are the most important structure of our homes," George tells us. "The float logs determine the value of the home."

Bruce adds, "That's why I only use that float over there for firewood. It's junked. Logs are tough to find. And they're hard to tow back. George's boat can pull logs."

"It just takes time, but that's what we give ourselves out here," says George.

"It's nice to take time for art and music and projects and words," says Bruce.

Bruce and Denis talk on about something. George tells me about Hermit John's lake island people. "Yes, I know them. They had a commercial seaplane drop them and all the gear up at the lake. Then the pilot later felt responsible so he reported to the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police. The RCMP wouldn't allow the family to squat there, and removed them."

"Oh, good. They didn't chicken out after all."

George mocks Hermit John's version of a hitchhike up Vancouver Island, "He said, 'I stuck out my thumb and instantly ten cars came screeching to a halt, all yelling out my name. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't get away from the mobs.'"

"Too funny," I say.

George and Bruce tell local eagle stories. "We've seen those dives when the eagle goes underwater into a herring ball and stays down about a minute," says George.

"If they snatch too big a salmon, they flap their wings and swim along the surface to shore," adds Bruce.

George laughs and says, "One time I thought an eagle was in trouble, drowning. So I jumped in my boat and, toot toot," George now shouts, "Eagle rescue, toot. I rushed over only to catch a glimpse of the bird ripping at his dinner."

I ponder the eagles a second, then get the nerve to ask a question of George and Bruce. "I kind of have a problem, or rather a wonder. I am writing a book of our kayak trip and the past few days Denis and I have seen the most beautiful territory we have found on the whole trip. Islands with berries and skulls, and here and in Echo Bay, and the whales and the eagles. I somehow feel it's not my right to expose this place to the world. And you guys and everybody we meet. I get embarrassed to have my pad and pen out in front of people. I wrote as Hermit John talked, which I usually don't do, and I felt wondrous. Do I have to disguise names of people and places, or what. I just need to know the opinion of locals, how you feel." I'm embarrassed.

"I think you could do it and not worry about it. I think it would be fun," says Bruce.

"Most people don't like to bring their stink machines this far north because after Campbell River and Desolation Sound the rapids scare them." I laugh at George's name for yachts. "Besides, sooner or later, someone will expose this area and it might as well be from the perspective of a kayaker."

"Couldn't be a better way to show it," says Bruce. He points to Denis' kayak. "Where'd you get the Frontiersman?"

"The what?"

"Frontiersman. Your kayak."

"Oh. I've never known the brand name before. Nobody has till you. Even when I bought it five years ago, its owner didn't know."

"That's a good boat," says Bruce. "Bill paddles it; a two-man. He's put a sail on it."

Bruce goes in the house and brings out a file folder with pictures of George Dyson's forty-eight foot baidarka. Stuart Marshal's Indian designs painted on add the historic feel. The kayak has bubble domes and looks somewhat futuristic too. Bruce mentions, "It looks more like a space ship with those domes. The picture of Dyson makes him look like a serious scientist."

"Freeman Dyson, his father, is amazing too," says George. "Did you read the Starship and the Canoe? That's about this area." We acknowledge yes.

"The spaceship Freeman Dyson dreams of," I say, "to take all the nuclear weapons from U.S. and Russia and explode them behind a whole city built into a space ship."

"And those pusher plates. Just giant, would shoot the starship through space," says George. "Like a giant squid."

"Or a jellyfish," I say. "A single organism."

"And the son wants to be with real jellyfish." says George. "He says he wants to build a fleet of a thousand of his baidarka to cover the coast, to make people aware of human power. He wants to orient his project towards kids so they can grow into a better world. George Dyson is writing a book also. I don't read much these days, but I'll read your book. Last I read was some article about those satellites taking pictures of Laos. With infra red cameras they deciphered from the native people's average height that POW's were among them. The Americans stand much taller."

"Ha," I laugh, looking up to the clear blue sky. I wave, "Hi, up there, all is fine, thanks for checking. Hey, Big Brother."

"Really," laughs George. "Like no privacy."

"Why don't you read books?" I ask.

"Sometimes they interfere," he says.

"Even obstruct," I add.

"Yes," says George, looking to my eyes.

I say, "I find I can't read sometimes because I get tired of seeing ideas I'm reaching on my own in print in front of me. Seems like I write in my journal, then the next day I read my own words written ten or a hundred or a thousand years earlier. If I do read, I like to follow my thoughts with reading rather than lead thoughts with reading. But it all turns to the same mind mush anyway."

"Exactly," says George. "When I do my projects I like to think I'm getting there on my own. I don't want to feel I have no originality." Our eyes hold each others' and I feel we reach a mind link, both hooked tightly to the same ideas; a sharing of minds. A mind link is the excitement two people share seeing the same shooting star. They refer to the same light. George and I see the same shooting star right now. With some people I can barely link up on a stationary star, or the sun or moon even, let alone a shooting star. A mind link is like two gears meshing and turning together, rather than a grinding of gears or two wheels spinning totally separate.

George continues, "It's hard when so many things are already defined and thought over. There's a power I feel reaching conclusions on my own. That's why I like living out here, so I can work on fresh ideas. People around know I like to build things so everybody saves junk for me. I find use for it. You'll see my junk pile when you come over later. I'll show you my projects."

Denis is telling Bruce about VD and George tells me, "Well, I'm glad you write your book." The conversation merges and the four of us laugh together about VD. Denis says, "I'm the director of the American Chicken. You know, the peace sign, it looks like a chicken's footprint."

I say, "I'm director of Ski Networks and Zymurgy. Zymurgy is the last word in some dictionaries, and it's the science of fermentation. Seeding, agitation, growth..."

"What do you have to do for that?" asks George.

"Nothing. Vacation Dynamics is nothing. Pick your own directorship."

Bruce says, "I'll be director of Float Houses and Something."

"I'll be director of Missing Links," says George.

Bruce and Denis fade off into conversation again. I ask George, "So do you like staying here, settled in one place?"

"Now I do. I traveled a lot. I had that itch where I couldn't slow down for a long time. But now, married to Suzy, I feel relaxed here. I can build my ideas. There's enough here in one spot to indulge in all my life."

"I'm still in the general search," I say. "I run around trying to sense as much as I can, but I see how I could get specific sometime, just go deeper into one thing instead of briefly over it all. Some day I'll be sitting where I want to be most of all in the world. Then I won't have this need to run around so much."

"That's how I used to be," says George. "But I'm probably ten years older than you. I got the travel out of my system."

"It seems," I say, "I can arrive at the same conclusions about life and existence as a scientist in a lab or a man on a shovel in a ditch. It's like we all reach for similar ideas but each through our own means. I have to flow and be receptive."

"I'm all for that," says George, petting the cat that joins us.

Bruce says, "Kleetna, kitty. Puss puss." George heads back to entertain his house guests. He invites the three of us over for dinner.

Bruce builds a fire under his outdoor bathtub, heating sea water. We swim in the bay, the water warm enough to stay in for awhile. I open my eyes under water and can see thirty or forty feet to the bottom. Soon I'm in the tub, facing the afternoon sun. I melt.

Denis soaks in the hot tub next, drinking scotch from a wine glass, smiling behind his Vuarnets. Bruce and I play music together; he on guitar, me on recorder.

We head over the trail in the woods, past George's junk pile of old gears, metal plates, wires and boxes. George's wife, Suzy, cooks in the kitchen, her stomach protruding with an expected child. Blond hair hangs to Suzy's shoulders. As she mashes and pulverizes innocent potatoes, she mentions, "You guys sure swam a lot today. The kids kept running in and talking about the naked men next door. But the salt water will keep you healthy. I've heard that humans still retain the ability, from our water mammal days, of absorbing nutrients through the skin while submerged in sea water."

I look around their home. There is driftwood and fine forest wood furniture. "We like to gather the drift of the rich," she says, ripping and shredding virgin lettuce. Oh, lettuce pray. "We find nice pre-drilled logs and fine sanded oak boards." I notice a picture on the wall of two children looking at a flower and a sunset. The caption reads, "The wind across the land is whispering... peace." Another painting of a sailboat getting thrashed in a storm, swells blowing into spray from the wind, reminds me of our day in Portland Inlet.

Conversation flows to whales. Bruce says, "I used to caretake over at the Hanson Island whale watch. Kayaking with the whales is the only way."

George says, "I hear they are trying to stop all the motorboats from clinging to the orca pods. Jim, the neighbor in Echo Bay, will probably be hired to fly around over the pods to tell boats to stay away."

"The whales will like to get rid of that buzz," says Denis. "Give the whales a break. Those motors just whine under water. I wonder why the whales even tolerate them."

"They'll carry around picket signs when they really start to care," I say. "Whales are like that."

After the dinner of red snapper, mashed potatoes and green salad, George leads us to his shop float house. Inside he has a room that he's sound insulated for a recording studio. On into the next room I see an amazing wood contraption, looking something like the world's first airplane. It's made of spruce strips and wire cables and hangs from the ceiling. It's about nine feet tall. An axle runs through the center and four blades circle parallel to the axle, like an old lawn mower, for a six foot diameter. "This is my windmill," says George with a smile. The machine is a piece of art, as finely worked as Judy's cedar strip kayak. "I'll mount this above the cliff where the wind blows strongest. Look at this. This wind vein lines up with the wind and turns this key which bars to the blades. The blades will always face the strongest wind for maximum resistance. I have a gasoline putt-putt generator now, but this will supply all the juice for my recording studio, and saws and home. Come see my batteries." We walk out to a floating barge with a housed generator motoring away on it. More than a dozen big truck batteries all connect together around the generator. "I've been collecting these batteries for years, knowing I'd need them," says George.

George notices my t-shirt and reads it aloud, "He who dies with the most toys wins... only if used." He thinks a second and says, "Yes, I think so. We grow up and get bigger toys and we play with them."

George mentions he may want to market his windmill, if it proves as successful as anticipated. "Getting people to know about it would be the tough part... but Mark, with you writing a book..."

Back in the house, George plays his banjo. I'm impressed. I try to play along with my recorder, but I only fumble, not able to perceive his keys or notes, not able to give and take musically, synergistically. I need practice.

We head back over the trail to Bruce's home. I go to use his toilet which is built outside on his dock, under a roof, with a back wall and two side walls. A hole cuts through the dock so that plops plop in the water. In tonight's darkness, I squat over the hole, and bombs away. The plop hits the water and a fountain of glowing phosphorescence showers up, like a fireworks display under my butt. After the good dinner, my art work sinks nicely. I watch the green glowing bomb drop thirty feet in clear black water.

July 11, 1981

Bruce, Denis and I laze around, then breakfast. We climb into our empty kayaks for a day cruise, heading north around Evangeline Rock, into Hornet Passage, and crossing over to the Birdwood Group of Islands. We fish for cod and play on a white beach of broken shells, picking wild onions and biting off the hot flowers. The stringy stalks chew nicely. I look at Bruce, his hair tied back revealing his receding hairline and a sunburn line along the forehead. He says, "I always wore a hat planting trees. We'd cover our whole bodies even on hot days like this, just to keep from the bugs. Deet was the only insect repellent we found that worked. That's the active ingredient of Off."

"Deet?" says Denis. "Sounds dangerous, like a short way of saying DDT."

Bruce says, "Come over here. I'll show you one of Bill's camps." We find a pyramid-shaped smoking stack over a fire pit. A log lashes between two trees for a tarp shelter. "He'd hang out at his camps and smoke all the fish he'd catch. We'll stop and visit Bill and Laurie on the paddle home."

We kayak and catch a couple fish then cross back over Hornet Passage. Bruce leads us to a float house sitting by itself in a cove. A very brown man with no shirt on, in levis and bare feet, comes out on his dock as we slide in sideways. A smile stretches across his whole lower face behind a beard and mustache. His hair is black and he looks me directly in the eye. "Hi, I'm Bill," he offers a shake. His eyes glow a deep blue. Invited inside, we get introduced to Laurie. She too is very healthy, smiling, and her brunette hair pulls back. She wears a Guatemala wrap skirt and a shirt, all very colorful. She invites us for dinner, so we bring in the fish and she incorporates them into what she prepares.

Bill sits in an adjoining room of the float house, its walls and ceilings made of a white translucent tarp. "That's his favorite chair," Laurie says to me. "He just sits there and thinks. I kind of snatched him from his ways. He feels boxed in, even in this float home. He's used to being outside all the time and gathering all his food. I work at the Echo Bay store a few days a week so I bring home foods that he's tried for so long not to eat. He's got some drive in him to gather everything, but now I carry his baby, three months along. You guys should take him away from here to paddle south with you. He needs to go out for a few months. I've told him to leave, that I'd be fine, but maybe he'll take off with you guys now."

I say, "He sure could teach me a lot. We haven't been living off the land at all, really. We just paddle and get lazy about gathering."

We eat a wonderful dinner of cod, red snapper, a rice dish, and fresh oysters. She explains, "Friends brought the oysters up from Desolation Sound. They're everywhere down there, the water is so warm." For dessert, Laurie pulls out some fresh raspberries.

All through the dinner and the whole visit, Bill smiles and I feel like the man contains a ball of energy, an unlimited tap. He says, "I have a Frontiersman like yours, Denis, only mine is a two-seater and I rigged a mast on it. Laurie just bought a new sixteen footer so she can kayak to work faster."

Bill tells how he came from Calgary a few years ago with two kayaks and a year's supply of food. "I was a sight," he laughs. "I carried so much junk I didn't need, but I figured it out and by the time my food ran low, I could eat pretty much everything from the land. I'd still carry rice and flour. You ever make chapattis? Mix flour and water, toss in some berries or nuts or whatever, and just grill them over coals. They're really easy and high in carbohydrates. Carbos are tough to get from the land except when berries come out. I mash berries and dry them in cakes. Indians made up the starches they lacked with animal fat carbohydrates. I guess their bodies assimilate the losses. I barter with the Indians up in Knight's Inlet for Oolagin oil, from the candle fish."

"We're out of the oil now," says Laurie. "The stuff is really valuable for life."

Bill explains how he tried to play the survival game in the Rockies before moving to the coast. "That's why the Indians out here had it made; food is easy here compared to the mountains and the plains. Pacific Indians had time to relax and dance."

"Bill caught a halibut once," tells Laurie. "A hundred pound monster. He thought he had killed it so he stuffed it in the bow of the kayak. When he got home and pulled the fish out, the halibut whipped to life and snapped all over the dock.

"If he had flopped in my kayak, he'd have destroyed it," says Bill. "I used to come into towns so worn out during the winter. I had camps set up here and there for a hundred miles where I'd dry fish, but I'd come to town soaked and freezing."

"Once he stayed at the Birdwood camp, where you guys went today," says Laurie. "And he dislocated his shoulder."

"I did it swinging an ax. I swung it just right and it popped the shoulder right out. And it was snowing."

"He paddled all the way to Echo Bay and landed at the store almost dead. He'd only had one arm to paddle with and the pain killed him."

"That's when I'd be needy. I begged a few meals from friends on some wet winter days."

"Do you keep health insurance or anything like that for emergencies?" I ask.

"Oh, I'm a citizen of British Columbia. We have socialized medicine," says Bill.

Bill tells, "I want to paddle across the Bering Sea, from Alaska to Russia. I'll have to first move up there and live and eat with the Eskimos and let my body adapt to their diet of meats and oils. Then one day, when the ocean looks calm, I'll paddle across. Those swells roll up off the sandy bottom and it's so shallow that the waves can get giant and rough, real fast."

"It's so funny," says Laurie. "People come in here all the time looking for Bill. And they ask such silly questions."

"Yah, like they want to know why do anything. Why would I want to live off the land or kayak in the water?"

"Why climb a mountain?" says Denis.

"Why not?" I ask.

Bruce, Laurie and Bill talk about the float homes. This house faces the northwest so summer winds tend to rock things a bit. They discuss a fire that threatened Bruce's cove awhile back. They unleashed all the float homes, ready to tow them out, but a sudden wind change saved everything.

Bill shows us his heavy wool blankets he camps with instead of a sleeping bag. And the tarps he uses rather than a tent. Outside we examine his kayak, the sunset now a raspberry red. He says, "I just tie my mast on with ropes and I made this turning rudder so I can steer while sailing." He bends over and touches the fiberglass inside the kayak. "I patched this three days ago and it never set up. Probably not enough catalyst."

We thank them for the dinner. Laurie tells me to stop by tomorrow because she wants to get Bill to paddle with us. They each give us big hugs and Bill comments he wishes he could join us. Laurie nods her head yes.

Bruce, Denis and I paddle home in the dark. Gulls cry in the night and trails of phosphorescence follow our kayaks.

July 12, 1981

"Why must I plan to watch the sunset? ...we have made so complicated that which was meant to be enjoyed spontaneously." Kranesh

I wake to soothing music. Denis strums Bruce's dulcimer. Kleetna, the cat, swats at my down sleeping bag. Looking out the window I realize the world bobs up and down, at least from my floating perspective. The black cat jumps by my head then pounces on my fingers on my chest. Bruce says Kleetna is the Indian name for Ooligan oil. "Bill and Laurie raised Kleetna on Ooligan oil. I think Kleetna licks people because she left her mother too soon." A poster on the wall of a bear walking on a log reads, "Let it be."

"I guess you almost have to let it be," I say. Kleetna escapes the house through a hatch in the door which leads through a maze to the dock outside. The maze keeps the wind from blowing in. I ask Bruce why he doesn't have any furniture and he says, "Couches and stuff are just too normal." He has built a table running the length of the room, like a workbench.

Bruce cooks us breakfast. Combining cereals of ours with treats of his own, he soon feeds us. His shelves are lined with jars of grains, nuts, legumes, and dried fruits, vegetables, and herbs. As he moves smoothly around his home, I can tell Bruce enjoys fulfilling his dreams. He tells of growing up in Vancouver, of hating school until finally in his last year he pulled it together, clearing up his studies and grades enough to graduate. "I then worked for Greenpeace and housesat at Paul Spong's whale watch for six months. I'll return next year to tree planting. It's good money and I work outside. And replenishing all the cut down trees gives me my sense of contributing."

"That seems to be important," I say. "Do you live in a tent when working?"

"We live in tents and we eat real good. The union is trying to make it so they fly us in from fine apartments every day. That would destroy the simple atmosphere and my chance to save so much money. That's what I'm there for." Bruce sucks on a yellowish small stone, twirling it in his mouth with his tongue. He seems in fine control of his life. Bruce says he's only twenty- one, but he seems much older. I think he's got an ideal image in his head and he's exerting himself to become that image. Like if I want to grow a healthy rose, I must first conceive the goal, plant the seed and nurture it, taking the proper steps towards the imaged beauty. The conception must be maintained. I must water and feed sun to the rose or nature won't fulfill her part. This bay is Bruce's garden.

We pack up gear for a kayak venture. Bruce shows his cotton sheet liner he uses in his sleeping bag. Denis and my sleeping bags are getting quite dirty from daily use. Stuffed into our three kayaks, Kleetna on Bruce's shoulder, we paddle to Bill and Laurie's cove.

Bill says he wants to paddle with us and will rework his fiberglass. We arrange to meet him, if he shows up, in two days at the berry paradise. Bruce and Bill talk fishing and refer to Billy Proctor. He's an elder local whose name has become analogous to good fisherman. "He can catch a spring salmon when nobody can even snag a cod. Since he was thirteen he has written a journal of every fish he's caught, the time, place, date, weather, tide, size, and type of fish," says Bill. "He's another of the local geniuses, like George, Bruce's next door neighbor."

Paddling away, Kleetna on the shoulder of Bruce again, Judy motors up to us. "Want some millet pudding? I'm making my deliveries. You need a container." We graciously accept the treat and she scoops it into my berry container. We paddle west around Baker Island, inside Ragged Island. We sip on cups of a bitter tea we'd been steeping all morning. It's a pleasant tea, but it tastes bad. The Mescalito gift.

A big stink machine roars past us and leaves his big wake. He stops up ahead, drops his crab pots, and doesn't share a smile at all. Bruce says "Hi", but no answer returns. The boat zooms away. We stop paddling and hang on to each other's boats. Kleetna travels over the slick kayak decks, slipping and sliding without traction. Bruce calls, "Here, Puss Puss. Kleetna kitty, Puss Puss. Don't let the cat piss in your boat. He's got to do it somewhere. I've been thinking of gluing some friction material to my deck so Kleetna could get a better grip on things." Bruce sips his tea and rolls his yellow rock in his mouth.

"Has an eagle ever tried to catch the cat for dinner?" I ask.

"Nah, but one might. They like small furry creatures."

"That would be something," says Denis. "Down swoops baldie and swipes your kitty."

I add, "At least kitty wouldn't go to waste. The eagle would eat her." We paddle down a narrow passage. In places the pass spans only three kayaks wide. I catch a glimpse of a float home nestled into a bay. Bruce knows the owners. As we exit the tight passage, we quietly enter an intersection of passes, five points of five islands meeting like an inverted starfish. Bruce leads us to the center and we float for awhile.

Bruce talks with a respectful hush, "Notice a difference between the points. Look at the color of the trees."

Denis says, "Looks like the trees on that island are much greener, a lighter, more alive green."

"Sure is. Looks fresh. Powered," I say. We paddle towards it.

Bruce tells, "Indians used to save this island for their spiritual rituals. The power of their religion and their beings shows in the health of the trees. They brought a special energy here that still remains. The tepee where Jim and Muffin were married sits back in the woods. I only come here for ritual, like today... a perfect place for the tea."

On a finely crushed shell beach, we set foot on this southwest tip of the island, among the light green trees. This cross point of the several islands feels like a cross point in space and time. We pull the three kayaks high up on the beach. Sitting on my blanket I stare out over water and green islands to the south. I see snow capped peaks high over Vancouver Island. Through my telescope, I ski the peaks, down glacier fields and over cliffs. Denis sits down next to me and I say, "What a high, and without a space blanket over the brain."

Denis howls with laughter, "Some guy," he says. We each trail off into our own fantasies. Soon, from an unquestioned urge, I get up and wander. I leave the water and enter the woods, over fallen needles, through widely spaced trees. The soft ground is a sensual delight, a tickle and tingle to my bare feet. I stand in one spot and lightly shuffle my feet. My whole body rushes. I sneak back into the woods further, back into the past. The tepee appears before me. Approaching through the high grass, I walk surrounded by billions of bees. The aroma of flowers sweetens the air. Pulling open the canvas door, I step inside the tepee. The fire pit sits on the dirt floor. The ceiling slits for a smoke escape, facing east; designed for a perfect sunrise.

I sit cross legged on a piece of canvas, opposite the slit, and glare up at the blue sky and tree tops. The constant buzz of bees grants a hum to the atmosphere. Looking around, I notice two unopened beers on a stump, then I see Bruce's ritual smoking pipe on a log. In the fire pit I notice a book of matches and an open wood container. Smoke

buds glisten from inside. "Some guy" I say to myself, assuming Bruce arranged the beers and smoke and atmosphere to a magical perfection. The bees' buzz makes me believe in the unlimited power of this island.

Denis, also drawn to the same spot, enters and quietly sits next to me. "Bruce set us up," I say, pointing to the rituals he left. "He's organized this whole day to the tea. This has to be the Harmony Islands."

Using logs, we pop the tops on the bottles and smoke herb. "Listen," I say. A rustle outside rubs bushes on the tepee canvas. Our ears perk up. We listen awhile then I extend invitation in my troll voice, "Come in, come in. Please join us." The rustling continues, then stops, then resumes again. "Come in, come in, please friend," I say, half thinking Bruce stands outside, half thinking supernatural. I rise and lift the canvas door back, increasing the buzz of the bees. I see their magnificent numbers, but see no sign of animal or Bruce rustling grass.

As I sit back down, I see our mystery friend. He hops on the dirt. A palm-sized frog has joined us, and I name him. "Welcome, Mescalito, welcome, heh heh heh heh..." I pick Mescalito up and bring him to our canvas seat. He sits. Then he hops. Then he sits. I move him close to us again and Denis empathizes with the frog. "Wo. I just hop around in here to get in the shade and these big dudes pick me up and move me wherever they want... lay off, hue mans."

Bruce soon joins us and we ritualize. In my mind I wander out through the slit in the ceiling and then look back to the tepee, the sunset behind it. I imagine the beams of light glinting off leaves, covering the image with haze. The tepee of the woods; a power I don't think I would know how to measure. Bruce still sucks on his rock. I ask, "Is that your power object?"

"No, not really. What makes a power object?"

"I don't know," I say. "The rock in your mouth seems a power object. You focus on it, appreciate it. I see it as part of you. You are it, it is you. For now."

"Hmm." says Bruce.

One by one we leave the tepee. Evening clouds pile up to the waxing moon, almost full overhead. Bruce pulls out a box of colorful fresh produce from his kayak; deep red tomatoes, celery stalks, dark green peppers, onions and garlic. While he cooks rice and prepares dinner, I sit by my kayak totally confused. The past three days of unpacking only my sleeping bag, sleeping in Bruce's home, meeting Bill and learning his camping rituals, these days pulled me from my own kayak routine. Now I feel new, novice, an outward bounder, like a nautical boy scout without his compass.

But I don't want to do the routine unpack, set tent, eat, sleep... Do I just pull out my sleeping bag and sleep in the tepee for the night? Or do I pull out all my gear and set up my tent on the bank with view over the water to snow mountains? Do I socialize and sleep in the tepee with Denis and Bruce, or climb into my tent with my own thoughts? Everything I do is chosen. I sit here. I chose the spot without conscious thought. But I chose the spot. I'm not sitting on a sharp rock or in water. I choose everything I do and I must believe this. If not and all my life is destiny, what use is exertion?

I write this book. But I live this book... and I write it. The book! It sounds as if it's already written, like the trip has already occurred. But we're in the middle of it... but I can feel the book already finished... the whole. Someday I'll hold the completed book in my hands and see the destiny that was. What?

Denis notices me lost next to my kayak and mentions that if I'm having such a tough time making the decision, he won't even try to think things over. "You make the decision, then I'll see your reasons."

"I have no reasons now," I say. I sit longer. So I paddle this kayak trip to avoid the routine life, to live among change and feel changes every day. But now, the tea still in my head and my frog friend in my memories, I find I still live routinely. To pack and unpack my boat from beach to beach is still only day to day.

Why am I so confused on such a powerful day? At such a powerful place? Maybe that power instigates my wonders. This place is where Indians used to come to contemplate their own lives through the power of medicine men and animal gods.

I just pull out my storage bags and climb the hill to set a view camp, like every other time I set camp, only different. A new time and space. To not sleep socially in the tepee, to sleep in my own green tent, is to have my own space on my own blanket. I can pull the space blanket over my brain.

"Some guy," says Denis, seeing I made a decision.

"Dinner," tells Bruce, the feast all served. For dessert we eat Judy's millet pudding with walnuts and raisins and other wild flavors.

Standing by the water's edge, I pass my bodily fluids into the sea, igniting phosphorescent sparks. The cycle is complete. My salt fluids finally reach home with the salty sea. All is a continuum, no matter where or who I am. Today proved so fine. Bruce organized it perfectly. Denis and I barely planned anything. Just nothing.

Bruce writes some words in my journal tonight:

The world is changing both day in and day out,
Our time here is short without a doubt.
There is so much to see and so much to do,
Before the wheel of life catches up to you.
The closer you get to the rocks and the wood,
The more you'll see the world is good.
Heaven is here, although hell is too,
Which one you live in is left up to you.
Onward.

I thank Bruce for his words. I am glad to see a man conceiving dreams and shaping himself towards them. Goodnight Bruce and Denis and Mescalito, and good luck wherever you are Cha.

July 13, 1981

Denis catches fish for breakfast, to eat with pancakes. We load into the kayaks, Kleetna kitty on Bruce's shoulder, and paddle under clouds. South, by George Point and Mars Island and through the Fox Group. We sneak views between islands, out through the Queen Charlotte Straits to the Pacific Ocean. Past Midsummer Island and the Indian Group, we reach the berry island to find Richard sitting on the old pier reading a book and growing a beard. As we float, he tells us about his circumnavigation of Gilford Island, of whales and villages.

Richard joins us in his kayak and we catch fish. Eventually, we set camp again at the berry patches, under the totem poles. We prepare a feast and relax around a glowing fire. I say, "Wouldn't it be fun to haunt the island. The ghost village is scary already."

Denis adds, "We could set up speakers in the woods with weird tapes of screams and explosions and we could set up strings to shake bushes..."

Richard adds, "And set up booby traps to have branches snap up and reveal totem poles and beware signs..."

The fire snaps and throws sparks into the darkness. Bruce pets his black cat whispering, "Don't be afraid, Puss Puss."

July 14, 1981

Tourists begin walking through camp early. A couple of guys from Sweden introduce themselves and feel at home with us, but other people, having left their stink machines at the pier, turn back without nearing our tents. They never even find the berries because they are too afraid of meeting us. Ravens play voice imitations in the woods. They gargle and wag tongues, they tonk and whistle.

I crawl through the berry patches for breakfast. Picking with the bees is entertaining because they buzz all around. If I move slowly, they don't touch me. The idea is if I leave them alone, they leave me alone. I find one bee wrestling with a wasp but it quickly turns to me and lands on my yellow shorts, then on my face. "Shhooo, lay off," I say, swinging a vine around over my head to keep the bee away. "Whap." I whip myself with the thorny vine. I get stung by my own stinger, like a scorpion in a fire. If I would have mellowed out, the bee would have left.

We play all day and fix a feast for dinner. Richard harvests goose tongue, a grass which tastes like string beans when cooked. We fry up some fucus, the crab claw-like seaweed we find floating on the water. Cooked in butter, it almost tastes of bacon and the color changes from dark green to a pleasant green like green peppers. After the rice, fish and veggie casserole, we munch a pot pie made with a thick pancake crust and filled with raspberries and honey.

The sun sets to the northwest and the moon rises on the other horizon. The water's slight ripple glitters the light of both sun and moon on our camp, the colors blending into a nice water kaleidoscope collage. Richard says, "You know, for a rush you guys should fly to Seattle from the middle of your kayak trip. Just for a comparison. You've been out so long, you live this as a lifestyle."

"For a real rush," says Denis, "we should fly straight into Las Vegas."

"That's what I need most right now," I say, laid back against a log, watching the moon glitter on broken glass.

Richard says, "We take fire for granted." The fire pops. "Indians used to have a special person to care for the burning coals when traveling. They'd carry the fire starter in a leather pouch from camp to camp."

Richard tells us about the classes he teaches and that he's had two wives already. "There's a book called, *Divorce, So You Want to Do It Yourself?* and for sixty dollars you can get married and divorced the same day. I spent less than one minute in court.

"I'm going to get married tomorrow then," says Denis.

I play my recorder, the song, "So easy, like taking candy from a baby..." I say, "Excuse me, honey, we've been married a few hours now and I've got VD, so it's time to leave."

"Tweet tweet blah blah," says Denis.

The four of us pack. Bruce says, as we discuss Bill not showing here on Village Island, "I'm not ready to live completely in the bush like him." Bruce rolls the yellow rock behind his teeth with his tongue. "I enjoy the city lights now and then."

"We seem to get the best of both," says Denis. "This area sure is paradise."

Bruce says, "Anywhere the whales like has to be a paradise." He holds his rock in his hand and says, "Mark. You know when you said this rock is my power object? It is now. I realize it. I give it power and it gives me power."

"Believe it so, so it is," I say.

The four of us paddle loaded kayaks out by the burial island. We bid Bruce goodbye, trading hugs from kayaks. He paddles east to Echo Bay, Kleetna Puss Puss straddled over his shoulders, his long hair hanging loose over his cat. I Tarzan yell as we separate, to keep our emotions together, "Aaaa aaaa aaaaaa."

Bruce yells his out of sight, "Whooooo eeee oooo." Echoes return off the small islets between us. We pass an eagle perched on a rock. For a couple of days I had watched this rock and assumed it an anthropomorphic guardian of sea and berries. "Whooooo eeee oooo," I hear in the distance, maybe a mile. I return my Tarzan yell.

Richard, Denis and I paddle out Indian Channel, by Berry Island, through White Beach Passage and across Blackfish Sound to Hanson Island.

From the whale watch house a melodious flute floats music over the water. I answer with my recorder then paddle to the beach. Two middle-aged, long haired and bearded men sit and laugh, one with gray hair and beard, the other with black. One is tall and wiry, the other short and stout. Together, they look like the Fabulous Furry Freep Brothers. "They're here," says the gray haired short man.

The black haired wire says, as we float off from the rocks in our kayaks, "We chase the whales for fun. That's our life. We play music wherever, street fairs, city streets. And winters we travel down the Baja to catch the gray whales in Bahia de Ballenas."

We beach and climb to the circular whale houses. Several new faces walk about the premises. These young scientists, in their twenties and early thirties, chase whales on wind surfboards. Joel and Linda, the givers of the lettuce two weeks ago, are now somewhere else. The jars of berries we have brought for them we give to Bill, the other fellow, the quiet guy who greeted us two weeks ago also. He tells us Hermit John sailed through on his way to find a Danish girl. He left a message to us saying Hi. We say bye.

South we paddle through Blackney Pass and find ourselves riding a five knot current. We fly over whirlpools, through white water rapids. I wonder where I could travel if I slid down a hole in the center of a whirlpool, the door leading into Imagine Nation. Denis' bow dives into one of the holes. He paddles as hard as he can and passes over the top. The water spins his kayak and points Denis ninety degrees to port. Richard and I, each caught up in a rush of current, are suddenly slammed together with sideways sweeps of the water.

"Orca," yells Denis, pointing across Johnstone Strait to where a group of motorboats cluster. We paddle fast, sweating, dodging tugboats. We reach the pod of many killer whales. I immediately see five dorsal fins of large male orcas, and dozens of

other smaller ones; babies, juveniles, females. We paddle close, less than a kayak length away from the surfacing whales. Denis joins with four orcas that seem to slow for him. The five of them travel together for a couple of miles, down to Robsin Bite, "The Home of the Whales."

In almost an hour we rejoin Denis. He is excited, saying, "I could hear them squeaking and talking under me."

Richard and I fish. In about five minutes we have a dozen nice rock cod. I use two hooks on my line, a squid and a worm, both rubber. Richard uses his metal buzz bomb. Whales continue to echo their exhales off the rock cliffs. The whole valley sounds of orca. As we paddle the shore searching for our prime camp, the whales enter into the Bite. Again they surround us. One breaches just off my bow, shooting out of the water, his white stomach and saddle marks completely exposed. He seems to smile as he splashes back down. I notice a whale swim inches below my kayak. Two surface on either side. The whale under me passes and surfaces a paddle length away. His wake rocks my boat gently.

In camp Richard whips some licorice on us, a taste treat. We prepare dinner, fish and rice. During dinner a mink appears on a floating log. We watch him eye the water awhile, then he dives in, submerges a few seconds, then returns with an eight inch fish in his mouth. While swimming to shore he drops the fish, then retrieves it. The mink climbs from the water to the rocks and loses grip on the fish again. He dives from a four foot rock ledge, Acapulco style, back to the water and catches the fish for the third time.

After dinner we walk up the river which empties into Robsin Bite. Clear, fresh water flows over slippery rocks. We traverse rock ledges, finding footholds difficult. After hanging from branches, we climb to a fallen spruce tree which bridges the river. Here we sit. A pile of huge uprooted trees lie to the north as obvious proof to some powerful forces. Huge logs scatter, like in the dreams of float home owners. But to remove these logs would require a crane.

Richard says, our feet dangling over the passing water, "Robsin Bite is some of the last of Vancouver Island's sanctioned land. Because of the whales, loggers can't remove trees from the seaside of the mountains by boat. They must come over the island for the lumber." We look around to find all the trees untouched."

"It hasn't been raped yet," I say.

As Richard talks, more orcas arrive in the Bite. "Pooosch..." "A fellow from London, Derek Hutchensen, builds Nordcap kayaks. The one at the whale watch center today was one, with the turned up bow and stern. They are narrow with built-in bilge pumps. Hutchensen surfs big waves in his kayak, turning and tunneling through curls and popping out the backs of waves. He can shoot in the air and do a half twist in flight to land properly."

"That's new thresholds I haven't even conceived yet," I say. "Seems like he's taking the sport to it's limit. I guess he probably still sees new tricks and images of new thresholds which once seemed impossible. He's a pioneer of the sport."

Walking back to camp, we wade the river, listening to big boats in Johnstone Strait, the freeway of eight lanes and super traffic. The full moon must be up tonight, but the clouds hide it.

July 15, 1981

Denis says from his tent, "I'm going to get a picture today of an orca from inside here. My tent doorway will frame the whale's dorsal fin."

I say, "I've been hearing them all morning. I can't tell which were dreams and which were real. I heard exhales all night, I think." I feel so good sleeping in. All day yesterday all I thought of was a long night's sleep. I must have needed it.

I lie on my sleeping bag, on my belly, and watch out the door. And over the tent material, through the threshold, slimes a slug. "Hey, intergalactic buddy." I hear a "Poosch," and see a whale surface just off our beach. From Denis' tent I hear a camera click. Denis says, "Got it."

The slug studies me. "What planet you from?" I ask the slug. Denis asks, "What?"

"Just talking to slugs," I tell him. More whales surface out front. How nice, I can study the whale without confining it. Keep a whale free and it will stay around anyways. This Inside Passage is a natural zoo. I guess the whole earth is a natural zoo. That's why the slug studies us. No need to take us earthlings to other planets when our natural habitat provides perfect observation. I guess it's the same as Art told us of Tsimpsonian Indians infiltrated by otter people. Spies everywhere. Such is.

From my tent I climb to some shale rocks overlooking the Bite. A visqueen shelter perches on the knoll and I sit in the noon sun. I can barely see snow capped peaks rising over hills to the east. More orcas arrive in the Bite. Richard paddles his kayak out to follow the orcas through the bay. Orca whales surround him and play. A huge black horsefly lands on my leg and begins to chew. The orcas blow loudly and return for another pass through the bay. Salmon jump and I yell, "Eye Yo." This call the Haida Indians had me yell whenever we spotted fish. "Eye Yo." Food for whale, food for man.

I find one of the few ripe salal berries. The taste is not real sweet but the pulp feels rich. Salal cakes would be delicious. The only cloud in the sky grows cumulus to the south, behind the mountains from where the river flows. Two jets fly overhead, the fast military power as awesome as the whales.

The water below my cliff ripples clear and inviting, shimmering its patterns of light on the bottom and rock cliffs. A raven caws, then chokes, sounding as my throat probably would when I eat too fast. Sometimes I feel like a glutton. I eat more than most people, yet I never gain weight. My body's tuned to burning lots of energy, and I don't eat much fatty or sweet foods. Maybe I should eat more food. Eat more fat and sugar to burn up.

Richard paddles near and exclaims how close the orcas came to camp, in only eight foot deep water. Robsin Bite lies perfect for water skiing now, my stink machine dream on the calm water. I feel like a professional whale watcher. Those poor VD scientists wind surfing down channels after orca whale pods. Much of their job consists of waiting. When whales arrive, they start work; collecting data of movements, measurements, correlations, and timings.

A bee lands on my water bottle and sits as if licking the plastic. He rubs his front legs together as if satisfied, then flies away. For a moment the bee seemed conscious of me, an active being considering every move with precision. After the bee's launch, it flies away from the sun, flying a slalom course, apparently just for enjoyment, or food search? Maybe it follows a strategic path, following a scent. I doubt the bee really thinks out his

actions as I do, but it follows a path. Often as I watch certain friends, they seem to contain the non-thought of action, the intuitive understanding of their body and the terrain. Too often I feel burdened with my thoughts. They interfere with my smooth actions where I could, like the bee, perform most actions better by feel, to sense my way. A sport like skiing or kayaking turns into a sport of feeling. After mileage practice, thought leaves the action. Like it does walking. We learn to walk, then forget the action itself. Walking just happens now. Kayak or skis, I can turn through trees or islands, sensing the terrain without contemplation. Time stops.

The whales take their time, swimming slowly through the Bite. Gulls sit on a floating log. They bask in the sun, evenly spaced, waiting for fish, like the whales and Richard. They all wait in leisure. Bugs fly around, buzzing so fast they will burn themselves out in a short while. Their systems are so designed like an emergency flare, to burn rapidly a short life, fulfilling in the short but whole period all the necessary functions. But I'd rather not burn so fast, unstressed here with the gulls and orcas. Two yellow flowers are printed on my Lucerne cottage cheese container which I store trinkets in. A bee comes to check the center of each printed flower, searching for pollen in plastic. Fooled you, B.B.

We all paddle up river, over the syrupy water, the saline and fresh fighting integration. We beach and wash clothes and bathe, our first fresh water wash since Buttedale. The whales arrive for dinner, showing off their exhale sprays, blowing rainbows in the sunset. I need my sunglasses to look the other way, towards the sun. The glare blinds the whole view without a proper lens. What else am I blind to just because I don't see through the proper lens?

With our fish meal we chop up some tubular kelp whips, frying the green rings. The color changes to light green and the food is mild and tasty. A bald eagle circles where the gulls sat earlier. It dives in the water but retrieves nothing. Two eagles now circle and the whales swim closer. The mammals' exhales echo through the valley as if in hollow oil drums.

A gap between Vancouver Island and distant Malcolm Island reveals the Pacific Ocean. Through the gap shines the red sunset. The whales roll over the water's red road.

July 16, 1981

I lie in my tent. The whales announce their arrival through their blow holes, like a lot of my friends do. I'd like one of these whales to spy hop, poking his face out of the water to me, and tell me things. But he'd have to be bilingwhale. Or I could get a bilingcod to translate.

Twelve days ago we pulled into Blinkhorn Peninsula, on Independence Day. Today we leave Robsin Bite, just a couple miles down the freeway from Blinkhorn. Richard is ready to leave in this early morning light. Without a spray deck, he wants to beat the afternoon winds. He'll drive his car home today and sleep in his bed tonight. We'll paddle on. Orcas visit now, wishing us well. The bugs have been slaughtering us this early morning. Richard claims his VD title as Director of Orca and Raspberries.

We hug Richard goodbye. He climbs in his kayak in his wet suit and paddles away, northwest.

Now in my tent, I relax. My senses explode with earthly flavors. Fog hides the upper world in white. The ravens screech calls. One bird sounds like a droplet of water magnified many times. Like a poit on a body of water. The poit echoes across the Bite and back from the cliff. I hear the river flowing in. It's a constant soothing background song to the raven's strange solo. Hummingbirds and bees buzz constantly. A bird somewhere repeats several times a ten second melody of notes. Rhythm and music, beat and harmony, innate features of life. Some gulls chat on a log, as gulls will do. Yakity yakity... I hear the peep peep of a pintail duck jetting overhead. I hear a frog's song and splashes of summer salmon. Another raven barks like a dog, one goes tonk-plop, croak, garrle. A whistle. Occasional hemlock needles drop on my tent and slide down the dry fabric. Out my tent screen, past black flies, no-see-ems, and blood gorged squiters, I see the water lapping the rocks. A far-off boat approaches down the freeway Johnstone Strait, its diesel engine humming louder and louder. Wind whooshes from a raven's wings as it takes off, accelerating, defying gravity's pull.

I lie wondering about Cha and Richard and Laura and my folks at home. I wish to hug them all. A hug is like the bonding of two wandering atoms. A hug is the gravity between people which need to bond. The positive energies of a hug can keep love in life.

And again I ask myself the awesome question... Why? What is It? What Is? I haven't enough data to answer. I feel like I am no different from the trees or the birds or the rocks. I am just another extension of the universe; a contemplating, sensing creature. Like I'm creation checking up on itself. God is my senses.

I am.

Chapter 12

"Campbell River Connection"

"The fate of this man or that man was less than a drop,
although it was a sparkling one, in the great blue motion of the sunlit sea."

The Once and Future King by T. H. White

July 17, 1981

We paddle the on ramp to freeway Johnstone Strait, merging with boat traffic, leaving behind the rest area Robsin Bite. The water lies calm with a slight ripple to distort the mirror effect. I thank the whales and say hi to a Bonaparte Gull, his black hood pulled over his face as he bobs in the water beside me. Passing a logging camp surrounded by treeless earth, six orca come to greet us. "Pooosch" breathes the big male.

The fog lifts and the sun comes out. Porpoise too. Many boats pass in both directions. Mountains layer in the distance, colors fading. The northwest wind picks up and we take the free ride, paddling fast over some rip tides as waves roll from behind, over the kayaks and spray decks.

"A sail would be nice today," starts in Denis. We fade into conversation, sharing dreams, talking skiing and family. Denis tells of his dad's passing away years ago and of his breakup with Suzy, just prior to last winter, after eight years of dating. He tells of when he was a child and seeing his house burn down. Twenty-eight miles pass quickly, past Windy Point and Hickey Point, along Newcastle Ridge and into Kelsey Bay. The sun shines hot.

Leaving the kayaks at the Kelsey Bay Government Wharf, Denis and I hitch into town. With my VISA card we acquire food and we hear of a bar throwing an open house party tonight.

We return to the boats and paddle further into Salmon Bay, then up a river. Over marsh grass and mud in the high tide flood water, we kayak to a field behind the open house bar. "In the morning, with the tide out, this river will be dry," I say.

"Oh well, a forced VD day," says Denis. We camp in the grass, drink some beers, then walk through the field to the bar.

The table lies covered with sandwich foods and potato salads. We eat plenty. I see a platter with one more piece of ham, but no serving fork, and I finger the food to my plate. I instantly hear, "You think we want your fingers all over the food? What kind of upbringing have you had?"

Looking up to the whining voice I see three giant marshmallow ladies sitting at the feast table. They all eye me with stern expressions. The face of the speaker wrinkles into a boiled prune and she disappears into the fold of her chin. I feel like a pickle in a jar of imitation mayonnaise. Standing in a corner I sip on Wild Turkey Liquor and see a tan woman talking to Denis. To myself I think, "That Wild Turkey would like to Liquor!"

I talk with a local. He's younger than I and says, "I have three little ones. And that's my wife over there." He points to a young marshmallow. "And my chickens lay six eggs a day. I'm going to get a cow, but first I need to get back to work. I'm a logger and

now the lumber industry is on strike. We're out of luck, but I'm still happy. I've got my family and the things I want..."

Our conversation passes and I stand quietly. Other locals tell me stories and soon I desire my tent. Signaling to Denis as he dances with the lady, I slide out the exit, over the field, and to sleep.

July 18, 1981

Denis walks into camp this morning as I rise. "Some guy," I say.

I climb outside and stretch to the sky and watch a truck pass by on the road two hundred feet away. For a moment I don't consider the situation, then I realize we camp by the road in Kelsey Bay, and I stand naked. I drop to the ground. The truck driver probably just scratches his temples.

As the tide fills the river with water, we pack and exit out the marsh. Out of Salmon Bay, we head east down Johnstone Strait. The late afternoon sun drops low as we enter Race Passage. This spot sometimes rushes water to six knots, but for us it's a smooth ride. After a short five mile day, we stop on Camp Point.

From our beach we notice heat pockets over the distant water, distorting our vision, making the mixture of hot and cold air look syrupy, like fresh and saline waters mixing. I paddle back out to catch several small fish for dinner.

After the beach feast, Denis and I sit watching the fire. A burning log sends off debris in the unseen wind. Fist size brown chunks drift on the air, turning slowly, still glowing. Then we hear, "Pooosch."

"Whale," we say in unison, both rising to our feet. We walk out on a drift tree and sit on the big stump.

"Pooosch." Minke whale: grayish, with a dolphin size fin on his back rolling slow over the surface. He turns and plays in the slight bay. A wood chip floats by. The minke seems to have left. Bye.

To the northeast a tall mountain streaks with valleys, steep and bare. Is the mountain naturally bald, or has logging cleared it? I can't be sure.

"Pooosch..."

"Hi Minke," I say. "Must be a good dinner." Denis blows a soft tune, slow and rhythmic, on his harmonica. The sound of the fast current with the wind and the water slapping the small pebbled beach all blend for his backup music.

"Pooosch..." Minke rolls over the surface, first his blow hole, then his rounded back and dorsal fin. I look down Johnstone Straits towards Campbell River. The sight is beautiful, an artist's conception of islands, mountains, haze, and clouds. One mountain has a strip of trees remaining as a Mohawk haircut. The rest of the mountain top is butchered.

This stump we sit on is so fine. Our perch hangs ten feet high, perfectly formed chairs. This tree would be a \$50,000 prize as some Californian's landscape. And here we are, living legal poverty level, on the finest waterfront with these valuable art pieces all around us.

"Pooosch."

"Nice arch, Minke," says Denis. "Fine job. Pretty nice evening, eh?"

The setting sun splatches clouds here and there with fire orange. The ebb tide flows so fast the kelp bed out front is held under water. Denis climbs down from the tree perch to find a paradise of flat rocks. Now we skip stones... do dah do dah.

By the fire I carve a new spoon from a cedar shake to replace my lost hemlock one. Denis finds a piece of driftwood bent in an elbow with nice natural lines like where skin would wrinkle in my own elbow. The wood has potential for a nice flower arrangement, so Denis throws it smoothly into the weeds. I find some more papillon shells.

Across the channel a beacon flashes red. A seiner roars by, waves splashing from its bow. Denis and I walk to the point, passing styrofoam sections of floats, styrofoam egg cartons, a styrofoam hamburger carton, styrofoam cups, a plastic deodorant container, a plastic nose spray bottle, and a couple of Bic lighters.

From Camp Point we see standing waves of the ebb tide against the northwest wind. In the kelp, two otters play. "There we are," I say, pointing to our two friends. They see us and duck under water, rising even closer, watching. Two watch two. They come closer, ducking and rising through the kelp. The four of us now sit in a circle, two on land, two in the water. I play my recorder, "Do you see what I see? A star, a star..."

The otters watch until their curiosity passes, about the same time as ours does. We wander to our tents and I say to Denis, "I really think those otters were us down there playing."

"Could be."

Now in candlelight, I look out the screen door of my tent. The trees form a frame for the scene, looking down Johnstone Strait to the day's last gleam. I swat a mosquito that lands on me. He explodes, already gorged with blood. "Greedy bastard want more blood?" I say aloud.

I fade into a peaceful sleep, happy to be kayaking, happy to enjoy comfortable silence. Life is easy when I don't have to defend myself to others, when I can keep the peace of an otter. Where are the otters sleeping?

July 19, 1981

"The best thing for being sad is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails." Merlin in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*

This morning I notice the floor of my tent delaminating, the waterproof skin shedding like a snake skin. My wool blanket covers it though. We exit Camp Point at noon with the tide in our favor. We travel Johnstone Strait Freeway in the sun. Every so often I pick up my recorder and play while Denis paddles on slowly. I play songs by doing. Being told or shown helps, but I must do. Like skiing or writing or living, doing is the way to learn. Along this trip I've learned notes and half notes and scales. By doing it, I learn tone qualities and personal style. The basics are what helped me to learn. Do Re Mi... Like numbers, one through ten leads to infinity. Or twenty-six letters in the alphabet. And letters lead to Latin and Greek root words as ten leads to a hundred and notes make a song. These basic building blocks allow insightful learning. Relationships. Red, yellow and blue.

When teaching skiing for Powder Pigs, I learned that to teach kids to ski all I needed to tell them were the basics, about center of gravity and edge control. The basics follow through all of skiing, right to the top racers and aerialists.

The foundation allows for building, and evolving the mind. Basics, like food, shelter, health, transportation, communication and education; all society could build on these. Political resistance aims at returning our goals back to the basics. Resistance of my paddle on the water now is what propels me. Resistance keeps the boat moving.

I resisted my parents. I had to or I would have yielded to their preconceived image of me. I resisted and they resisted me. They kept me in touch with tradition. Now my parents and I glide back together, both having learned from resisting.

As a child I used to hug my folks. Then hugging stopped as I grew, and the resistance increased. Now, the resistance slowed, hugging returns. I must learn to heed people's resistance, to learn their reason for resisting. Others know things that I don't and when I can reach a plateau of no resistance with another person, we find a mind link, a mutual image. But sometimes only I know what's best for me.

We paddle past Palmer Bay and Humpback Bay. Vacations from my childhood are strong in memory. A car trip at three years old remains clear in my thoughts. I've thought the bright lights, the blinding squinting that I used to dream of so much, could have been my exit from the womb. I can remember my parents putting on my diapers. Vacations from four years old, five, all the way to yesterday's memories, all play big roles in my choices. I have good memories. That seems to be the goal of raising children: to give the child the best memories possible! Memories of love, of play, of low stress living. And any negative in a child's life can be made positive by turning the memory into a lesson. The evolution of thought.

Denis paddles a mile ahead of me. I've spaced out. Past Bear Point and Ripple Point, by Little Bear Bay and around Chatham Point, we paddle south down Discovery Passage. The north wind pushes us, the current pulls us. Our paddles drive and soon we arrive to infamous Seymour Narrows just before the slack tide. Fishing and pleasure boats motor about in Plumper and Deepwater Bays waiting for complete slack. The rumors and scare stories we've heard till now give us much respect for Seymour Narrows. We contemplate our passage and think of the forces we are about to encounter.

A story goes that by April fifth of 1958 at least twenty large ocean vessels had been damaged passing through the Narrows, and over one hundred smaller ships had been lost, mostly due to a dangerous submerged rock in the center of the channel. Over 114 lives had been lost to Seymour Narrows to that date. But with a two and a half year project, costing \$3,100,000, experts removed Ripple Rock with 2,750,000 pounds of explosives. That was the largest manmade non-nuclear explosion in North America. Experts had dug down 570 feet on Maude Island, tunneled 2,000 feet under the channel, then three hundred feet up into the two rock domes of Ripple Rock. All residents were evacuated from a three mile radius of the rock, known as the worst shipping peril of the Inside Passage. All ships were kept five miles away and scientists flew aloft in planes. With enough explosives to fill 114 railroad box cars, detonated from a half mile, 370,000 tons of rock flew eight-hundred feet in the air. Timed at 9:31 a.m. with the maximum rip tide to dampen tidal waves, the sound could be heard for three miles, but seismographs registered for hundreds of miles. The tidal wave only reached eight feet on the north and

east banks of Seymour Narrows, though the explosion blew so powerful as to raise the Empire State Building one mile in the air.

So, with currents showing in the charts to register to fifteen knots, Denis and I monitor my clock, waiting for the right moment to paddle through Seymour Narrows. Being a couple days after a full moon, the current plays its maximum exchange. Electric cables with round weighted balls drape across the narrows like Christmas lights. Beyond we see Menzies Bay which is famous for its whirlpools swallowing whole ships and trees and then spitting them up a mile away from the submersion point.

I say to Denis, "We should head through before the rest of the boats because it's three miles before we are free of the rips. And I don't want those fishing boats barreling down on me." We check my watch and decide to go.

With our spray decks on, we fly in the fast current. I smell the freshness bubbling up in the water from the deep. I feel the cold and warm pockets which the water churns up. Under the high cables, the real whirls start. As we round the bend of Maude Island we paddle so fast that when giant whirlpools appear in front, we slide quickly over them, the boats only turning out a small angle. More whirlpools suck us into 90 degree turns, but we float on the surface so much like leaves that the water doesn't apply much drag. Paddling full speed, we now head straight at each other, the current joining, our exertions insufficient to assume full control. Denis yells, "Pretty fast water for slack tide. I wonder why the other boats don't come yet."

"My watch has been keeping time with Kayaker's Reality for weeks. It might not cooperate with real time," I say, picking up speed and crossing over to Race Point. Denis continues down the slower midstream. I steam ahead, feeding on a swift current. I feel safer, almost out of the Narrows and closer to shore. At Race Point I lose the current and notice Denis speeding in one. Fishing boats now barrel through behind us. The big boats get turned sideways in the current too and they just ride with it, at the mercy of Seymour Narrows. One barrels down on Denis, the current controlling all. I see Denis' deck suck under water, his body turning sideways. As the kayak almost rolls, he jerks and breaks away from the deadly suction.

Fast water rolls over my stern and over my spray deck as I round Race Point where fishermen cast from rocks. Several fling their weighted hooks just inches from my boat and they laugh at me. The casts come close as they show me I invade their space. The bastards invade my space with their hooks. I paddle away from their reach and watch an eagle swoop down to the water. It plucks about a four pound salmon from right in front of the fisherman. They just stare at it jealously. "Yea, Eagle," I cheer as another fisherman casts his hook straight at me. I bat it away with my paddle, wanting to cut the line, but I paddle on. Such is.

Soon Denis joins me and says, "That was truly the scariest I've ever been in my kayak. I thought I would flip for a second. Those fishing boats couldn't control themselves if they had to. Lucky we blasted through early." We now notice ahead, looming out of the water, a Crown Zellerbach Factory, smoke billowing in the sunset; a spectacular blech... yuk... blah. Denis paddles to fishermen in a boat who drink beers and he cons them out of two. We drink and celebrate another day alive.

Hundreds of sport fishermen cover the Passage towards Campbell River. Houses line the beach on fifty foot lots. A tourist town, this place is famous for salmon and clear warm water. Being inside of Vancouver Island, the water here has a chance to warm

without the constant flushing. So oysters grow and water is pleasant to swim for longer than the jump, dunk and spring to shore. We paddle over to a man on a dock who calls us crazy for paddling through Seymour Narrows. "Boats go down in those whirlpools and never rise again, big boats, like tugs and barges."

Denis notices the top half of his own fishing pole missing and decides it ripped off as his kayak tilted in the swift current. On the charts, the path which almost sunk Denis reads, "Heavy Tide Rips with Flood."

By dark we set up on the outskirts of Campbell River in a vacant lot we find. We obviously trespass, but we drag, tired after our longest single day paddle yet, of thirty-six miles. As Denis climbs into his tent he says, "I will never paddle Seymour Narrows again in my life. There are easier ways."

"Good education, though," I say. We fall quickly to sleep, the sky still light and the sounds of motor cars and trucks and boats filling the air.

July 20, 1981

I awaken to the sound of engines. Boats race out to the fishing holes to catch The Big One. This is probably the thousand dollar VD annual for many people.

We paddle. At the Campbell River dock, one of the few city floats, the attendant wants three dollars for us to tie up each kayak for the afternoon. We dock between the rock bulkhead and the outhouses in a spot nothing wider than a kayak could use. I tell the man, "We haven't had ten cents for a few weeks, let alone three dollars. Our money is waiting in a bank here in town."

"Well," he says slowly, "one kayaker came in a week and a half ago and he just tied up for a day, he said. He ended up setting his tent right here on the dock and he stayed here five days."

"We'll just be the afternoon and we can pay you later today," says Denis.

"I get off work at four o'clock. You have to come before then," he says, making me wonder whose pocket gets the cash.

"Did the other kayaker look like us?" I ask.

"Yah, he was tan and wore a beard. He sat in his tent all day eating." Denis and I laugh. "And he said he paddled from Alaska."

Denis and I head up town to a pub. By noon we drink High Test beer and talk to a local who is not pleased with his life. "The postal strike's on now so no money is moving through the mail. Checks and bills will be held up for a long time."

The waitress brings us beer. She's very pretty and both Denis and I stare after her. Our sad table partner tells us more, "And thousands of folks are out of work now and need money." He bites into his five dollar sandwich and sips his beer. I watch the waitress in the red dress float between tables. "And all of Campbell River could go down the tube like Ocean Falls did a couple years ago when the company bought everyone's homes for cheap. The town folded all operations."

"Campbell River seems to have a booming tourist trade though to pull the town through," I say.

The fellow says, "Did you see the paper today?" He signals the waitress for more beer. "Of the hundred deaths in a Kansas City bar..."

I drain my beer and so does Denis. We give each other eye signals to leave, and we do.

Walking back to the dock, the day very hot, we wear only shorts and knapsacks. Some roses by the road end up stuck in our packs, along with the feathers which are already there. Denis points to a picture in a store front, of an office scene. A man sits at a clean desk, with flowers in a vase on his file cabinet, his tie on straight and tight, and a picture of a smiling family on his desk. Denis says, "What a sterile picture..."

Along Campbell River's waterfront we wander. The city has a fine park. Mounds of short cut green grass roll over the terrain and picnic benches set around. As we walk, shades covering our eyes, a sandy-haired kid of about eighteen watches us. He stands and follows us. We stop, he stops. We walk, he walks. "Nice day," I say to him.

"What of it," he says, folding his arms and standing still. I look at Denis and laugh. We walk on. He follows. He's a strong built kid, but no bigger than either of us.

We stop, he stops. Denis asks, "Got a dubee?"

"Don't touch it," he says.

"You from around here?" I ask.

"What of it?" he asks.

"Nice town," I say. Denis and I walk on. He follows.

"You want to join us?" I ask, tired of being followed. Kid shakes his head no, smiling.

"Can we help you?" asks Denis, with a more irritated voice now.

"Take off the glasses, they're ugly."

"They're good glasses," I say. We cross the busy four lane street. He follows.

Denis stops again on the other side and says to him, "What's up, fellah?"

"I don't like you guys."

"Well, get lost," says Denis, now more irritated than I would have expected.

"What did you say?" the kid says, with a whining tough guy voice, still smiling.

"Get lost," hisses Denis. The kid jerks and kicks off his hiking boots without untying them, almost tripping in the process. He wears his socks and Denis and I are still barefoot.

The kid stands in a squatting karate stance and slowly grits out, "K Rah Teh..."

Denis says, "Take off fellah, you're lost." I laugh. A man and another guy our age wanders over after watching the scene awhile. They tell the kid to get lost and grow up. The kid eventually grabs his boots and walks across the street. He sits on a bench in the park and extends his middle finger in the phallic position.

The man says, "Ignore the kid, he's a little crazy."

"I don't trust that kind of craziness," I say.

After discovering Denis' money hasn't arrived yet, we walk back down to the kayaks on the dock. Denis rounds a corner from me and encounters the kid again. He lies over the water on a yellow rubber raft, maneuvering with his hands for a paddle. Denis and he talk a second, then I hear, "Ouch. Damn it." I round the corner to see the kid holding up a bleeding finger. When he sees me, he looks back at Denis and says, "Oh, it's you guys. I didn't even recognize him," he says, pointing at Denis. The kid holds up a rock crab with his bloody fingers. "The bastard bit me." He pulls a bandage out of his back pocket.

"I don't blame him," I say, wondering if the kid planned on getting hurt because he carried the bandage. "Lucky you know first aid," I say.

"I wasn't really mad at you guys," the kid says. "Your sunglasses just reminded me of some guys that once beat up my brother and me. They wore those kind of sunglasses."

"Better clean up your memories, kid," I say quietly. The dock attendant walks over, a younger man than the man earlier today.

"Your buddy left you guys a message that he'd be a week ahead of you, over in Desolation Sound."

"Did Cha find a lady in town or something?" asks Denis. The kid hand paddles away.

"Oh no," says the young dock attendant. "He pitched his tent right on the dock and stayed there for days. Bad weather he claimed." The attendant walks on.

A different, older attendant walks up and says the same story, saying our buddy "Is a real bull shitter... if he had a truck, he'd be a millionaire."

Denis and I paddle up to the Anchor Inn on the south end of town. Five to seven o'clock the restaurant serves a five cent salad bar, with fruit, turkey, beef, hot pickles, macaroni and potato salads, green leaf salads, and different breads. The salad bar is an old horse carriage. The restaurant views over Cape Mudge, out over hundreds of sport fishing boats dotting the water. Another carriage hangs from the wall, along with a stuffed sea tortoise. Fans, all connected by belts, turn throughout the room, all run by the same motor. I overhear the tall bearded waiter explaining to a girl bartender, as he holds up a clean crystal glass, "The perfect size for a woman's breast is the size of a red wine glass. But personally, I prefer beer glass size. Besides, the nipples on a red wine glass are way too big..."

A fellow named Jimmy wearing a Panama hat and a Columbian smile sits at our table. He tells me the woman tending bar moved up from Mazatlan, Mexico. I go ask her if she knows a friend of mine there, also in the restaurant business. I stare into her eyes, not remembering my buddy's name, but looking deep into her soul's windows, I recall his name is Jesus (pronounced "Hey Zeus"), a common name in Mexico. I go back and tell Denis and Jimmy that she grew up from the crib with my buddy. Jimmy says, "Bianca has a way of communicating with her eyes. She can bring it out in others too, the same way cats do..."

A band comes on stage. Denis and I both bounce with the rock and roll beat. The telephone urge attacks me so I wander from the table and call my brother. I talk with his wife, Cookie, and she tells me to call Laura.

Laura says she bought Denis and I Grateful Dead tickets, a concert in Seattle, August 14. I tell her no because we must meet Cha the fifteenth in Powell River. She tells me to call Danny, our kayak buddy with the broken leg.

Dan says he's ready to meet us soon. I suggest in Powell River or Nanaimo. I set a date to call him August 15 at his folk's house. "No, Dan, we won't make it for the concert," I say.

Back in the music lounge, I tell Denis of the phone calls. Hearing the Grateful Dead concert offer, Denis being an avid fan says, "We could still do it. Just leave Cha a note to meet us two days late. We could hitchhike down and back."

We start glowing and getting excited for a crazy vacation away from our vacation. We laugh and talk loud. Jimmy just sits piecing together our situation. He shakes his head.

I go call Laura back and tell her we want to go to Seattle, but not to tell anybody. She says she wants to visit us up here, so we arrange a date in Campbell River in ten days.

Denis and I leave from the bar after midnight and set up our tents in a pre-selected spot on the beach, tucked into the trees. Watching over the water, I think I see the true yellow brick road and the land of Oz at the end, but I realize, in my alcohol stupor, that the rising moon, in waning gibbous, shines over the water and the city of Oz is only the Cape Mudge lighthouse. Sorry, Toto, Sorry, Dorothy. Sorry... sorry people drink... glug glug glug...

July 21, 1981

I wake up to realize my life is now planned: errands in town today, date with Laura, trip to Seattle, rendezvous with Cha, rendezvous with Dan, then home... home.

We buy all the items on our food lists. Denis discovers his mom lost the bank's name so she never sent him money. We talk with a group of bicyclers, six people from all over North America. We meet two girls from Quebec working for an outdoor center. Now they counsel children from Mexico City who only speak Spanish.

In the park we lie in the sun on the grass and a drunk Indian slobbers over and sits with us. Grabbing Denis' feet, he claws at the heels. Denis jerks away.

The Indian mumbles out, shocked, "You guys don't wear shoes. You guys Indian." He notices we have beer and grabs one forcefully. He compares his dark skin to ours and finds ours darker. He rolls up his pant leg and reveals a pale white skin. "You guys more Indian than me. What'd you do?"

Denis gives a brief explanation and the Indian gets up. He says, "Bullshit," and staggers away.

In a department store I see Denis hundreds of feet away in a group of people. I notice for the first time how dark he is. Again we indulge in the five cent salad bar, then continue to a bar where the women have been watching a male dancer for a few hours. Guys weren't allowed in till 10:30 p.m. Tired of booze, both Denis and I drink coffee. Many pretty women group around and the whole crowd seems to be local and familiar to each other. I feel like an out of townner in a group of locals. I dance once. We leave and get a ride with two ladies. They take us to the park and they tell stories of divorce and kids at home.

In the park, Denis and I sleep in his half dome.

July 22, 1981

"If people could be persuaded to read and write, not just to eat and make love, there was still a chance that they might come to reason."

T. H. White, *The Once and Future King*

I feel just as hungover from the coffee as I would have from booze. "Why don't they ever serve something nontoxic in bars? Like juices," I ask Denis. He supplies no answer. As we stuff our sleeping bags in our boats on the dock, a fat man with a martini climbs off his stink yacht and waddles over to us.

He says, "So what. You're in college, or what?"

"I just graduated this last winter," I say.

"Well, my boy's going to be a senior and he's only gotten one B in high school. He'll go to Stanford or M.I.T. He plays football but he wants to study more. What number were you?" the man asks me.

Squatting next to my kayak, I ask, "Number?"

"Yah. What number in your class were you?"

"Oh. I don't know," I say. "I didn't even go to commencement." I feel sick.

"My son could get a free ride in the Coast Guard Academy, but he'd rather have me pay for a big school."

"Sounds like a smart kid," I say.

"Oh, yea. He's a whiz. So why are you here?" he asks, chugging his drink.

"We travel in our kayaks this summer," I say, thinking the man couldn't care what I tell him.

He slugs his drink and says, "Well, you guys will have to settle down and get a good job and get married..." He waddles back to his boat.

We read part of the day in the library and visit the museum. Again we eat at the five cent salad bar. "Denis. I'm taking off, let's rendezvous when we meet Laura. I don't feel good and you have to wait for your money." We hug goodbye.

With the sun still up, I paddle across Discovery Passage, over the Yaculta Bank in about a six knot current. I'm sucked south towards the Strait of Georgia. Two separate tourist boats, seeming drunk to me, test my skills. They fly towards me at twenty five knots and then turn at the last moment, spraying water at me from the engine and throwing up a wake. I feel so mad, the bastards could have mowed me over. I swear in my thoughts. I sweat and feel delirious. I hurt. After crossing Discovery Passage I beach and set camp on the Indian Reserve by Cape Mudge. My fever pounds my head. I feel a need to be better, to cleanse myself. Health I want now. I must learn to stay healthy and appreciate that health every moment. Discovery Passage, of the Inside Passage; I must discover my environment; why I live and what I live in. I learn by feeling.

I feel sick, and fall quickly asleep. The sun just sets and hundreds of boats still crowd into Discovery Passage, hoping for the Big One.

Chapter 13

"Searching For the Comfort Zone"

"'cause out on the edge of darkness there rides a Peace Train.
Oh Peace Train take this country, Come take me Home again" Cat Stevens

July 23, 1981

I reached a high fever in the night. I was delirious and sweating and pained and feeling close to death. After falling asleep at sunset, feeling fire from within and without, I later awoke in the dark to hear many sirens. Soaked from my own sweat, I towed dry and shivered as I relieved myself outside. At first the sirens seemed to be from the Cape Mudge Lighthouse. I wondered if they were routine warning signals. Next I thought the sirens to be for some boat that had flipped and rescue boats were out searching. But as I peed I saw across to Campbell River. The traffic and lights and action of an accident along the waterfront road answered my wonders. The sirens, in my delirious sleep, had fit in perfect with my fever. They described to me how I felt.

This morning I feel better, but I will not paddle today. I must rest. This is my first real sickness since the start of the trip. My sleeping bag is heavy now from all my sweat. Today I organize; tomorrow I round Cape Mudge.

A cat's crying seems vague in my memory. It had screamed in the dark night, wild, hungry with nature's drives; sex, food and territory.

Now it's evening, after a sunny day spent intermittently in my tent and lying on driftwood. A couple of swims today kept me cool. Denis paddles across Discovery Passage towards Cape Mudge. He kayaks through the rip tides, weaving a slalom course through the fishing boats. The channel is again packed with tourists. What drives those sportsmen in their stink machines? Fun, fish, status, or what? I wave to Denis but he doesn't see me. He disappears around the point. Bye my friend, until then...

A sailboat motors against the current, almost standing still. Such is the rushed life. Is this full current really good fishing? Maybe these sportsmen wait until high slack before retiring for the evening.

I've been flu'ed all day. Naked on the beach, I'd dress when people came close. No one spoke to me though. I don't know whether I can paddle tomorrow but I really want to get away from all these boats... too much engine noise. The sound waves don't blend harmoniously enough. A few miles around the point will do.

When I'm sick, like now, I promise myself I will appreciate when I am well again. What's more important than health? My body hasn't been used to city germs. Can I correlate this flu with the arrival to the city? To my diet... booze, coffee, meat cold cuts?

I am thankful for being alone now. Like a dying animal that leaves its family and heads to the woods, to be alone, an individual experiences the hell of creation; the exploding of stars, the heat of the universe. I will feel better mañana. Gracias...

July 24, 1981

In a delirious state, I drive myself to pack and paddle around Cape Mudge. The hooded Bonaparte gulls seem to be most numerous of all birds now. I paddle under the sand eroded cliffs, under a blue sky with floating marshmallow clouds. A raven zooms by, so shiny in the sun that it loses its blackness to colors of silver. To the west, snow capped mountains line Vancouver Island. To the east, rugged peaks point to the sky along the Coast Range. Texada Island lies to the south, hazed on the horizon. A yellow and black butterfly flutters past, the first I've seen for awhile. I admire the butterfly with the same passion as the papillon shells, but like the shells, I know I cannot keep the creature for myself. To catch her, she would die. To touch her in flight, her wings would lose draft and the butterfly would fall. The air is its breath and spirit. I paddle below the yellow and black flutter-by and she stays with me. Together we travel; solo, together.

A car lies smashed and rusted at the bottom of a cliff. The fall must have been fun to watch. I turn my kayak to Desolation Sound, along the east side of Quadra Island. Many beach homes line the water, each on a large private lot. The last quarter moon sets over their roofs. I begin to tire rapidly. Feeling feverish and sick in the hot sun, I stop at a home where everyone sits around arguing. They fill my water bottles, mentioning that I take the last of their water. They must refill their five gallon buckets elsewhere on the island.

Onward I paddle, my rudder seeming bent to the right. After constantly fighting my kayak's desire to turn, I stop and bend the stabilizer. But over corrected, now I turn constantly left. Onward, to Rebecca Spit. I beach by picnic tables with people all around. I'm wasted from my exertions.

After setting my tent, I fall fast asleep in the midday heat. I awake to meet Bob from Aberdeen, a twenty-five year old engineering consultant. He's well built and healthy, with sandy hair and a mustache and a hero's vertical dimple on his chin. We shake hands, his grip firm, but not squeezing. I think how Cha and Denis both claim they learned to "shake like a man," with a vice grip to show strength. I'd sooner shake like a dog after swimming. Bob rides his bike after having had similar knee surgery to mine. He says, "People ask me whether I'll water ski again, which was the original cause of my knee problem. I feel that's a poor question... of course I will."

He talks of his career. "Basically I'm trouble shooting industries through the aids of computers and personal knowledge. It's very stimulating for me. It allows for travel and money savings, experience, and time to contemplate my personal goals. I'm paid thirty dollars a day for expenses, plus a hotel, so I never even spend any of my salary. Due to the strikes, I'm not even working now, but I still get paid. Next week I move inland." Bob tells me he won't marry now because there's too much to do and see alone. "Later," he says. "After a couple years I want to travel on my own with my saved money; to Fiji, to Europe. But for now, I'm as happy as I want to be. Everywhere I go I feel is home, but I am getting tired of living out of a suitcase. I'll hold off on family obligations till later. I just wonder when I'm thirty five if I'll be able to find a suitable woman."

Bob rides away. I admire him for his satisfaction and consciousness of actions. He lives by choice within a career, yet he feels as free as I do. He agreed with me that appreciating simple things like a walk or a conversation does maintaining the proper attitude.

After a stroll, I return to my tent, alone, feeling more unsociable than ever. My whole system is tired and drained. Without my health the world is not so beautiful. I need my strength back. If I were to jump rope now, I would pass out. If I drank beer, which I still carry a six pack of, I would lie and ache.



The sun now sets, like the cement in my brain. Negative thoughts invade my head. I don't look forward to paddling the last month and a half with Cha. I'm too free from his insults... but why even think this; Cha is a beautiful man. Why can I think negatively of him? The negative grows with my illness. How can anybody live without good health, with no exercise and bad diet? I feel my health directly controls my negative thoughts. I must fight my bad attitudes. I choose.

Breathe deeply... relax. My heart pumps oxygen into all my blood cells, the flesh's connection to life's spirit. No wonder the word spirit comes from the word meaning breath... breathe slowly, deeply, relax...

Sleep... sleep...

July 25, 1981

I awaken out of delirious, confusing dreams. Numbers and cities, schools and family, trees and I don't remember what else. My mind feels split by this fever. I've been told half my brain works for the logical, while the other half plays the arts, creates. Why the split?

I choose to stay another day, to regain my health. I am always choosing. Sometimes I forget that choice is constant, though. Every word I write I choose. At times I don't perceive my own choice, but others can. Like the person sitting at the end of a rainbow doesn't see himself there, but others do.

I am man. I am stuck with consciousness. When choosing, I often ask myself, What would a whale do...? Or an Eagle? Or a fruit fly? "Why?" I accept that my innate bodily drives still play great importance in my choices, but I can transcend those drives. I can wait. I am!

My stomach cramps attack so violently I feel endangered. I wish I could shit! I paddle my empty kayak to Harriot Bay, to the store where I will meet Denis in a week. With two quarts of prune juice and two of apple juice, I return to my tent. If solids won't leave my body, I better still drink calories.

I sleep deeply in my tent until a parks man comes to tell me to leave. "You can go camp across Sutil Channel on Brenton Islands," he says. I explain my circumstances and he says he's sorry, but I must leave. I say I don't want to camp on the island sick, alone, without any water near. Isolated and sick I would not feel safe.

Finally the man gives me permission to hide my tent in the bushes and he'll look the other way. Thank you, I need to recuperate... I'm bushed.

The new view from my tent is beautiful. The north wind blows strong and the Coast Range, many miles away, looms high in view. I don't think I've had this much water east of me for awhile. This grants a nice distance perspective.

Guilt... I sent Cha off on his own, disregarding his fears of being alone. Who am I? I told the parks man I feared being alone and sick without water near. Now I feel the importance of other people. Mankind is meant to bond as are atoms. Cha has probably bonded with others by now, as a wandering atom must. Even Hermit John is off in search of his Danish dream.

Laura will be here soon. I want to be well. Small swells whitecap out in Sutil Channel. Snow white mountains and white clouds cap the world. I enjoy seeing boats with their sails open and full of spirit. Fir trees surround my tent... and what else? What don't I perceive? Like a thin web floating on the wind, only visible from the perfect angle where the sun reflects, what other angles of perception can I achieve to open new visions?

I didn't sweat as much last night. The fever must be leaving. Only stomach cramps invade me now. I consume fluids, a few nuts, and some celery. I'll see what happens. Damn bugs in the system...

Ah... and stomach gasses escape... and in keeping in line with my faithful journal progressions, after the no-shits, is... the... shits... Yeh! Let's hear it for the big squirt and many pounds of pressure release. Yeh for the sprint to the outhouse.

I feel much better. A wedding goes on here in the park. People in tuxedos and formal dresses proceed with tradition. The groom jumps, energized, and the wedding

ends quickly... such is the ritual. Easy come, easy go. Maybe I should have to climb a mountain to get married.

A white capped bald eagle floats high above and passes the whole span of the sky without a single flap. He soars, a direct path, an eagle's fun. Two ravens, shining in the sun, glowing, play in a fir tree. They play hide and seek.

I play hide in my tent and seek for the Truth. I wish to grow, to evolve, to learn and better myself. I aim for perfection, to be as integrated as I possibly can.

Now I lie in the sun on my blanket, my head sideways on the ground. The earth balances in that position, the trees are horizontal and the grass is vertical. Beyond the fields I see the mountains and the sky. My view is thus limited, my reality thus limited... all that is... IS! But I turn over and see shadows reaching after me, the sun bright on the sky wall. Ravens chase one another to the trees. How do I know what is best? How am I to truly know what is bettering myself?

So many ants crawl over my blanket as I lie on this west side of the peninsula, on this bay, sheltered from the wind. People swim. Oysters scatter on the beach. The water is warm here; kids swim and play on logs until their skin turns to rapid old age of a prune. One boy holds a stick in the water behind his floating log and yells over and over, "Hey, everybody. Look at my little motor." His friends and family glance at him but barely acknowledge his invention. He shares what is important to him, as I do. His hope is that others will see the same importance.

A man plays with a half dozen kids on a raft. He wears a mask and snorkel as the kids treat him like a monster. He is number one to them. But what if they ignored him? The raft breaks apart and the kids experience independence, each on their own log. Most seek a rejoining of the raft. One boy thrives quietly on his own, paddling one of the raft's key logs away from the group. The sea monster swims away too.

The setting sun's glitter on the water, the ripples and points of light, adds extraordinary dimensions through my sunglasses. Each spot of light seems to be the sun in itself. Each part represents the whole. A nice oak dory rows by the sun's reflection, a dragon carved on the bow. The man rows facing forward. Above the dory a single dish-shaped cloud hovers. It's the only cloud visible in the sky. What intelligent beings could travel in clouds? Minute in size? Or just lighter in mass? No limitations can I impose, all is possible.

Once the man rows his dory into the wind, away from the shelter of Rebecca Spit, he pops the sail and rides free. The cloud is now gone... disappeared... Poof.

July 26, 1981

I awaken in the dark of night. Watching out my tent I see the rising sliver of moon. Cassiopeia rests in her throne, my lady of the night. She brings me hope and love and belief in my future. I watch Cassiopeia as I doze off again.

With sunlight I see signs of the blowing north winds. Again I hurt in the night with horrible cramps around my diaphragm. If the wind dies, I will move today. Otherwise I'm here. This spot where I pitched my tent is tucked into the weeds so well that I have seen no signs of beings in this public park. I don't know if it's today's weather, but this view is the best of the whole trip. Miles away are snow pointed peaks. Closer lie

the knob islands, and close, where my feet hang out of the tent, grows fresh green grass. Ah... I wish I could be strong again.

I catch a spider in my tent and escort her out. But apparently I damage her because I find in the cup, where I caught only one spider, there now appears maybe fifty baby spiders too, each the size of a sharp pencil tip. Sorry, mom spider. I think I killed many of your babies.

After reading some *Watership Down*, then sleeping all morning, I awake enlivened, feeling healthier. I grab my jump rope, ready or not, needing the exertion to overpower the bug in my body. I get my heart pumping, my starter kicking, and gas blowing and feel much better, ready for a swim. As my health returns, probably against logistics, but in line with fun, I drink a beer. Then a second... I have beer, so I drink beer.

Walking in the hot sun, the wind blows strong. I round a corner on the beach and find a girl sunning... topless. How free she looks. I wander on and lie naked in the sun in my own private spot.

I dress as a six or seven year old boy and his mother walk near. I overhear the boy, "...because of the earthquake and its crack in the earth." The mother pretty much ignores the child, who continues, "And I can show you where it cracked. It will crack in the same spot next time..."

The mother asks, "How do you know?"

The child answers, "I just do." The two walk out of hearing range. I wonder if the child has watched a lot of T.V. or if he taps such mind thought alone. Maybe the child is in touch with his own instincts, like the way a horse knows an earthquake before a man does. Maybe the kid knows something and the mother just can't hear him. Maybe the mother's brain has already split into left and right, and the child's mind is closer to the unity of the universe. Maybe the kid's got a wild imagination.

As I lie in the evening sun watching the people toys in the bay, the windsurfers, catamarans, water skiers, and yachts, a raven knocks pine cones down on me. "What's up, bud?" I ask. "Squawk, eh?"

In the night's darkness I walk alone through the park. I step softly, barefoot through the grass. I travel blindly but my feet feel the way, avoiding sharp objects. I sing, heart filled and spontaneous, needing no audience. I clap with a rhythm and dance a tune down the sandy beach, in and out of the salty water. How pleasant. If I meet some person now who lives life easy, I bet we would rhyme, like flowers, powers, and spring showers.

As I write by candlelight in my tent an inch long spider... oooh, interrupts my attentions. I cup her and throw the cup outside. "Go play elsewhere, madam. I'd hate to have you make love to my pubics or eyelashes or something. I know how some of you spiders aren't so friendly to your lovers after the act..."

July 27, 1981

Still awake at 2:30 a.m., I see weird colors on the north/northeast horizon. A green shadow glows and grows from what appears to be a cloud. The color spreads over 120 degrees of my horizon, 20 degrees into the sky. Bright colors wave behind the rugged Coast Range peaks. The colors wave towards the southeast, red streaks joining the green and stretching as high as the Pleiades constellation, the Seven Sisters. The original cloud moves southward, seeming to be only light. Soon all phenomena disappears. The

night returns to its normal visions. A last white streak of light flares up for five minutes, but then the northern lights disappear completely. Only the fine sliver of the moon remains, rising from the east.

Ah, to relieve my bowels on such a beautiful night. I appreciate my gathering health. I mean, what an all time subject... a healthy solid shit as a sign of recovery. I mean shit, what an all time avoided subject. Ever see Starch and Husky drop a load? Or Dorothy or the Tin Woodsman? Or Toto? We all do it, and if we don't, we're constipated and need to jack off or something. I mean... I hear in Turkey they eat with their right hands and the left is saved for the savory wipe. Maybe shit is so common that it's unimportant... but it must be dealt with. Say if I sleep in a camper in the parking lot of a fancy hotel. Where to in the morning needs? Ah, into a plastic bag. Stoop to it then put on the twisty. Do I just set the bag on the hood of a fancy car in hopes the owner has a methyl converter and I contribute to his needs? How rude and obnoxious? But an option. So do I wipe between the legs or around the side, and what age did I switch? When will I? Do I eat corn on the cob by chewing across or around? And those unchewed kernels... a starving person may want to eat them. I shouldn't get so gross in my tent this early morning. I write a kayak story and I should let the shit slide. Fuck, I said shit...

After my sleep and in the rising sun, I walk away from the tent to get out of the northerly wind. A sailboat sits grounded on the tide flats, tilting at a 45 degree angle. The boat's weight rests on the keel and hull... ooops. A trimaran also sits grounded, but it rests level without the keel. These days continue under blue skies and I'm thankful to be taking them slowly. Eat and sleep, read and write. Today is a waiting day. I must be here for the rendezvous in two and a half days. If I paddle south, I would have to return bucking the north wind. And to paddle north now, I'd be bucking waves. So I wait here. "Waiting is," said Valentine Michael Smith. And it must be, and will be, so I play my games and meditate. Marijuana is great for waiting, but I have none now. Waiting in my life is part of everything, of a relationship, of a job, of school, of life, of death. "Waiting is."

I walk the beach. Instead of the easy path, the smooth sands, I choose more action, more chances. I choose my path as my right as an individual. I wish not to tread where I can walk blindly, but to climb above the beach and walk on logs, high above, balanced and aware. On my drifting path I must keep my focus, seeing the different logs I can traverse, seeing my options, looking for logs which lead to others so that I never have to step down. On some logs I just can't be careless or they might roll or tilt out from under me. I must keep in touch with my center of gravity, with my own NRG's. Carelessness will drop my body to the ground. And I must keep my options in mind, knowing where I can jump in case a log starts to throw me. I'd much rather live my life exerting myself, aware of my surroundings, than walk blindly down the consistent beach, thinking myself safe.

July 28, 1981

Partly cloudy, a northerly wind... will I paddle? Nah. I watch a Rescue Canada twin prop airplane circling above the edges of islands and the mainland shore, apparently searching for something. I hope not some kayaker's worried mother's reported loss. There's too many white caps to paddle just for the sake of moving.

But in time, with the water calming, I am back in my kayak, with all my gear. I paddle through the Brenton Islands among the rough rocks. Many seals with their babies slide into the water as I approach. The infants cling to the backs of their mothers like a papoose. I'm alive with health again. The day is beautiful with a lower wind from the southeast. The upper wind and clouds still flow from the north. I go, but I don't know where. Rust colored blocks of rock, cracked into geometric shapes and designs, line the cliffs. Trees sit atop the rocks. I paddle up Hoskyn Channel between Read and Quadra Islands.



What's around the next point? What ever is? My returned health brings all... I love the world. This is another paradise; a home. I paddle along chanting Indian songs, the words and tunes unfamiliar to me but they feel good, smooth and from my heart. I dream of ancient Indians, of tepees, of kayaks, of forests. Up Hoskyn Channel occasional houses or cabins tuck into trees and on cliffs. A bridge reveals an existing road on my port side, on Quadra Island. Logging hasn't raped here so bad... not yet. I see many sailboats but

only one of about ten uses the sails in this pleasant breeze. "Lightweights," I say. A deer, two points on the antlers, and a doe by its side, walk on rocks along the beach eating from salal... the bush or the berry? The deer slips on a rock. The hoofs sound hollow.

Away... I paddle through a pass, unnamed on the detail of my chart. After I clear through, a sailboat, dory style with junk sails on two masts and a cabin on board, follows. The wind won't quite push the boat through so out pop two oars and the dory edges by the rocks. I hear children's voices on board as the rain starts... tra la tra la. I talk to the family.

They head to Cape Caution area so I mention the two mile beach. The long dark haired man mentions that they found that beach on their map and that is the destination of the twenty-seven foot boat. Two blond kids and the blonde mother wave good bye to me. "Adios..."

I paddle to Maurelle Island, to a co-op dock where several families share 150 acres. Each family maintains their own home, most of them doing seasonal work such as tree planting, log salvage, and fishing for their finances. I speak with a slender fellow with a mustache. He wears shorts and a raincoat and hangs under his skiff scraping barnacles. He says, "These slug out my boat, eh. They grew kind of late this year." I mention Kayak Bill and he tells me Bill is a tough fellow. "He had some tough winter camps. Now and then he'd stay here, eh, over by the tepee."

I paddle over to the tepee. It feels ominous. Inside there's an iron wood stove, a bed raised on rocks and logs, a kitchenette, and an inner canvas liner around the lower five feet of the base, to keep things dryer. Large eagle feathers stick here and there.

Paddling on to the next cove, past the dock, I notice a couple of houses up on the cliffs. With rain pouring down, I round the edge of the next bay and see a tent set up. It's Denis! "Wooo eee oooo," I hoot, happy to see my friend. "Hey, stranger!"

"Hey!"

We gather in his tent and share stories. Denis never saw me the day he crossed from Campbell River and the wind kept him from paddling too much.

Two kids, the boy Aaron and his sister Ayesha, come down to our tent and invite us to dinner, having seen me paddle in. In their home, a rustic cabin, their mother, Kimiko, with her long, black, almost Oriental hair, cooks us a fabulous dinner; a miso soup with a big green salad. The vegetables all come from their garden. The family has lived here eight years. They began by roughing the outdoors, knowing little. Now they gather seasonal fruits and vegetables to preserve. They can and dry salmon for year-round consumption. The kids boat to school through Surge Narrows to Sonora Island.

"Surge Narrows?" I ask, discovering the pass I paddled through where I met the dory. That pass rips as fast as twelve knots. And I didn't even know it. By chance I timed a perfectly slack tide. "I bozo'd and lucked out."

After dinner I pick up a copy of Mother Earth News from the coffee table. Bloody people in El Salvador, the cover picture. I put the magazine down without reading. Kimiko mentions the Cubans blaming the U.S. for biological warfare. The news is so bad and happens so fast that while we stay in the woods we keep missing the latest grim. We all agree it's nice to stay ignorant in the woods, but any real disaster will get us all. Kimiko expresses one of the greatest local concerns. "The oil companies want to start shipping their oil tankers through the Inside Passage. One spill would ruin everything."

The water life thrives now, but it won't be this way forever. We will use tug boats to stop the tankers if it gets down to that. We can't let the rich spoil the richness."

Kimiko tells us of Kayak Bill, when he used to have his camps. "During the winter he'd show up very cold. He'd know the good families around and they would feed him sometimes. He'd bring his own greens he'd gathered, many of which I didn't find particularly edible. He paddled around between his camps for a couple years just learning what he could eat and what he couldn't." We carry the dinner dishes from the living room into the only other room, the kitchen. A propane and two wood stoves heat the house. The kids sleep in a loft.

Ayesha sings from her song book. Aaron explains, "At school our teacher is very strict. We don't get any music. There's only two teachers in a one room school house."

Kimiko tells of Dorian living in Harriot Bay. "He used to teach and the kids loved him, but the rewards weren't enough to keep him here. Criticism of Dorian was hard because he was a friend of all the students' parents."

Kim explains her job. Five days at a time she works for delinquent kids in Campbell River. Her plans include a six month course on small motors and welding. "Then I can contribute to our community here. We have outboard motors and washing machines and chain saws. The more trades we learn, the more self-contained we are. When everyone first moved here we were all interdependent. Now we mostly do our own things." She tells that the man she lives with, Richard, is out with S.N.O.T. "On a climbing expedition. The Surge Narrows Outdoor Trips."

Aaron tells us a story of a midden, the Indian grounds where things were put and curses cast on them against anybody who ever disturbs the place. "One man found a bunch of old tools and when he put them in his boat and got away from shore, he sank."

Kimiko says, "Some of the local islands nobody will go on because of the Indian curses." Denis and I tell of the dead eagle we found, with all the feathers intact, yet we felt in our hearts we shouldn't touch them.

"Oh," says Ayesha. "Never touch the feathers of a dead eagle or something bad will happen."

"That's very bad luck." says Aaron, seriously.

"I'm so glad to see kayakers paddling these waters," says Kimiko. "You've heard of George Dyson? I grew up with his sister and..."

"And we climb up to his tree fort," says Aaron.

"George is focusing on children," continues Kimiko. "He wants to teach them the way of the kayak. He's building a fleet of a thousand kayaks and will change the world with them."

We thank the three for dinner. The kids call their mom by "Kim" and ask if they can walk us down the hill, but Kimiko rather they didn't. She sends Denis and me off with a bag of fresh lettuce and small sweet carrots. She says, "Feel free to use the house even if we aren't here. Use the stove, have tea, or whatever you need."

Clinging our way down the cliff in the dark I feel like a puppy wagging his tail with pleasure. All my expectations and what I see of life are so fine. What do I do with this energy? I feel like I could light up a whole Seattle building. I need skiing so much for an outlet of this energy. On skis I fly, fast, anywhere on the snow. Skiing is a perfect tap and a perfect release.

As I lie here in my dark tent, I hear noises. Branches break and I remember the curse stories the family told us. With no wind, and such a small island that no big animals really live here, I wonder, as I fall asleep, what could break such a big branch?

July 29, 1981

The kids come down early to wake us. Ayesha brings two of her little girlfriends. The three females climb in my tent and attack, giggling. I love every second of it. Aaron goes to Denis' tent and gets philosophical with him... but I never hear the details.

Sorry to leave such nice people so soon, we paddle away under clouds on calm water. After clearing Surge Narrows in the flood tide flowing like a river, we soon encounter three fellows from Big Bay on local Stuart Island. They are guides for the fishing camp there. First they barrel by in their aluminum work boat, then they cut their engines and wait ahead for us, ready to serve us beers. We drink and laugh with them for an hour. As they move on, we can hear their laughter for a long time.

We meet Sunflower in her sailboat, a woman Denis had already met days before. On to Brenton Islands, we set camp, catch fish, and grill pizzas for dinner. Piling fish, cheese, veggies, and spices on bread, we feast by our campfire. Denis tells me of the restrictions on fires now posted.

July 30, 1981

Millions of slugs attack this morning. Since the Brenton Islands contain several separate islets, I name ours Brenton El Sluggo, in honor of the space creatures.

Our paddle to Harriot Bay is short. We meet Dorian, the school teacher Kimiko told us about. He runs a canoe rental and lives next door to the store where I bought the prune juice a week ago. He's happy to let us stash our kayaks while we head to Campbell River on the ferry boat to meet Laura. She arrives tonight.

Dorian, a big brown haired and bearded school teacher, wears a flowered kimono and limps from an ankle twist and leg burn. He fell off his motorcycle. Marian, his girlfriend, also burned her legs in the same accident. Her long, brown hair hangs below her shoulders. She tells us she teaches locally also. In line with summer VD, we chat, play lots of badminton, drink beers and pass the day. Marian drives us to the ferry, explaining that they saw us the day before as we paddled so relaxed after Surge Narrows. Her parents, who she escorted in their boat, felt we represented the nonstressed lifestyle of the islands.

Of course our rendezvous with Laura is at the five cent salad bar. When I first see her, in her white summer dress, I notice she's very tan. I hug her. All three of us hug, then chat and drink and eat.

We return by ferry to Quadra Island. One of the laughing boys from yesterday's aluminum skiff gives us a ride in his pickup truck back to Dorian and Marian's.

Now sunset, we dance to Bob Marley, in his memory and to his positive vibrations. Dorian pulls out a guitar and I follow his songs with my recorder. For the first time I actually feel I contribute to another musician rather than detract. My ear learns. Until three in the morning we party, then finally fall asleep outside.

July 31, 1981

The first thing I notice this morning, waking up outside next to Laura, is that my bear bracelet, the leather strip she tied around my wrist at the locks on April second, has now disappeared.

Denis and I decide to paddle Laura out to Brenton El Sluggo. I paddle the two miles alone and leave all my gear then return to load Laura and her backpack. We paddle with her sitting in front of me.

Talking, I learn some sad news from home, of Petter Ring's death. I taught in Petter and his wife, Nancy's ski school for several years, starting my senior year in high school. They conceived of Powder Pigs, the children's program, at Snoqualmie Pass, the idea to make children feel important and thus learn quicker. I had adopted Petter and Nancy as a second set of parents. Now I'm awed, with no response I can share with Laura. We paddle quietly.

Petter gone forever? My memories of him are now my lasting treasure. He died in a plane with another friend, Don Ostrom. Laura tells Denis news of the death of a best friend's mother. News seems so sudden when friends die. I haven't been exposed to many such losses. Maybe life just melts into death as a glacier melts into the ocean, into a unified soul, but handling death is not the task of the deceased but of us survivors.

I stop paddling and hug Laura, holding her for long moments. She resumes paddling while I lean back and look to the sky... Blue... Blue. I've been told the sky is the limit. Was that supposed to mean we can achieve those great highs with desire and effort? My willpower gives me ability to reach beyond ordinary conceptions. So now, in honor of Petter, I cry Bullshit. The sky is not the limit... the sky is but a threshold. I conceive of more, beyond and back again. I'm with the universe, the One... I am with Petter. Now tears run down my cheeks.

We reach Brenton El Sluggo. Laura glows with excitement. She loves the island, the waters. I'm so pleased with her response, her thrill with the eagles, for the shells and rocks. She strips down to bare skin and dives in the salt water.

In time, Laura pulls out presents; T-shirts with the Vacation Dynamic logo silk screened on. Under the VD reads, "Something for Nothing." She says, "I only made four, one for each of us and the last one I gave to Danny. I made it for Cha but Danny was there and deserved it."

"He sure does," I say. "Missing this trip after planning it. He talked me into buying a kayak, then he shattered his leg skiing. He'll make it for the last leg of the venture."

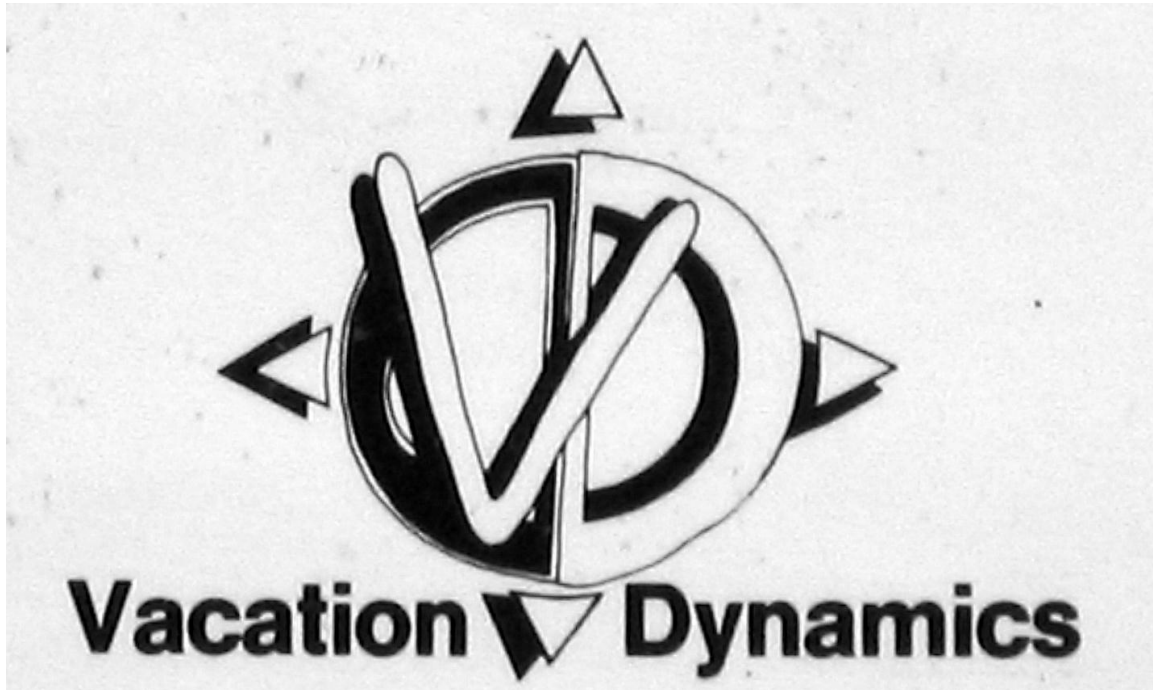
Laura apologizes, "I hope Cha won't be mad."

"Such is," I say. Laura pulls out more presents for Denis and I; underwear with "Ski Bums" printed on the ass. At Alpentel I always liked to point to the firm bottoms of women in their skintight ski pants and say out loud, "Ski Bums."

Denis, Laura, and I remain naked all day, swimming and playing. Every time a tourist boat comes near the beach, we stand in their view, waving. They go away. Nothing proves a perfect weapon for staking our territory. "We only dress for others," I say.

Laura tells of her summer work. "I've been gardening for the neighbors around Bellevue. Too bad while working I always have to wear my bathing suit top. It strangles

me. It's not fair guys can go without a shirt and girls can't." Laura's skin ripens in the sun, reddening. The one young deer of the island approaches, splotched with white on the soft brown fur. Laura's joy in the deer thrills me. She pulls out her hacksack from her gear, making Denis and I realize we haven't played for weeks... or months. Other interests have taken over.



Denis says, "Hack is more of a city sport, not for the woods or rocky beaches. We play later."

I sit and quiet my mind while Denis and Laura wander off. Time stops.

When Laura returns, her hair hangs down wet. She sits next to me and tells me of the swim. "I really wanted to swim out to the rock on the other side of the island. The water feels pretty warm but I was scared kind of, unaware of things under the dark water, out of my sight."

I hug her. "Sometimes I'm scared swimming in salt water too. Anything could be there. But I get really high when I do. The dark is worth the risk."

We talk of her coming year of school in Europe. She says, "You guys will come down in a couple weeks for the Grateful Dead. After that we won't see each other for a year." Tears hang in her eyes. "I really admire this trip you guys are doing..."

"You're going to learn so much going to school overseas, Laura. It will be the best. You know, sometimes I feel wrong with my emotions for you. I feel more like a father protecting a daughter, like I'm supposed to keep you safe. I worry about you returning home on your own from Campbell River. I think about you as a strong individual, yet I see vulnerabilities. Now you'll head off for foreign countries and be on your own. I feel almost an instinct to protect you, and I'm not sure it's an admirable feeling. In the past when we've tried to separate, I wouldn't sever the bond almost from guilt, like a job to protect you."

Laura says she understands and respects my feelings, but she wishes I wouldn't feel so. "You can't let that hold us together. I knew when we started together that you were a butterfly and couldn't be caught. That's why I said we should just call us an affair."

"But I called it a relationship," I say. "To me, we relate. It must be. I don't know how to deal with affairs."

"I don't either," she says as Denis comes to join our spot.

In the empty kayaks, Denis and I paddle out to catch fish for dinner, returning with a half dozen. Meanwhile, Laura had walked the beaches on both sides of the island, gathering trash in plastic bags.

We eat pizzas made from our four pound loaf of Oberlander Bread, a tightly baked loaf which doesn't allow much air in the pores. The package claims it stays fresh longer, being "Simply better bred." We pile on cod, cheddar and mozzarella cheeses, cayenne pepper, onion, garlic, and green pepper. Afterwards we uncap the bottle of tequila we bought in Harriot Bay.

Passing the bottle, I ask Laura, regarding her trash stash, "Is this all burnable?"

She thinks a second, then says, "Yes." I pile the litter bags on the fire and drink more tequila up wind from the noxious plastic fumes. Laura suddenly says, "Oh, no. There's an aerosol can in there, now I remember." I jump up with a stick and start pulling trash out of the flames.

Suddenly there's an explosion. Denis screams and flames and sparks fly. I hear metal shrapnel land seconds later. Denis slaps at his leg. I rub my wrist, but our burns are minor. We feel lucky. Pieces of metal landed a hundred feet away.

Denis and Laura, as the evening moves on, both from Bellevue High School, get into tequila gossip. They chat of people and parties and places. I wander off in my own thoughts. A couple hours later, the bottle empty, I wander off to bed, tired of the continuing high school gab.

Sleep takes me rapidly.

August 1, 1981

Laura and I awaken and talk about birth control and maternal instincts. I express to her my lack of faith in most methods to prevent conception. This conversation is one I've never found a conclusion to. I can't expect a woman to use the pill as the effect on her body can be too dangerous. Other methods seem too strange. Inside my heart, I reject making love without commitment. I say, "Seems like times have changed too much. Now we fight nature's designs..." My confusion I can't explain to Laura... nor to myself. I leave the tent for a morning walk.

On the beach I find the remains of our four pound loaf of bread and the cheeses. Ravens gather around the food eating. "Damn," I say. I might as well eat all the food now, consume everything now. Before I lose it or the birds eat it or it gets stolen. Mass consumption... the twentieth century way. Do I mean for sex too? Quick... feel good now?

Damn it, that's not the way. It is, but it isn't. Can life still be sacred? Marriage is true... good and bad. Idealistically it's the only way. A man unit plus a woman unit is. It is... I am...

Damn, I'm so confused. Laura and I don't crystallize together the way we should. We don't link up as my ideals say we should. But to reject her is to hurt her, and I want to hurt her not. Time and space away will help release the bond. I can't crystallize the love I share with Laura into a marriage. But I love her... I feel it, I do. Love is like snow. Both easy names but every snowflake grows differently, unique and individual. But not all love grows to the fine crystal. Our relationship, Laura's and mine, grew too quickly. We didn't incubate our love. The flesh NOW overpowered, the NOT-NOW was forgotten. Have I cheated her? Is the relationship really only an affair?

We pack the kayaks with Laura's gear and paddle back to Quadra Island so she can catch the bus home. She has decided not to hitchhike as originally planned. I help her find a ride to the ferry boat and I kiss her goodbye. Two elderly ladies drive Laura away.

Dorian and Marian decide to paddle one of their canoes out, along with two other couples to Brenton El Sluggo for a sunset potluck. Before we leave, I notice in Dorian's house a poster hanging on the wall. He took it off the ferry boat. It reads, "Do your children use drugs?" Children's scribbled comments cover the poster. One pen has crossed out children and written instead, "Parents." Another pen wrote as all one word, "Whatthefuckisthisshit?" One pen writes, "Who's fooling who?" Another says, "Nobody does." Marian mentions the need for a closing of the gap between parents and children, for a mutual respect. She likes the idea of kids calling parents by first names.

Denis walks the dock to the kayaks, several hundred yards away. I flash a couple hand signals to him and he nods, understanding. Marian, watching, says, "Did you just tell him something?"

"Yah. I asked him to bring up my water containers."

"You didn't really do anything. How could he understand you?"

"We live in kayaks together. Things work out." Denis walks up with my water jugs.

We enjoy the El Sluggo feast of steaks and hamburgers and vegetables, then bid Dorian and Marian goodbye, thanking them for the hospitality on Quadra. As they paddle their canoe away from our island, Marian says, "You and Laura sure make a nice couple."

I don't know how to answer this except with a truth. "Yah, she's very special."

August 2, 1981 Fourth Moonversary

Denis and I lie around, walk around, and remain undecided on our paddling intentions. We don't even ask one another what to do. We just hang...

I think more of Petter's death, feeling good that I'm taking the time to enjoy this kayak venture. I know if I die now, I won't have missed out on life as I would have if all my life was geared towards a retirement day. I am alive now!

So what about saving for a rainy day? I think I'll just use a raincoat and go out and play. Besides, the sun still shines on rainy days, I just don't see it. But I believe it. I don't see a lot. My senses are limited, but my thoughts aren't.

I sense Laura. I sense my unfairness to her in allowing physical love yet not intending that commitment to last. Does this mean I can't have a girlfriend unless I intend on sharing my whole life with her? Do I just wait in anticipation? Of what? I'm easier on myself as a single man than I am with a woman I don't intend to stay with. Is abstinence my only solution until the real snow falls? Maybe so.

The day passes. Eventually Denis and I know we will stay another night on Brenton El Sluggo. By our evening fire, I arrange a split log and my life vest into a comfortable chair. I shuffle rocks around until my seat feels just right... but soon the fire gets too hot. I stand and move, rearranging the whole mess. Sitting comfortably on a log, Denis asks, "Searching for the comfort zone?"

I quit and sit on the log next to him. "That about sums it up. Ah, the trifles of life; once I find the comfort zone, I desire another alternative. Maybe just the act of shuffling all this B.S. is the total fun...?"

I retire early to my tent and lie listening to sounds. The soft steps in the woods I assume to be El Sluggo's only deer. Is it lonely? Does it want a mate? Did it swim here? Will it swim away? I feel very strong and healthy and thank myself and All, as I promised I would last week on my sick bed. Being so healthy normally, I think I suffer so much more when incapacitated. Do the strong suffer incapacity more than those who live with it daily and never know the contrast?

A noise sloshes through my tent fabric... "Sschit ssschitt..." The sound of a slug inching his way. "What do you think of this earthling, spaceman?" I ask.

"What?" says Denis, outside but nearby.

"Nothing."

August 3, 1981

This morning ravens noisily search the camp, cawing. My watch reads 10:10, but then it has been 10:10 for weeks, ever since Seymour Narrows.

We paddle across Sutil Channel, over five miles of water in the hot sun. Kayak Bill recommended we stop at Marina Island to visit some friends of his, Doug and Diane.

Kayaking to the dot which Bill left on my chart, the northwest side of Marina, we find no residents. We head for the logged scab, the raped land stripped of trees. A nice cedar home lies in the center of the scab. Trucks, tractors, and machinery scatter, doors open, tools lying around. A man yells as we walk up the beach over piled logs.

"We need water," Denis answers, holding his water bottles in the air.

"Are you Doug," I ask, getting closer.

"Yes," says the man with a black ponytail and no shoes or shirt. A wood carved pendant hangs around his neck on leather. A seahorse earring, maybe ivory, hangs beyond his mustache. He wears no beard. Doug talks of Bill and of his old camp on the south end of the island. Looking at our kayaks Doug says, "Bill used to have tons of gear. His two man kayak was brim full. He overflowed our dingy when he transferred the load once. A big pot," he shows about three feet high and two feet diameter, "he used, I guess, to mash his berries in. He dried nettles and smoked salmon at his camp."

I ask about the logging. "They pay me for caretaking. No work," says Doug. "I just have to be here. We'll replant too. I bid for the contract." I ask if the removed trees bother him. "No, it's allowed for more berries to grow. The deer grow fatter now. We can log the new growth too, the alder, and sell it to the Japs who make furniture and sell it back to the states at four times the cost. The island's owner is a German baron from the Rhineland... he paid five million for the whole island. The logging contract alone brings him seven and a half million. He sends his son here for negotiations. Once they landed here in the bay in airplanes and all sorts of people came on land in suits and high heels.

They must have felt the way explorers did when first landing in the New World. We were only squatters in the beginning, but the owners took advantage of us being here. They like having caretakers and are willing to pay. I doubt if they'll ever tell us to leave. It's a good deal for everyone."

We walk up to the house and meet Diane. She's so tan, bare to the waist, that she looks Indian. Her hair hangs long and brown, her eyes glow a tropical blue. We meet their friend Mac too, a redhead with no facial hair. He says, "Good to see you again, Denis."

Denis tells me he met Mac on El Sluggo during the days we were separated. All three of these people work today on separate boats; Diane on her rowing boat, a seventeen footer on which she mounts an inboard engine. She epoxies over the newly supported hull and explains she doesn't plan on rigging a sail. Mac builds a half deck on his skiff and Doug totally rebuilds his double ended diesel boat. I don't go into their house, but dark cedar and windows reveal a home feel.

"Yah," says Doug, "the loggers will leave a junk yard that will take me forever to sort through. They receive and use 10,000 gallons of diesel per month when they work full steam. Now they strike, though. This island once acted as the central meeting place of all local tribes of Indians for Potlatches and ceremonies, so it's got good spirit."

An apple orchard grows next to the garden by the house. There's a work shed, an old camper where Diane and Doug once lived, and a blond boy with very blue eyes. He comes around the corner and I guess him three years old. His name is Quill. He calls his folks by their first names. Doug explains, "He'll go to school if he wants. I'll just run him over to Cortes Island each day, hopefully to Whale Town if they have the school going yet." Diane mounts an oak board for the gunwale of her boat. Doug continues, "There was another house here, and a barn and farm sixty years ago. They planted the orchards, but all got left during the depression. We plan on growing enough vegetables someday to sell some to Cortes. I want to plant grapes all over the hill behind the house for our vineyard; a wine paradise. I make beer now and have a stock on hand... we've got a whole life set up with all our projects."

Diane explains the boats, "We have to each have a boat. Neither of us can be stuck here. If one goes, the other can't be stranded." They say they live on the island alone, the only residents. They drink well water. Doug explains he moved his home when the logging started by putting it on log skids and towing it up to the orchard from the beach. "It could always be a float home now, if need be," Doug says with a confident smile. He tells that the loggers have ruined Bill's camp, so we shouldn't expect much. I comment how much Bill would smile when he talked about gathering food. "Good life," answers Doug. A power generator runs saws and tools for the three boat projects.

Regarding contracting the tree planting, Doug says, "I've planted trees long enough. It's bad on the joints and gives tendonitis from jamming holes into the ground. The back, wrists and arms suffer. It's good seasonal work, but I've got enough projects. I'll just hire the help I need to plant the new trees." Tattoos line his arms as he points over the property. Doug mentions the dry weather. "Even cactus grows on these islands."

Doug, Diane, and Mac work on their boats, their gears in motion, wheels turning, and minds focused. I try to talk to Quill but the blond boy treats me as if I carry bad vibrations. I trust children's instincts and I wonder why Quill acts frightened of me.

Denis and I paddle on. The south end of Marina is a rocky point projecting a half mile out from the island. Dozens of seals watch our passage. No Trespassing signs say the spit is leased for the oysters. I look back towards El Sluggo and it hides in the haze. We cross to the southern tip of Cortes Island and watch the sun set. Blue herons perch on the rocks.

We camp among dry thistles and sage on Cortes Island, feasting on our camp pizzas, listening to rats in the weeds. Occasionally the rodents dash into sight chasing each other over rocks. They stretch a foot long. To the north, on a hill, sits a big mansion. I tell Denis it's haunted with an old man rocking in a chair on the top floor... watching us. Doowah diddy!

We have six days before Powell River where we'll leave our kayaks so we can hitch south to Seattle. Such a twist.

August 4, 1981

This morning a rat runs in front of my tent. Earwigs crawl in my tent. I remember stories of them burrowing into brains through ears. How rude. I also recall a story of ants entering a person's nose and lodging in the sinuses... and bearing young. The person scratched at the irritation next to her nose for hours, the urge to scratch unbearable. The skin finally broke through and the ants came marching out of her face. How sweet. I wonder if she cried uncle.

The sun brings crimson colors, cloud ships ablaze.

What's Karma? Put out good, and good returns... put out bad, and bad returns? Denis sure puts out good energies. I read until I doze off again.

"Denis," I yell, half awake, with all the energy I can muster. He answers he's not feeling well, so the day we'll take off.

Now I sit on a rocky bench on my towel, padded with my life vest. The rocks vary in shades of gray, brown, white, and black. Many white oyster clusters lie around. A little crab walks along sideways, coming closer. He wades into a tide pool and disappears so just his knobule eyes peer out of the water. He submerges, soon returning closer to me, watching. I move and he quickly retreats, submerging again. My kayak rests near on a drift log. Above it the green grass and blue sky form the background. The sea glows a deep blue today as do the pointed peaks of the distant Coast Range. Green trees, white gulls. Green water where it's shallow and sandy.

I climb the bank behind camp. Denis sleeps. On the clear-cut above, I find many ripe salal berries. I squeeze one and it pops inside out revealing a blossom shape. I'm surprised that after years of being around these bushes, I'd never eaten a salal berry. There's so much to learn...

August 5, 1981

We paddle with the early morning wind, but soon the waves disappear and the heat wave blasts us. No clouds in sight. We follow the shore north along Cortes Island, past the haunted mansion. Close up the building doesn't look very scary. Nice homes line the bay. A pleasure boat comes close and a woman says, "Looks like work."

Denis and I answer the same time, "Nope, play."

I smell pine trees and dry forests in the heat. The scents remind me of Northern California. Before paddling into Cortes Bay, we stop and swim naked on a sandy beach, noticing a boat-fellow watch us through field glasses. We wave and smile.

At the Cortes Bay Resort we find they have no water for some hours, and no beer, and no bread. We hitch to Squirrel Cove, catching a ride with Rollie and Vi, a retired couple from inland Canada. They drive us to the store and almost all the way back, inviting us to their home in the bay. Later today.

Denis and I find the path through the dairy farm back to our boats. This is one of the only remaining farms allowed to sell fresh whole milk from the cow, a worker tells us. We follow him to the trail which leads us into the woods. The shade of the trees feels so nice, and the first blackberries to ripen twazzle our twizzle. MMM. We sit on soft leaves and drink a whole six pack of beer.

Back at the resort many tourist boats fill the harbor. A comic strip on the wall of the store shows a man and his wife, both fat and furious, on the flying bridge of a stink machine. They read a Canadian road map for a chart. The caption says, "Damn it, why don't they have Cortes Bay on here."

We laugh. Denis says, "Who's they?"

I say, "They take care of us. They tell us everything, they feed us, they can be bought..." The store's electricity went out, so in this heat wave the ice cream bars melt in the freezers. We accept jobs... eating ice cream... fast.

A man waddles into the store and says to the cute girl behind the cash register, "Why don't you have water?" The girl shrugs her shoulders as she counts another person's change out. The man raises his voice and says, "We have to have water, we have to do laundry and there's four of us. When will you get the water on?" He seems furious and the girl patiently lifts her shoulders again and says she can't predict the situation's outcome. The man reddens, saying, "Well, we have to wash clothes and expect to as soon as you get water." He leaves and the girl smiles at us eating our ice cream.

Back by the kayaks our pretty friend comes down to serve gas, telling a man and lady on their beautiful sailboat that gas rations are five dollars per boat. The woman frets to her husband, "Honey, we won't make it on only five dollars... we won't make it..."

"We just won't make it," I say to Denis. "There isn't any wind. I can't see it."

Denis says, "I haven't seen a sailboat sailing for days."

I comment to our girlfriend how warm the water is. She says, "I hate to think why it's warm," pointing at what appears to be a blob of sewage floating under a yacht. We bid the girl goodbye and she says she wishes she could leave with us.

Paddling along the bay we find Rollie and Vi's home, a nice waterfront spot with a rickety dock and a sunny porch. Vi serves us cold beer and we fill our water jugs. Rollie isn't home at the moment. Vi tells us, "For the last few years we've worked with kids. We ran a home for unwed expectant mothers, mostly sixteen to nineteen years old. They needed places to stay or hide during their pregnancies. We also ran a receiving home for beaten kids and unwanted children. Rollie was unique," Vi says proudly. "The only man in the profession. He enjoyed all the daughters. We housed some 200 unwed girls through the time. Nerves eventually got Rollie and the doctor said move away. So we came here to Cortes Bay, but once we retired, we started working as hard as ever. Tired and retired. We take care of thirty acres with several cabins and houses on the property. You know,

I've owned my own home and I've rented and caretaken and if I were ever to do it again, I would never own my own home. This is all we've ever wanted."

Rollie and Vi's home once floated. But now dragged up on land, additions have been added. On the porch lies refrigerators, stoves, ovens. "Rollie collects these for the auctions. He's the island auctioneer and everybody donates items. The next auction is for a pension for the elderly. Rollie gets asked to auction everywhere, and he loves it. He takes a few vodkas and gets up on the stage for a good time." Vi giggles as she imitates Rollie, "He says, 'three dollars, do I hear three fifty, do I hear three fifty,' and someone in the crowd yells, 'Hey, Rollie, you already got four dollars.' He gets the whole audience laughing and crying at the same time. Rollie says there's a sucker born every minute and they'll buy anything."

Vi says all her kids have married except one. "She's twenty-six, blond and pretty and she's in no hurry." They entertain guests a lot and plan on living the rest of their lives here. Rollie returns home and shows us his birthday cards. He's just turned sixty-five.

"Yep," he says, "I start on the brown envelope plan now, heh heh. I deserve it after being in the kid businesses for so many years." We get ready to leave and Vi tells us the temperature is ninety-five degrees in Seattle. Rollie says he has to go butcher a cow. "I used to be a butcher and people still call on me to hide and joint their animals. I'm not just a meat cutter, but the real thing."

We bid goodbye to our friends as Rollie pulls out his field glasses to check out a new yacht motoring into the bay. Vi says, "Rollie's disappointed because his field glasses haven't focused on any nudes yet. Now his best entertainment is all his Louis Lamore western books. He says they're better than T.V."

Denis and I paddle east to Mary Point, to the southeast tip of Cortez. In a long narrow cove we find a beach excavation tent spot like so many we made up north. We guess Cha maybe camped here. Pizzas for dinner. After the waxing half moon sets, the stars shine bright. We drink beer and sleep.

August 6, 1981

Another warm day with calm water and no clouds. We swim around the bay, the water warm enough to stay in all day, yet still cool enough to be soothing.

We paddle across the Stink Machine Freeway with an awesome view of mountains and water for miles looking northwest or southeast. We paddle into Bliss Landing where the docks and lots are private for families. One boat greets us openly and mentions many familiar names of owners here; of a Seattle Volkswagen dealer, the owner of Ski Acres and Snoqualmie Summit, a family from my home town, and others. They give us beers and we swim. We paddle on through the beautiful Copeland Islands. Many boats lie anchored and most boaters ask many questions. The common response is that they wish they had done or could do a kayak trip.

We sit on the Lund Pub balcony sipping beers among many locals. I lean over the railing and look down on a man, his wife, and child. He says the bar won't let them in with their six month baby. The baby sits on his shoulders and the mother goes to pet him as she talks with Denis. Suddenly the baby slides to the ground and whacks... and cries. "I thought you had him," the dad says.

"I was just touching him," mom says.

We eventually move to a table with about fifteen people. I introduce two people to each other, having never known either of them and they unfamiliar to one another. A matchmaker, I soon have the guy and girl convinced they should quit their jobs and sail his boat to the South Seas. I laugh the whole time as these two fade into dreams and already argue about details such as food and clothes.

Inside the bar, a group of fiftyish aged fellows all wear orange shirts reading "The Happy Hookers", silk-screened with a picture of a hooked salmon. The men all sing and a ninety-one year old man, named Billy, jams on his harmonica.

Denis and I pull out our sleeping bags and crash on the deck of an old house being remodeled on the waterfront.

August 7, 1981

We wake to the noise of a tourist town, but nobody bothers us in our acquired home. Paddling in the heat wave we catch up with two girls we met last night in the bar. They paddle naked in a canoe. Savory Island runs long and thin, the south side vacant with miles of sandy beach. Many nude people picnic and walk and swim. To the south we see a mirage on Texada Island, the waves of heat revealing what appears to be Greek ruins, hundreds of feet high, undulating pillars and columns rising far higher than the island really could. I watch for a long time, amazed by the visual distortion.

Denis and I jog in the waist deep water to get our legs pumped up. In the distance we see Powell River, clean and pretty, the pulp mill shut down due to the lumber strikes.

We share fire with folks from Port Townsend, Washington. Returning to our packed boats in the dark, we decide to just lay blankets and sleeping bags on the sand. The moon now set, the sky glows with the condensed strip of our Milky Way Galaxy. The big dipper points to the north star, and my lady Cassiopeia passes on her way.

As the tide rolls higher, the sounds of pitter patter on my visqueen mat makes me think rain. Boing... boing... Sand fleas! Aaaaahhh... They boing all night, bouncing on my head and sleeping bag, aimless, careless, without direction or purpose. The creatures live to boing, and they do. Lots. And they are haunting. I cover my head and close my mouth and sleep with the frightening monsters as best as I can.

August 8, 1981

Awake at pre-sunrise, both Denis and I exhausted from the sand fleas, we lay our blankets and sleeping bags over drift logs to make a fort. Late in the day this will be a retreat from the heat.

We swim for miles back and forth along the sandy beach, now and then rising up to our feet in shallow water for some thigh pumping runs. I dive back under water for a long time, feeling my physical body freed from the limits of gravity. Within the fluid I gain access to a three dimensional world as the fish and birds know, free as eagles and porpoises. I swim without air, using the water's resistance to propel, scouring the sandy bottom and drifting at mid-depths. Breaking the surface threshold, I breathe and dive once more. Now I'm a whale swimming in rippling reflections, in undulating waves.

I find Denis lying face down in the cool moist sand, naked. When he stands he points out his "VD hose hole." To relieve his body's weight, he's dug a hole so his unit

dangles below. We dress and walk over the top of Savory Island to the other side, finding many homes, people, and yachts, almost like a crowded California beach with ice chests and nice chests. We walk out on the pier where kids jump about twenty feet down to the water. I climb onto the wharf's railing, face forward and throw a forward facing back flip, a gainer... for myself and for the kids watching... Ego... I go...

We trek east, up over the cliffs of Mace Point and find more cliffs, much higher. Kids gather around getting nerve to jump and checking out safety. One brave boy jumps then returns to a higher spot. Denis and I sit and watch. The boy jumps again, this time off a forty foot cliff. I stand on the spot where he jumped and the kids all yell for me to... so I do. Throwing upward, away from the rock, I look and arch back and follow through a slow gainer again. The water comes into view as I rotate half way round, still upside down. I slice into the water almost perfect but just a couple of degrees forward so I can feel the water's resistance. Not in my plans, but I feel fine. The kids act very pleased and I feel a bit stupid for performing inverted air from such a height without warming up to it. For a moment's adrenalin and a pleased crowd I could whip my neck. But the water's so clear and inviting and the sun so warm. The rocks feel so fine on my bare feet and for some reason, I know my foolish acts will never end. Such is.

Continuing our walk around the island, we find the two girls, Leanne and Cheryl, who visited by canoe yesterday, sitting with a fellow named Allan. The girls look burnt on their titties from yesterday. Allan's tan glows dark to his waist then his skin remains white to his toes. We join them for stories. Cheryl and Leanne tell of their plans to bicycle down to California three days from now and Allan talks of the eighteen foot sailboat he lives on. It's packed with a year's supply of canned foods. He plans to sail to the South Seas from his house on Orcas Island.

Denis mentions to Allan that we met Steve and Mary as they rowed north to Alaska. Allan says, "Oh, did Steve ever put on those lee boards? He's taking chances without them." With his blond ponytail hanging, his sparse beard, and chipmunk cheeks, Allan explains he used to be Mary's boyfriend before she rowed around Vancouver Island with Steve last summer. The girls remain quiet as Allan talks, "Yah, I've got all my carpenter tools aboard my boat so I can work whenever necessary and wherever I need money. I'll never work full time for anyone again."

Two kayakers, one of them who walked by yesterday, paddle up to shore. Their boats are small white water kayaks with stabilizer fins they mounted themselves. Darcy and another Dennis say they've kayaked from up north, almost Cape Caution, to here. "We've heard about you guys the whole way," says Darcy. He points to a dory sailing south and says, "We met those people in that twenty-two foot boat. They've been chasing you since Ketchikan, hearing wild stories. They want to run into you sometime."

Darcy strips off his clothes and the other Dennis wanders away, shy. Darcy's arms and face burn red to his T-shirt lines and the rest of his body is as white as a cloud. Conversations stop and the girls wander away, seeming uncomfortable with the newcomers. They return dressed. In tennis shoes only, Darcy walks down the beach. I watch him off in the distance, passing clothed families and picnicking old ladies and sand castle building children. I feel embarrassed for him. Cheryl, Leanne, and Allan paddle away and we bid them goodbye. Denis and I start dinner.

In the twilight the other kayakers join us. Darcy tells stories which Denis and I have a hard time believing, of averaging five knots in their white water kayaks while

bucking wind and current, of surfing for a mile in breaking surf waves with tubes and not getting wet. He mentions they visited Echo Bay and saw Judy's cedar kayak. I say, "Isn't that the greatest place! The locals are the best."

Darcy looks at me shocked and says, "Not the people we met. They were so uptight and didn't even invite us into their homes." I ask the other Dennis how he likes the kayak trip and he just says it's alright.

"Where are you going from here?" I ask him.

"Ask Darcy. He's making all the plans."

"Don't you decide together?"

Darcy answers "No. He's never kayaked before and doesn't know much about these waters."

Denis and I excuse ourselves from the guests and climb into our individual tents. I'm happy lying here alone, listening to sand fleas bounce randomly outside. Such boingers!

August 9, 1981

Darcy wakes me early to say they are paddling to Powell River and they might see us there. "Great," I say, as I squish a sand flea under my thumb. No need for random boingers. The sand flea pops under the pressure and many tiny sand fleas going away, pink boingers bouncing from the womb. Hundreds flit the outside of my tent walls. I lay back and try to recall the dream Darcy woke me from, of travels through strange times and spaces... where was I?

Denis and I join for breakfast and look at the snowfield high on Vancouver Island to the west. "That must be Forbidden Glacier Plateau," I say.

"I like that name," says Denis. "It makes me want to go there."

We pack slowly then paddle south to Powell River, stopping to swim at Scuttle Bay in the heat. We slip from our kayaks into the green water. House yards have been cleaned of the big rocks down to the sand. "I bet one owner did it, then they all had to," I say.

Paddling on, my stabilizer breaks and hangs in the water. Denis can't fix it so I do without my kayak's only moving part. At Powell River we notice a dam which keeps us from paddling up to Powell Lake, the destined meeting point with Cha. We had planned on leaving all sorts of messages there for him so we could miss the rendezvous and head to Seattle. Seeing no logical tourist town, we paddle two miles further to the ferry dock and the harbor master's office. I call the Powell Lake Resort and leave messages there, setting August 19 as the new meeting date. I leave a note for Cha with the harbor master; "Sorry we missed the deadline, but we're on the Dead Line." I don't mention Seattle or the Grateful Dead Concert. Denis and I can't decide where to safely leave our loaded kayaks.

Up in town we run into Darcy and the other Dennis again. They say a boat at the docks was looking for us, that they know where Cha has been. We go down and meet Marvin and Dot Gluver who say, "Oh, yes, Cha's been around for weeks. He's been with Bill on the Taihoa. We all traveled up Princess Louisa Inlet and had a great time."

Dot says, "Cha's so cute. I think he was kind of homesick. He called us Mums and Pops."

"My mom's name is Dot too," I say.

"So's mine," says Denis. Dot likes this.

She continues, "He was so happy to have a family. He's so cute."

Marvin shows me through his boat and tells me he's sixty-one years old... and retired. "I was postmaster and that just tired me out. We live in Sidney and just travel on our boat." I ask him how he keeps in such good shape. He proudly responds, "Oh, I smoked for forty years, but I quit. I used to be a professional swimmer and I still swim all the time."

"It shows," I say. "That's my goal, to be a tough guy when I'm sixty."

Marvin and Dot arrange for us to stow our kayaks by the Taihoe where Cha still keeps his base. "Cha's up paddling on Powell Lake right now so you can leave your boats and a note for him. Why are you going to Seattle?"

So I don't have to explain my own random boinger tendencies, I say, "My girlfriend is heading to Europe to school so we're going to go see her off."

With sticks and Marine-tex I mend my rudder. We stash our boats at the Taihoe sailboat. Through a window I can see a note Cha left for Bill, the owner.

We meet up with Darcy and the other Dennis in the Marine Bar and watch a strip show while drinking beers. Denis whispers that the well built stripper keeps giving me the eye. I jump in my seat and say, "TWANG!" As she dances, her music machine breaks and she's caught with her pants down. Embarrassed, she dresses while several men from the crowd offer to help fix the machine.

Darcy says, "What comes first, eh, the woman or the oyster?" Nobody laughs and he excuses himself from the table, "I've got to go to the bog."

Denis tells Dennis and me about an advertisement he saw in Campbell River, of a pill people can eat to get a tan. I respond, "That's just what I need, to eat a skin dye and have it come out through my pores. Sure, why not, I'm American, I'll eat anything."

The other Dennis says, "That's why Americans eat so much, because they enjoy shitting. The great American Orgasm. In the Far East, they don't overeat and shitting is only a function."

"They shit in the streets and wipe with their hands," I say.

Denis says, "Yah, shitting does feel good, it's one of those sensations you could market." He imitates an advertisement, "Eat our pill, for that real shit sensation... without the mess, without those unneeded calories..."

The other Dennis drops his shyness and tells, "I've been apprenticing now for three years and finally have my papers. I plan on getting a job right away. It's kind of what my folks want me to do."

"What do you want to do?" I ask.

"I don't know. I used to think I had to go right to work. I'm just taking this month off. But now I see you guys and start to wonder. I've never even thought of anything like Vacation Dynamics."

"A lot of choices," I say.

"I don't think my folks would ever accept me if I just started doing nothing. Where do you guys get your money, anyways?"

Denis answers for us, "Seasonal work."

"But it takes more to keep going," the other Dennis responds.

I tell, "When I was twenty-one I got involved with buying and remodeling a condemned building in Seattle."

"Oh, so you do have money. I thought Vacation Dynamics means not making money."

"Vacation Dynamics is nothing," I say.

"But you said you have lots of money."

"I did not," I say. "I've spent all those savings now. I like projects where I can see an end and a change. I want to write my book, then leave and travel around the world. I like money to buy myself my own time."

"Oh," says the other Dennis as Darcy returns. He sits and the table goes silent. I think of the assumptions the other Dennis made of my life which I negated. Could Cha do the same thing about me? Maybe Cha sees me as the things he's been taught he couldn't do all his life and maybe that's why he punched me that night on Lake Washington. He fought the extremes in himself and I represented one. But I don't feel extreme. I just try to live a life that I value. I'm glad we've heard news that all is well with Cha. Why do I feel so responsible for him?

Darcy comments, "You know, us four are the only ones kayaking these long distances. Nobody else is even doing it. They're scared. I mean, what we are doing is blowing people away."

My partner says, "You'd be surprised. We've met quite a few people out there paddling around."

"I haven't heard of anybody else," says Darcy.

I say, "Didn't you just hear Denis?"

We drink several more beers. Darcy says, referring to a VD title, "I want to be Director of Reggae Telemarking."

"I'll write that down," I say. "What do you want," I ask the other Dennis.

"I don't know. Personally, I'm too spaced right now to think," he says.

"Okay, I'll write you down as the Director of Personal Space," I say.

"I like that," he says. We all shake hands goodbye and Denis and I run to the ferry boat with our knapsacks and a case of beer.

Chapter 14

"Living Dead"

August 10, 1981

As we board the 8:45 evening ferry with beer in hand, the loading attendant jokes, "I'm a lawyer, I'll take your case."

I keep walking and say, "Sorry, no drinking in court. All aboard for Courtney." Our heads are full of beer. We walk, laughing through the ferry and spot two girls laughing and swabbing the floor. We laugh right by to the front deck and sit just below the Captain's window. The sun sets that same red grenadine sky. Three wet crew members run by with buckets filled with water. One girl sneaks up behind a fellow and drenches him. She smiles at us and says, "It's one of the crew's last day at work. We're celebrating." She runs on.

After a beautiful ride over the Strait of Georgia, past Texada Island and nearing Comox, I confront the two girls and ask for a ride with them to Courtney, the town on the Vancouver Island Highway from where we need to hitchhike. They say they will pick us up in front of the terminal about 15 minutes after unloading.

So the girls drop us off at a local bar and they return to another one where their whole crew parties a goodbye celebration. Finding I left my recorder in her truck, I call the bar and ask for the girl. She says she'll bring the recorder to my bar.

Denis and I drink beers and laugh with the Courtney and Comox locals. I con five girls into taking Denis and I along to a disco with them, a locality right on the highway, still two miles from here.

In the disco we dance and get in trouble several times for being barefoot. The barmaid from the last bar says my recorder showed up. "I'll get it in a week," I say.

The crowd grows. The locals. Everybody knows everybody and all are friendly with Denis and me. Finally the bar gives "Last call."

"The river," several folks yell. One of the five girls tells Denis and me to follow to the river, that we can camp there. "Everybody's going swimming," she says.

We follow twenty-five crazies over a bridge and through a park to the river. Everybody strips down and dives in. The water flows dark and fresh, cleaning the salt and dirt from my skin and loosening my matted hair. People laugh and scream and eventually leave. Denis and I sit down under a tree and laugh. "We are only a hundred yards from where we wanted to be hitchhiking in the morning." Our sleeping bags rolled out on the grass, we fall asleep instantly.

August 11, 1981

It seems to me, lying in this park, the river winding its way along the mowed grass, a man picking up trash left by riverside parties, that religions are based on the question of whether the momentum of our biological order, our life, our mind, our soul, if that aura, that energy beyond normal perception, is an energy that continues past bodily death. Religions try to relieve the empty feeling of the survivors and say the soul continues on to merge with the universe. Such thoughts to wake up to! I actually look

forward to dying, just to experience it, but if I have one life to live, I am going to fulfill it here and now. I can wait for my eternal orgasm. Now I live a lifelong project.

I jump up and walk over to the litter man. "How's it going?" I say.

The middle aged fellow, working slowly but steadily, replies, "Business is picking up, but then I'm outstanding in my field."

The man makes no comment about us sleeping in the park; I mention the warmth of the river. "It's glacial run off from the Forbidden Plateau," he says, looking up to the mountains, a great snow field sitting high above Courtney. "Indians named it that based on superstitions of the deaths of many Indians up there years ago. They say bodies can still be seen hundreds of feet deep through the clear blue ice."

"Wo," I say. I help the man pick up the beer bottles, some of them broken.

"I don't know why those kids have to break these bottles. I guess it's worth the trouble. I get a dollar twenty for every case of good ones," he says, loading up his truck and driving away.

I discover I left my cereal bowl in the five girls' car. Such is. Two boys on stingray bikes ride up and ride circles for a second. One asks me, all flustered, "What happened to all the bottles?"

"The man has already cleaned them up," I answer. "He's gone.

"Where'd he go? I've got to get those bottles." The boy looks around scared.

"He drove off that way," I point.

"I've got to get those bottles," he says.

"What'll happen if you don't?" I ask.

He just stares at me like I don't understand anything and says slowly, "I've got to, cause if I don't... I'll DIE."

"Boy, you really need those," I say.

He rides away mumbling about his mother and a bus and the "bastard old man".

Denis and I sit chortling and Denis says, "If I don't, I'll... DIE!"

After packing our knapsacks, we go to a health food store and buy fresh blueberries, tofu, peaches, nuts and granola for our road trip. I leave Denis to go buy a new recorder, one I can give Denis when I get mine again. I find the last one in town, a four dollar special, then I walk back. A guy and a girl, both with dark tans, lots of skin showing, and pony tails, stop me in the street. She says, "Are you one of the kayakers?" I answer yes and she says, "We're driving you to Victoria. We met Denis in the Safeway."

"Since we're neighbors, let's be friends" I say. In a half hour Denis and I cruise down the deadline, once again with our unused hitchhiking sign. Sky, the guy, from Tennessee and Jules, from Victoria, met at last month's Rainbow Gathering in Washington and now return from a healing gathering of herbs and life education up on Powell Lake. Darcy and the other Denis had mentioned meeting Sky and Jules.

Down the road. We stop frequently along the way to cool off with skinny dips. Sky and Jules are also smoothly tanned without lines. Even when we stop at a lake outside Victoria, Jules swims topless among hundreds of dressed city people. Us three guys wear our swim shorts.

I play my recorder for a long time in the car but Jules finally asks me to stop. I do, embarrassed to have bothered her peace. They leave us with directions to a festival in a Victoria Park on Sunday, for when we return through the city.

Denis and I bus from Victoria to the Sidney Ferry, the day now darkened with night. After setting up Denis' tent, we sleep, tired from all day in a car.

August 12, 1981

The night explodes with terror. We sleep directly under the takeoff path of the International Airport. The jets bomb our sleep. No wad of clothes can protect our senses. It's as loud as shooting the 75mm cannon to start avalanches. It's worse than childhood memories of frightening thunder.

Finally daylight. I jump from sleep with the jet blast off and wander down to the park's public facilities to wash, relieve and drink. Sleeping in their pink sleeping bags next to their bicycles, two girls lift their heads and wish me good morning. "How'd you like the jets?" says the one with sleepy freckles, her sandy hair as ruffled as my brains.

The other girl under dark hair and morning darkened eyes cracks a few quick jokes that fly over my head and the girls giggle and ask if I slept in the tent. "We were going to wake you guys when we came in last night but didn't know if you'd have a sense of humor. I'm surprised you didn't hear us screaming anyways."

"We were dead to the world."

I return to Denis. As we eat morning granola the girls, Donna and Barbara, ride their packed bikes over and ask if we want a ride to Seattle. Their car waits in Anacortes.

They head off to a cafe for coffee. Denis and I congratulate ourselves for successfully hitchhiking all the way to Seattle, without hitchhiking.

We walk to the booth to buy our ferry tickets. A lively girl in front of us is smiling and laughing with the ticket girl. I watch as she pulls out cash and pays for a whole bus load of people. She wears slacks and a red coat with a badge which I read out loud to her.

"West Tours. We work for them too."

"Really," she says politely, preoccupied with her tickets and money, putting them in the proper places in her wallet. She looks up and asks, "Tour guides?" with a doubtful expression on her face, seeing us barefoot in swim shorts.

"No, we work at Alpentel winters. It's a ski area West Tours owns."

"Really. I didn't know they owned a ski area too. That must be fun." She stuffs her wallet back in her handbag. She moves with the confidence of a cat. She smiles to us, a happy round face, dark hair straight to her shoulders.

"You like working as a tour guide?" I ask.

"It's the closest I can get to real traveling right now. I just finished college and didn't want to settle down to a real job."

"Really?" I ask. "Where'd you graduate from?"

"Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma." She looks at Denis and asks what we are up to.

We laugh because our situation seems a bit hard to explain but Denis says, "We're kayaking up north, but we're running to Seattle for the weekend."

"I'm working now, gotta go, nice talking with you."

I watch her walk away and feel a rare, if not new, sensation. I'm attracted to someone in a matter of minutes. Maybe I should... No. Shut up Mark. What would I do about it?

We wait around and talk to Donna and Barbara, who now have a flock of men around them. I mention we'll just meet them in Anacortes to make things simple. Denis and I indulge in caffeine buzzes. I secretly keep my eye out for the smiling girl. Sitting on a bench, I wonder if I could ever find her again if I wanted. I know who she works for. And she went to P.L.U. But what would I do about it?

We meet a fellow named Nick who has been bicycling around Vancouver Island and has bicycled up from California with two other guys. We eat and chat with these fellows on the ferry. We are lucky enough to have two musicians, a man and wife, he on guitar and she on fiddle, to entertain the folks in the sun on deck. I keep looking out for the smiling face. Even if the company wouldn't give me her name and address, I could give someone a letter and I bet it would get to her. I'd just explain myself. But what would I do about it? Nothing.

After several conversations with different people, I end up sitting with a mother and her daughter the last half hour. Her husband is out fishing. She's going to the coast to meet him. The daughter says it will be the first time on Daddy's boat.

At Anacortes the customs official checks us out. We explain our kayaks and that the eagle feathers stuck in our packs are sea gull feathers. I look around one more quick glance for the smile, but my eyes don't find hers. Maybe she's my Cassiopeia and I will cross paths with her again, and maybe then I could do something about it. But I can't affect Cassiopeia.

Donna and Barbara are wild and crazy girls. We sit in the back of the car listening to their private jokes. Barbara takes a pair of tweezers to the palm of her hand, wincing with pain, yelling out the window at some bicyclers, and pulls a sticker out of her skin. She turns around to us and explains, "Women have a low threshold to external pain, but we make up for it because we withstand internal pains men will never fully understand."

"I bet that's true," I say. On Interstate 5 heading south we pass a semi-truck with "Twinkie" and "Wonder bread" written on it. Denis and I laugh and ask the girls to pull the truck over so we could get our daily ration.

Barbara says, "Did you know Twinkies have a shelf-life expectancy of twenty-four years?"

"That's about our age," says Denis.

Barbara explains, "I used to work for them at the factory. I've seen more Twinkies than I ever wanted to."

"Denis wants to set a world record sitting in a box and eating nothing but Twinkies," I say.

Barbara mentions she doesn't look forward to going back to work tomorrow at the Nutrition Shop. Denis and I try to decide what we are up to.

"We could camp out at Luther Burbank," he says, "on Mercer Island."

I say, "I've never been there but that's right in the city and we'd be close to everything. We shouldn't call anybody, just not let anyone know we're home. We've got two days before the concert. I think it would be kind of neat to go on vacation and be a stranger in my own city."

"Alright," he says. "It's a plan. We won't call anybody and just show up at the Coliseum. We meet Laura at noon at the fountain, right?"

"Big ten four," I say.

Donna drives us to Green Lake Park, dropping us at the Espresso Stand. We thank them and wander about. A group of guys play hackysack, fantastic players, and we join them. They explain a national club they've got going, and their local club called Seattle Bigfoots. They give a few pointers, such as turning the shoulders towards the sack, no matter what position it falls.

As we walk around the footpath, skaters and bikers all about, Frisbees flying, the lake shimmering in the sun, a fellow stops us and says, "You guys the kayakers?" Shocked, we answer yes.

"Well, two girls are looking for you."

We find Donna and Barbara again and they say they just wondered what we were up to. Donna, for a couple bucks gas, offers us a ride to Luther Burbank. And off we go again with these giggling girls, they talking about a 71 year old man who took them sailing in Victoria then tried to seduce them out at sea. "He pulled my bathing suit top off."

"Active feller for his age," I say.

On Mercer Island Denis and I walk down to the Lake Washington waterfront and dive in for a twilight swim, feeling good to be back on home ground. Denis says, "Richard suggested this on Village Island, that we flash home just for the rush." We find a nice spot hidden in the brush, five feet from the water. Ripe blackberries vine around camp. We set up the tent. "This is no different than any of our other camps on this trip," says Denis.

"No change," I say. We are both thrilled.

We walk after dark, the park now closed, and we find some people on a point watching the sky and drinking beers. A party blasts across the lake on the Bellevue side. Denis knows the house; some friends of his. A falling star burns brightly overhead. The band across the water plays old time hits from the Beach Boys, the Beatles, the Animals and the Kinks.

"If we had our kayaks we could just paddle over there. It's miles by land," says Denis. Both of us have the urge to tell friends we are home. Thirsty, we ask the guys if we can have a beer, their ice chest full.

"No," they say. "We only have about twenty left and we want some to trade if someone brings down any pot." The moon shines near full, rising over Lake Washington.

"Oh," we say. After several more falling stars, a meteor shower these people tell us, Denis and I wander back to our camp and climb into bed, listening to the music at the party across Lake Washington.

"You know, Denis, your mom and Cha's mom are both within a mile of here, and my folks are within five. Maybe before we leave we should send them postcards of Seattle and say how nice the city is, since we aren't calling them."

August 13, 1981

I wake and leave Denis sleeping. When I return with two quarts of blackberries he is just sitting up. The morning fog lifts. We eat by the shore, talking of how we could live a summer around the Seattle area, kayaking from park to park, living with camps in a city. Denis mentions several parks like this one we could sleep in, reachable by kayak. I realize how little I know my own city. The freeways, sure, but these beautiful parks, no.

After vigorous swimming, we pack up and wander through the park, meeting many people, mostly younger, playing hackysack and Frisbee. I witness a mania for the Grateful Dead. For years Denis has been collecting their records and we've both gone to their concerts. I knew the Dead to be popular but these kids in the park carry lists of all their songs and make Grateful Dead buttons and chase the band around the country, going to all their shows, to San Francisco, to Colorado, to Portland and Eugene. "Deadheads" they are called. As we toss the Frisbee in a grass amphitheater, some high schoolers listen to Donovan and one girl tells me, "All my friends are turning back to the older music now, the groups of the sixties, not Punk Rock and that stuff." The radio sings "They Call me Mellow Yellow..."

I sprint off jogging around the park, over trails, on big lawns and by the crowded dock where radios blare twenty different stations. Well built high school boys and girls flirt with each other. I jog towards the entrance of the park and find the terrain a contoured spiral; small hills of dirt grown over with short cut grass winding round and round towards the center. I spring through this, banking up on the vertical, down in the trough, and back up the other side, like skiing down a gully or surfing a nice wave. Around the spiral to the center and back out, occasionally I fly off the top of a mound and kick my feet up like ski jumping, and land on the downhill side closer to the center, or further from it. Then I sit. Just sit. And empty myself. Sweat drains down my body. I remove my shoes and let air to my feet.

I wonder while skiing sometimes when I'm in dangerous positions, hanging from a tree over a cliff or sliding slowly over blue ice towards a crevasse, just why do I do it. But more important I wonder Why Not? I know my job is for me to overcome fear, to cleanse my life of unneeded anxiety. Like if I get small pox they just inject more of the same disease in me to cure it. My job is my fear vaccine. Maybe that's why horror movies are so popular, and frightening books, because people are afraid and need to scare themselves even more with fiction in order to handle reality. How would I be living in the heart of a big city, a metropolis. Why call it a metropolis? Metro is mother, polis is city. That's mother city. Mothers are supposed to be loving and caring, which I guess cities can be. And I guess Mother Nature is kind as well as violent. Mount St. Helens sure proved that. I still choose Mother nature over Mother city. There again, choice is my savior.

I walk back, carrying my shoes, and find Denis. He looks up and smiles at me and says, "I ran into Svia and she said we weren't here. I told her to keep our secret. She was with Laura just last night."

We pass the rest of the day blissfully vacationing in our home city. At night a free concert plays in the amphitheater. Denis and I now know many of the locals in the park. We end up sleeping at the same spot by the water.

August 14, 1981

After berries we bus to Seattle and ride the Monorail, which I haven't done since I was twelve. At the Seattle Center, thousands of people gather for the day's show. We meet Nick, the bicycler we encountered in Sidney. He needs a ticket. With a felt marking pen he writes on his bare chest, "I need a ticket." In ten minutes he has a ticket so he puts an "X" through his chest message. As the day progresses, other chest signs appear, following Nick's example, and other "X"'s appear. By the musical fountain, lined with

rocks and people, I spot Laura walking. "Huevo," I yell, an Alpentel signal, and she comes running over. She is very disappointed when I mention we hid out in the city for two days. "I felt you were here," she says with a puppy pout.

Lots of hackysack and lots of friends, old buddies and new acquaintances from our stay in the park. Inside the concert jams, and feels good. The music seems to float above the heads, an energy level containing every soul in the Coliseum. It feels like three different beats pounding simultaneously. Some of the music almost seems precognitive, sub-sensory, subliminal. Girls in long dresses spin. I float. The beat drives my senses, as I let it. I swear the Grateful Dead uses a heartbeat as the basis for their songs. Their music is so smooth and flowing. The crowd energizes, people dancing through the Coliseum, solo and in groups. I run around in only shorts, cigarette butts sticking to my bare feet. I squeeze through the crowd packed in front of the bandstand, and put my chin on the bounds of the stage, watching Jerry Garcia pluck away melodies, sending magic into the crowd, probably a magic he's aware of but can't even explain himself. The Deadheads are a cult. Turning around to look into thousands of mesmerized faces I notice Rob. The last time I saw him was when he escorted us through the locks in his kayak. He stands with another friend and as soon as he glances at me and recognizes me, I laugh at the shock on his face and I duck away into the crowd and dance around, floating about like a jellyfish.

During intermission I walk around bumping into friends. At one point my eyes focus on a white t-shirt with a yellow and black design. A VD T-shirt! I look up and wearing the shirt is my blond buddy Dan, who planned to kayak with me from the beginning. I see his leg still in a cast, but a walking cast cut below the knee. As I sneak up on him, Denis is sneaking up from the other side of the Coliseum.

"Hey" we yell, and totally shock him, he expecting a phone call from us tomorrow.

"What?" he says. "You guys aren't here." We explain and talk and arrange to meet later out in front of the Coliseum.

After the concert, a whole gang of Alpentel folk accumulate by the fountain, then we all drive to a friend's house. Nick joins us, throwing his bicycle into Laura's car.

At the Bellevue house we play moonlight croquet and laugh and tell stories and make plans. Dan will meet us on Newcastle Island outside of Nanaimo, in his cast, with his kayak. Danny tells us Peter, owner of Easy Rider Kayak, is looking for us to do a photo layout. He wants to fly his plane up to meet us somewhere.

By four in the morning the group sleeps outside, Denis, Dan, Laura and I close together.

August 15, 1981

Laura's not happy in the morning. "I wanted just you and me to go camping somewhere after the concert. We won't see each other for at least a year now."

"We're here now Laura. Enjoy." When everybody else starts getting up, opening beers and lighting joints, I merge into the party once again.

Leaving Nick lost in a strange city with our wild friends, Laura drives us away in her car. We bid goodbyes at the U.W. onramp. She will have a good year in Europe. She is still hurt that we didn't spend time alone, but I can't be her lover. And I can't be her father. Will she let us be friends?

Denis and I hitchhike, then catch a ferry to Orcas Island. Sleeping in the bushes, we have to wait until tomorrow for the boat to Sidney B.C.

August 16, 1981

Awakening in the bushes on rocks in my sleeping bag my mind crosses the death of a friend again. I see Petter's smiling round face, his cheeks puffed out like two plums, his mustache flying like spread eagle wings. He will play with us as Petter no more. The crashed into the high mountains of Oregon. I miss him. Nothing matters too much when death comes. Maybe that's what the line "Life is but a dream" means in "Row row row your boat"? What does it matter now of the menial choices Petter made. He felt like a winner. That matters. Now we, his survivors, decide whether he was good or bad, or a winner or a loser. What about his network of relationships, that spider web he wove connecting people and places and paperworks, will it slowly dissolve? At first his family and wife receive the most shock, friends and business partners are very sorry. But a year or two later most difficulties will be overcome. Maybe Nancy will remarry, maybe not. A generation later Petter may not be remembered too well, but be only a story. A century will fade him almost completely from society, though a book or art has some permanency to carry him forward through time. But five centuries later only a significant historical figure or classical artwork can carry him on. In my life friends who I met by being part of Petter's intricate web will always surround me. And I'm thankful.

Through the trees I notice the 9:45 ferry already steaming in. I wake Denis and we hurry on down for our morning ride to Canada. From Sidney, B.C. we ride a bus into town with plans to find Sky and Jules at the park. But we end up in the wrong park and the Sunday music there is big band. The crowd's average age is about sixty. We move on to another Victoria Park and find our two friends and enjoy music with them for the day. We also run into the man from the Stuart Island camp. He and his buddies passed us in a skiff with beer on their way to Harriot Bay. Later he gave Denis, Laura, and I a ride in his truck from the ferry to Harriot Bay. At the park people again bob solo or in pairs or groups, freely feeling the music, a celebration, like celebrations as old as man.

Jules invites us to stay at her Victoria home and we choose to do so. Soon I find myself in a living room listening to two guys in an intellectual argument. Oliver, Jules' roommate, discusses with a thin, long haired wiry fellow about life and its enchantments. I sit with my journal on a foam pad. Oliver says, "It's a light and we are all striving for it, all the teachings tell us so."

"No," says the wiry fellow, "it's more. I don't know what it is but it's a higher being we are reaching for, to join that being, to..."

"No", says Oliver, "I've been studying enlightenment since I was thirteen. I've read most of the literature that's ever been written on light and..."

I try to not listen to the argument. I write. The two fellows seem to be arguing about the same thing only with different words and definitions, like so many religions seem to be saying the same things. Only words maintain the differences.

Denis goes to bed early, as does Jules. Sky and I walk about the city, both of us strangers in town. We look at castles all lit up and stores and bars all closed on this Sunday night. Groups of people gather on several street corners sharing loneliness. We walk back home.

August 17, 1981

This morning I can't shake sleep from my brain. I wander into the kitchen and see the enlightened housemate. "Good Morning, Oscar," I say.

He treats me sternly, "You made a mistake, that's not my name." He continues buttering his toast.

"Oh, oops, Oliver, I'm sorry, not Oscar..." I say.

He walks out of the room without another word or smile or gesture. I feel squished. He overrode my "Good Morning," and left it squished. That's not enlightened. I thought such "higher consciousnesses" were supposed to lead to love and faith among man, a unity? I pace the kitchen. So we all have faults. I made a mistake and life is not balanced perfectly. I am not symmetrical like a fine snowflake. My legs are different and my right arm performs things better than my left. I grab a peach and bite into the juicy fruit and juice runs into my beard. "Good Morning," I say aloud and walk back to pack my things. I still feel squished, but I know I can't let other people's hang-ups throw me off balance. My balance is my own connection with nature's perfection, to the snowflake.

Our thanks and goodbyes and we hitchhike north with the first falling leaves of autumn. After three rides we are only 35 miles out of Victoria, walking up a hill, our thumbs out. An old beat up Camaro speeds up the hill about sixty or seventy miles an hour and I stop to show myself and my thumb. Denis keeps walking, his back to the car and me. Just as the man passes he slams on his brakes and I turn around to see him start into a spin in the middle of the road, his rear end heading right for Denis, who still isn't watching. With reflex speed, Denis jumps up and to the side. The speeding car misses his two knees by two inches. My mind will always remember the image. The car keeps spinning and does a full 360 degrees, ending on the shoulder of the other side of the road. "Bastard," I say to myself.

He backs the car up and yells, "Let me get outta' the road and you can get in." No apology. No recognition he almost crippled my buddy.

Denis and I both look at each other, both in shock, and signal him to get away. He backs the car down to us and waits for us to get in and I yell, "Go on."

Denis yells, "Get lost."

The man looks kind of hurt and I even wonder if he would do something crazy, like with a gun. "You don't want a ride?"

"No!" we respond together. He squeals his tires and screeches off. We walk on.

"My heart is still pumping," says Denis. "I'll feel better when we get back to our kayaks."

So we hitch and a few people pick us up. No long rides. After losing thumb faith, after maybe twenty short rides and 1000 pickup trucks who wouldn't even share the back bed, we eventually grab a bus for the last 25 miles to Courtney. We meet a lady who takes us to the bar to retrieve my recorder then drives us to the ferry and ends our travel day with faith returned in the kindness of people.

The ferry docks at Powell River at 5:00 p.m., the appointed moment to meet Cha. We see him waiting for us. With smiles and hugs, Cha throws us in a Datsun 240Z and drives us around his town, up to Powell Lake, talking of his wind surfing. We return to the docks, to the Taihoe, where Denis' and my kayaks wait safely. Cha tells sailing stories and drinking stories and stories of wild times between Desolation Sound and Princess

Louisa Inlet. The day I had paddled Laura to Brenton El Sluggo, Cha sailed right by us on the Taihoe with his skipper and friend, Bill Johnson, not seeing any kayaks. Cha wears a shirt that reads, "Cha, Cabin Boy, Taihoe."

With Bill the Skipper we all eat a fabulous dinner of hamburgers and salad, prepared by the faithful Cabin Boy, then we drive up to town to the local bar. Cha seems to know half the people. After midnight pizza we all go down and sleep on the decks of Taihoe, Cha selecting the music for the evening. "This bloody sailboat living is the best, eh?" he says, relaxed with his feet up on the rudder handle.

"Sure is," I say. "Goodnight, Cha."

I lie watching the clouds roll in, covering the twinkle of stars. I'm glad sun shine is only temporary. Likewise, my life is only temporary. The sun rises again each morning. I don't plan on coming back to life from death. It may be a possibility, but I don't plan on it. Death is a nice termination; the end of the round. With death always possible and inevitable, I feel I must get the most from life I can; to ski fast and jump high and kayak big waves. Extremes are a bonus way to experience life. And I have my choice of extremes. I enjoy the contrasts, from city to forests, from mountains to seas. I'm not sure I would like to carry a seventy pound pack and a fifty pound sled up Mount McKinley, but I bet with peer pressure and good guides I would. And if I die doing it... that's life. And then again, a seaplane could crash on my tent, and poof. Ha. I sing to myself, "No matter how they toss the dice, it had to be..." I like to take chances, like a pair of dice... paradise! Extremes can be only imaginary, like Cha's and my feud, but imagination is so powerful. So what if there is a fly in my soup or mud on my shoes. I sing, "So happy together, and how is the weather..."

The clouds keep rolling in. Now the moon hides, the stars lost to my eyes. Goodnight, Cassiopeia. I know you're there, I just can't see you. I slip into sleep, my imitation death.

Chapter 15

"Recycled Leg"

"I know we've come a long way, we're changing day to day, so tell me,
where do the children play?" Cat Stevens

August 19, 1981

We eat breakfast with Bill on the Taihoe then set out, Cha bidding Bill his goodbyes. The morning water starts out gentle as we cross from Westview southwest through Algerine Passage off the northern tip of Texada Island. The paddling feels good after a week away. Sensing a three kayak race, I am relieved as I paddle past a floating plastic Coke bottle and I see a note in it. My momentum carries me past it and I turn around, Denis and Cha stroking ahead full speed. With my knife I slice the bottle open and read,

"To those that find this I give joy and luck. I hope you have a nice time finding me.
Much love from Gya Devine. Sechelt, B.C., Canada, Sunshine Coast."

The note generates the good feeling intended and I sit watching my partners paddle nonstop around the rocks of Kiddie Point. I sit for another ten minutes. What's the hurry, Gringo? I watch the ferry unload several cars from the Powell River side onto Texada. I'd been hearing good words about life on this island and Lasqueti along our hitchhike and city stops.

I round the point and soon paddle into a growing southeast wind. Cha and Denis wait for me, paddling slower now. I feel I'd rather they just went their own pace. My rudder breaks again, the Powell River patch job insufficient. I must fight my kayak to keep it straight in these waves. The boat turns with the great weight. After a few miles of this, passing the Texada Mines, its tall machinery and gravel pits bare of vegetation, I call to Cha that we should take the day off, that bucking into a storm is not worth the effort. We wear our wool clothes again, the first time in awhile. "Denis doesn't look like he'd want to stop now, though," says Cha. I see Denis paddling straight up in his kayak, his normal strong posture of confidence.

"Let's head him off like nothing is happening and run him into that bay up ahead," I say. We speed up and come at Denis' starboard side and talk and joke and crowd him. He looks confused at first then says, "What's up?"

"Mutiny," says Cha.

"Abandoned ship, we're taking control," I say.

"You mean camp?" says Denis.

"Ten four, big buddy. No more buck buck today," I say.

We set up tents and watch the storm progress, waves growing and rain gaining volume. We are happy to have beached. By sunset the clouds to the west start dispersing so the sun's red cranberry juice splashes over them, the brightest red around the edges. The ball of fire submerges below the detailed strata of clouds. Waves from the south

continue to crash on our log beach. A dragonfly twits by and more leaves fall to the ground.

In Denis' tent we talk, "We left seeing ice, the end of winter," I say, "then a spring, bursting, then summer's heat and now we see the first of fall. I kind of thought our trip almost over, but now I think we are seeing the return of the southeasters."

Denis says, "Fall in the Northwest is the best. I'm looking forward to this last leg, eh?"

"Like Danny's last leg. I bet he's already waiting on Newcastle for us," I say. "Sure hope we don't buck a storm till we reach him."

"That will be fun having Dan with us, eh?" says Cha. "Four of us will be bloody crazy when we get to Friday Harbor. I can't wait to see the faces on the people when we go through the locks."

"You have to wait," I say.

Using the aluminum handle from a pan in my mess kit, I make a splint and wrap heavy fish line round and round my stabilizer to fix it. I remount it on my kayak, now convinced of its strength; the only moving part!

August 20, 1981

Cha stands outside his tent naked, urinating. I see how solid a tan line he has from being with people in clothes for six weeks.

A couple of logs floating on end so just the butts stick out of the water pass by in front of our camp. Denis says, "There's a couple of Deadheads just making it home from the concert."

"You're bloody right," says Cha. I wonder if I travel with moldable cheese, both my partners now using Canadian "Eh" instead of Yankee "Huh". And Cha uses "Bloody" constantly.

We paddle into the southeast wind without rain and get drenched just from the splashes. For three and a half hours we work down the Strait of Georgia and only cover five and a half miles, so we camp on Texada just south of Mouat Islands, which are just rocks in the water. The beach is soft; small round pebbles which give like a cushion under our bodies. Both Denis and I lay down in our wool Peruvian hats and sweaters and thick army pants and fall into a deep sleep, comfortable in the gravel bed.

Awakening later, I see Denis sleeping soundly. Cha is nowhere in sight. I walk up the hill behind the beach and find the remains of gardens, fenced in with chicken wire and driftwood, though too weedy for a garden to have been here this summer. I meet Cha up on a cliff and he says, "I found a cabin just up there, but nobody's home. There's a killer dog, a Doberman that didn't want me near. I was glad he was chained."

"I wonder if we are on private property?" I say. "They probably won't mind."

Denis and I join together on another cliff with our two recorders and play tunes together, the sun shining and hiding. The music sounds so nice to me as we join on beats and vary on notes. Winds gust to 15 and 20 knots, making blowing on the recorder difficult.

We venture up to the cabin and the killer Doberman pinscher. The dog paces on his chain. Denis says, "He's just a pup." Walking up, hand forward, he instantly makes a canine buddy. Cha and I laugh and we all pet the pooch.

August 21, 1981

The water is calm, the sky blue. After we pack, the Doberman appears over the top of the beach, standing high and mighty. We trek again up to the cabin and find Claude and Lynn, two French accented Ontario folks cooking coffee. "I see Ben found you," Claude says, laughing. "He's a real mean one." Lynn is laughing too and they invite us in for cups of caffeine. Their cabin is made of scrap wood, old billboards, clear plastic, and a big tent joins for the bedroom. Claude tells stories of his last year, "We spent the time trapping way up north and didn't see a soul except each other for the whole year. Most of the time we'd go out for the furs it was 40 degrees below zero. Now we spend our six month's vacation here."

Lynn says, "Claude's brother lives a couple kilometers down in another cove. They laugh down there even more than us." The room energizes with laughter, the funnies beyond any words.

Claude starts rolling spleefs and soon he has everybody smoking an individual one. They pump us full of coffee. An eagle feather clip rests on the table and Lynn tells us to take it on our journey. "We have lots of eagle feathers. We found one dead," she says.

They ship us off loaded with fresh garden vegetables. We trot off down the cliffs forgetting the eagle feather behind.

Into our packed boats we buzz south past Claude's brother's home, across Sabine Channel. We sneak through the tiny islands off the northeast side of Lasqueti Island, through the Avery Reef, past Jervis and Jedediah Islands, in and out of Bull Passage, the water calm, the day serene and magic, my soul floating above my kayak. Lasqueti shows us rocky cliffs and woods with earthy homes built here and there. The grass is brown now, dried from last week's heat wave. We round Young Point and head into six miles of water, crossing the Strait of Georgia over water so glassy it reminds me of the calm before that storm crossing Portland Inlet months ago. We cross paced for pleasure, and reach Ballenas Islands where in mid-May we stopped with Chuck and Eva on board the Marne to retrieve the anchor. That one job got us the ride all the way to Alaska. We paddle into the cove we motored into before, the day we united our efforts and hoisted the anchor aboard. The camp is in open field. We cook over a fire and retire after a twenty-two mile day, some of it bucking currents.

August 22, 1981

We cover the miles from Ballenas Islands across Ballenas Channel, past Yeo Islands and through Winchelsea Islands. Onward into Rainbow Channel, we kayak up to Newcastle Island. Walking around the island, we spot Danny's kayak, his stabilizer painted black with a dolphin carved into the paint. We find his dome tent set up and gear scattered about on a picnic table and the ground. Denis says, "Hey, look at this." He shows us the other side of the painted stabilizer. It reads, "Vacation Dynamics".

With his fishing pole in hand, Dan walks on the rocks on McKay Point, limping with his cast. He doesn't see us and several tourists walk around the trail. We yell and make lots of noise towards him but he pays no attention until we get closer and he recognizes our voices. With hugs of reunion and for Danny's dream of the kayak trip, a

plan he accumulated over years, then missed, he says, "I heard you guys yelling but said to myself, 'I wish all these people would shut up and I wish my kayak buds would hurry up'."

Danny is tan from living in Sequim for the last few months, his blond hair as bleached as ever and a ceramic blue eye hangs on a string around his neck. "I was supposed to have blue eyes and got brown ones instead," he explains. Picking up a string of fish from a tide pool, Dan leads us up to camp and we feast and party and make plans for early departure. Dan tells, "I saw the doctor and he told me I can take the cast off any time. I left it on just to make it easier moving my kayak."

August 23, 1981

We paddle this morning. Nanaimo marks our round trip, the full distance paddled between Seattle and Ketchikan. But nothing feels special about it, now a nomadic way of life.

On through Northumberland Channel I tell Dan of the nest on San Juan Island where we searched out the osprey, the great fish hawk. Dan tells, "We have osprey in Sequim Bay. I watch them dive from trees and pull salmon out of the water like an eagle. The wings are white on the bottom. They seem just as mighty as any eagle to me."

We paddle to Dodds Narrows at slack tide. Denis says, "You know, what we should do next is float down from Alaska in survival suits."

Our four kayaks flotilla together and Cha adds, "Ha. We could just float on our backs and have our sprout jars and peanut butter and apples tied to our chests."

"And use a kayak paddle and when we pull into the bars we just unzip the unisuit and step out in dry tuxedos," I say.

Dan adds, "Just get in the current and go to sleep and wake up at the destination."

We slide on through Dodds with almost no current and paddle on in the hot summer day, into Stuart Channel, down the west side. Houses scatter here along the beach, people sunning and partying this Sunday in the heat. Onward we go a few more miles to Yellow Point where we were told lots of tourists hang out.

"Let's stop and swim at that white beach," says Cha. We paddle over and dip in the blue clear water, a perfect Mexico setting, cabins behind us like tropical palapas. Several people lie around, mostly nude, sunning. Dan swims with his fiberglass cast.

Dan says, "It's going to be time one of these days to cut this thing off."

"You're with us now. We could move your gear," I say.

"Ya, let's cut it off," says Cha.

"I'll slice it with your buck knife," I offer.

"I don't know. But I guess today on a Mexico beach is as good a time as any," he says, retrieving the knife from his boat.

I stick the tip into the top of the cast and start slicing outward and soon Dan gets a grip on the fiberglass and spreads the gap. I slice, he pulls and we slowly rip his leg free. "March 9 to August 23," says Dan. "Five and a half months in this sucker."

"I can tell from the smell," says Denis.

We unwrap the leg like the best present Dan ever opened. "I sure can appreciate my body more now," says Dan. "This was really the first time I'd ever been laid up by an injury in my life."

"That surprises me the way you used to ski just as fast or faster than everybody else when you were on those short skis," I say. "Those were only 185 cm., weren't they? I remember following you through the woods and you'd fly off cliffs without checking the air out first. No way would I follow."

"I skied differently living at Sun Valley this winter. I skied 223's all the time," says Dan. "I don't think I ever skied less than a 215 in the Valley. That's the longest ski you'd ever really want at Alpental, it's so steep and all the cliffs and trees."

I slice a little more cast, then carefully grip and rip the remaining off. A man in a little skiff, after visiting two of the naked sunbathing ladies, rows up and says, "Break a leg?"

"Sure did, last winter. We thought this Mexican beach would be the right place to cut off the last of my cast."

"Too bad we don't have some champagne or beer to celebrate," says Cha.

The man says, "We don't sell beer legally today, but if you paddle over to the resort, I'll donate a case to your cause."

After another swim we paddle to Yellow Point Resort, where much of the furniture is painted yellow. People lounge around a big, clean swimming pool. Up above sits the lodge, built of fine old wood. Our man friend walks down as we sit by the pool, bringing us a case of cold Labatts, with some Old Styles thrown in. We thank him.

"I think he owns the place," says Cha. "He was telling those guys what to do and he walks with that pride."

We pop open the beers and sit by the pool and laugh. Dan's leg sits up on a chair, whiter than any part of our bodies, atrophied and lacking the sun's nourishment.

With sunset nearing, we paddle across to Fraser Point, sitting back, our legs on deck. We venture through North Cove into a long narrow stretch of water, stopping by an abandoned shack. Oyster shells cover the beach. Dump remains of the houses scatter; broken windows, old mattresses, scrap lumber. Our tents pop up in the yard and we feel isolated enough, though this region is more populated than we have kayaked for months.

August 24, 1981

Morning campfire burns in an old wheelbarrow between our four tents. Wind blows the tops of trees and the clouds return. Danny tells us of his Dad's job. "He's paid to make sure people have a good time. He introduces them to Mexico, starting with Mexico City. I go with him sometimes and it's a blast. He takes the students to the museum and the old cathedrals and the parks and monuments, then we move on to the beach, go to Puerto Vallarta or some place. He told me he knew of VD but still had too much guilt to define it as a way of life. His folks had always taught him to work for life, so he taught high school for years until he came up with the Mexico scam."

"Sure is a life style. I don't want to work," says Cha.

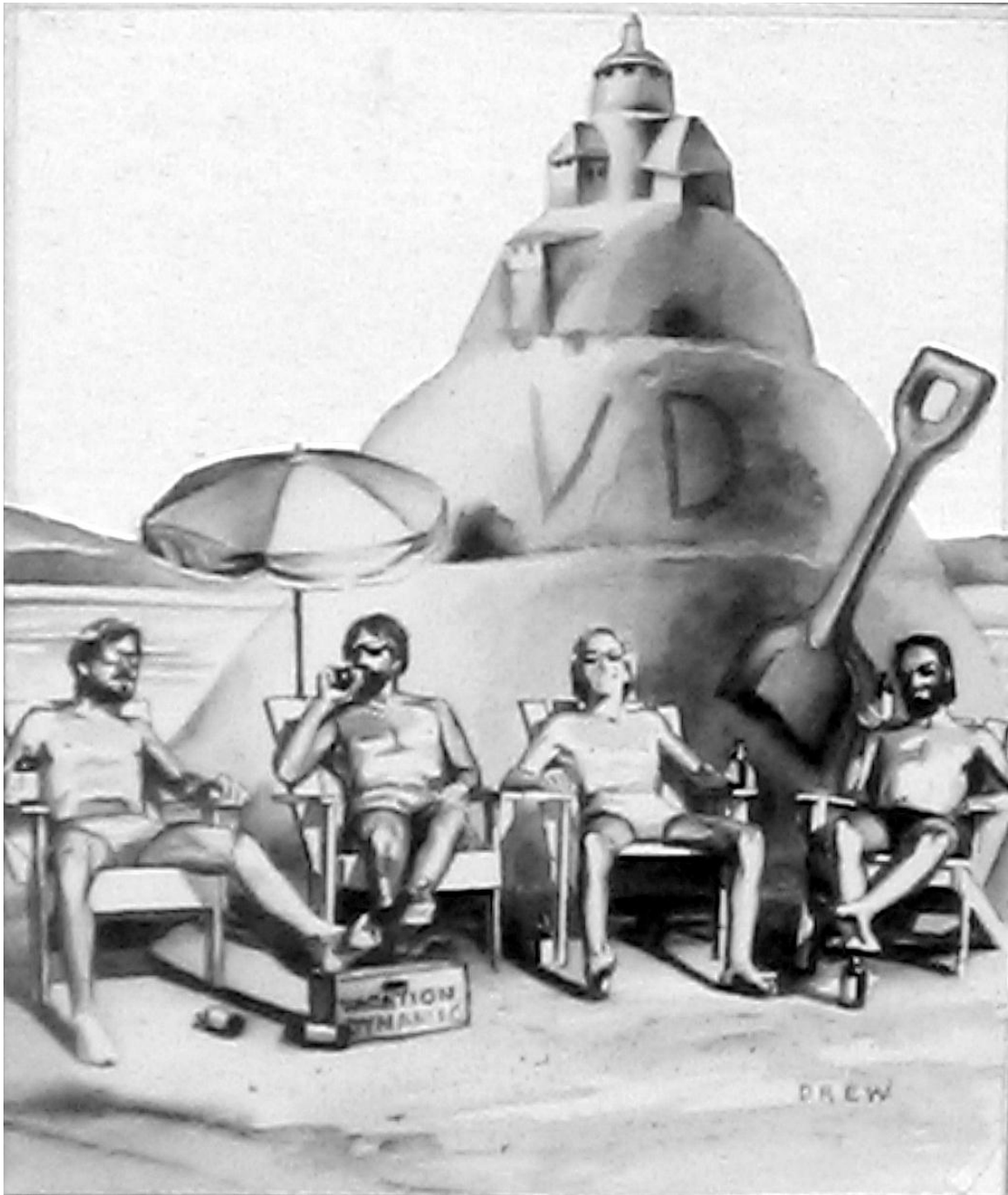
"I like projects," I say.

"I don't," says Cha. "Work's for jerks and school's for fools."

"That too," I say.

"You guys sure live VD now. Always a new camp, from city to the wild and back again without batting an eye," Danny says, stoking the fire.

"That sure was fun camping out in Luther Burbank on Mercer Island," says Denis. "We were in the middle of the city living no different than here."



Danny walks slowly, limping. "My leg already feels better today."
"I bet it does," I say. "Just getting air to it I would think helps. When I was in the hospital with my leg operation a nurse came in. They'd given me a spinal block and a bubble got into my brain or something and I had the worst headaches I'd ever imagined. The nurse sat soothing me with a cold cloth and told me to breathe deeply and slowly,

with my diaphragm. I had always done deep breathing to get rid of stress, but she reminded me how much oxygen is fuel, that slow deep breathing oxygenates every cell in my body and my leg would heal faster with the fresh nourishment. I thought I knew that but she sat next to me so sincerely and believing in breath so much, I got new inspiration."

"Ya, I should do that, but I think it will take time anyways," says Dan. "I think I'm going fishing for a big salmon."

"I'll go too," says Cha.

"You could take the fire pit with you and just cook the fish out on the water," says Denis, reclining, almost asleep.

"Just drag the wheelbarrow behind the kayak and cook whenever we're hungry," says Cha.

The guys paddle away, the channel now almost empty at low tide, only deep enough for the kayaks. Denis and I, the lazy boys for the day, crawl back to our tents for snooze time.

I awaken from my nap with an awe, an emptiness, at first like a longing, unfulfilled needs of love of a lady or more of life. Soon I feel strong with the emptiness, watching out my tent door at the water, grids of interweaving waves forming a checker pattern. The feeling is the freedom of a helium balloon, floating on drifts of wind, on the earth's spirit, like my security of being able to float away from camp and leave it behind, this abandoned shack, the trash heaps, the trees and oyster shells, the cable crossing sign on the far bank. Yet a balloon usually loses it's loft. I wonder if I will with age. Danny's Dad in his mid-forties still wishes he could be a bit more like a balloon, but maybe it's good to have just enough static to cling to a surface, yet still free enough to be spurred on with a passing breeze. The spirit to move on. I feel so lofty now. Will I later? Do I need an anchor?

A bee buzzes in, then out of my tent. I wonder what visions he sees through his brain's space blanket. Pine smells float on the wind. Yells of children's play rise and a boat motors somewhere. This is my life now and has been for a while. Do I write more? Novelty isn't so rapid and impressing on my senses now.

Danny brings new motivation to the group. He laughs and goes fishing and wonders what strange creatures make the noises we now accept as ravens. And Danny knows this life. He's kayaked for years and has canoed the whole length of the Columbia River through Washington. But what can I say new? I feel too simple to write my life in a book.

I climb out of my tent with my jump rope and stretch and begin strenuous exercises. I speed the rope, whipping it around faster and faster, jumping once for two revolutions, then quick steps, on for a half hour, forty-five minutes, an hour. I swing the rope, eyes focused on a sturdy tree trunk, slow deep breathing in my diaphragm, sweat and a strong heartbeat. I think clearly.

Cooling on my blanket, I watch Cha and Danny return, bottom fish tied to their decks. "Catch any salmon?" I ask.

"No, we weren't fishing for salmon, obviously since we didn't catch any," says Dan. "We met a lot of people though. There's an all girls' camp and the little girls asked us for dinner but the lady director of the camp was afraid, I think, of us being there."

I help Dan with his kayak and Cha tells, "And we met King Adam, who used to own all of this Island."

"The King of Thetis?" I ask.

Cha says, "Ya, and we told him about a rowboat we saw floating away out in the channel and he realized it was his."

Cha and Dan laugh, "And we saw the mighty hunters of goeey duck," says Dan. "So funny. A guy in a wet suit comes walking out of the water in big boots and carrying a hose. He looked like an underwater farmer. They harvest the goeey ducks with hydraulics. Those guys had the best time working. They didn't stop laughing and they each had the silliest grins on their faces."

"So do you two, right now," I say.

"That was a good fishing trip," says Cha.

We eat a fish feast with rice and veggies. A skiff rows in the calm evening up the channel from a sailboat in North Cove. A woman asks us where we've been and after a quick story, the lady says, "My husband's brother and his wife are rowing a dory from Seattle. They're up by Juneau now."

I think: the brother's brother, this is a wife, so I say, "Is your name Gropp?"

"Yes."

"We met Steve and Mary way up north a couple months ago."

"I just read a Juneau article on them," she tells. "It says they landed a hundred pound Halibut into the Harvey-go and had a basking shark follow them a few miles."

The night is a bit dark to even see her and after we laugh at the coincidence, she rows back to her sailboat.

Cha tells me about the girls' camp they visited. He shares, "I've never hung out with anyone better looking than me, like Danny. I don't really know how to handle it."

August 25, 1981

Afternoon we leave this Oyster Beach on Thetis Island and paddle into a southeast wind, crashing the waves which soak us in the first two miles. We paddle down to Kuper Island and Penelakut Spit where we first made our sign to hitch north, the Indian Reservation that the woman on Norway Island told us was public. We paddle over to her spot again, the brass eagle still flying on its statue mount, the flag blowing. The lady meets us at her dock. "Were you the boys that paddled north in May?" she asks. At her home we fill our water jugs and make phone calls. I call Laura, feeling like I burned her on my visit home, not having called her. No answer at her house. Mrs. Andrews tells, "My husband and I built our home in 1967 but he's since passed away." The home is filled with Oriental art pieces and she tells they had lived in Japan for 38 years. The bookshelves are stuffed with exciting reading.

We meet Charley and Anthony, elder fellows who also remember us from our northbound stop. "How'd you get these young handsones in here?" Charley asks Mrs. Andrews.

"Oh," she says in a melodious tone, fluffing her hair with her hands, "I just stood on the dock and said, 'Hey, yoo hoo, boys'."

Mrs. Andrews shows us her blackberry patches and the four of us pick a couple quarts each to stow in the kayaks. We paddle on, leaving the happy group. The kind woman's home and guest home are the only houses on Norway Island.

On to the southern end of the Secretary Islands, we camp on a point with 180 degree view south down Houstoun Passage along Saltspring Island and north to where we paddled our day's six miles. Our camp straddles a shaded spot bordered by two sandy beaches. In the woods a rain slaughtered house lies collapsed.

Wandering the woods, I find an ex-homestead spot with a broken fence and an orchard of apple trees. And now we each have a pile of apples, green and tart, by our tent doors, quarts of berries in each tent scenting sweet, and fresh fish, that Cha and Dan masterly hooked, frying in a pan. Some spicy split peas cook too. As I look about from a rock spot I admit I haven't been seeing the large numbers of eagles any more. I view down the Gulf Islands past Prevost and into Mayne and North Pender. Mount Warburton Pike, on Saturna, peaks above the islands. The water is now glassy. The sky's clear. I hope for calm tomorrow.

After dinner we accept an invitation out to a sailboat. Five fellows enjoy their three day weekend from work in Vancouver. On the Ariel, a 35 foot boat, we drink beers then leave early.

August 26, 1981

While Denis and Cha sleep in, Danny sews himself a VD towel and suns his healing leg. I swim and jump rope and chase seals underwater. I'd like to roll with them on the rocks like with a pet dog, but they shy away easily.

When the packing begins I leave camp and return later. I tell Denis, "You guys go on, I'll either catch up or I will find you on Turn Island. I might catch a ferry to Vancouver to go see the whales in captivity in Stanley Park or I don't know what."

"Okay," is Denis' reply. I sneak up the hill of the island, a 250 foot summit and I sit and space. I feel I need to be isolated to catch up on thoughts, like I feel too submerged with my friends. Cha and I get along fine, we both learned a lot being separated, and Denis and Dan and I are best buds, but I feel integrated, like one tweet in a flock of birds, turning as a group, feeding and resting as a group.

About a dozen swallows fly together to a rock face and land in various cracks and holes and ledges. Having split apart into the nooks and crannies, each bird is now solo and hidden from the others. One flies out to another rock. None of the others follow. He returns and lands in an occupied crack, shoving another swallow aside, picking at his head. They scabble, fight, whine and cheep at one another and the invaded bird leaves to another hole.

Two birds fly away together. I wonder if one said to the other, "Let's go, bird." The whole flock follows, allowing themselves the ease of having leaders.

I walk slowly back to the apple orchard and munch on fruit, then I return to camp. I pack and leave, to follow my buds.

I catch up with the three as we approach a store near Fernwood Point on Saltspring. Cha says, "Aren't you going to Vancouver?"

"No."

At the store I try calling Laura again and I reach her. We talk a bit. She is leaving in a couple of days. We wish each other well.

After several ice creams we paddle on past Walker Hook, a sand spit, and by Nose Point. Clearing our view from Saltspring Island, we peak into Haro Straits towards Roach Harbor on San Juan Island, Washington State, USA. On to Peile Point on Prevost Island, miles slide past, into Navy Channel by North Pender Island.

A covered motorboat approaches Dan as he eats a sandwich. From where Cha, Denis and I float together we can hear the conversation. "This isn't a very safe place for you guys just to sit in kayaks. This is ocean." The sun shines, the western sky so red, the clouds layered. Big freighter ships to the east glow orange in the reflection, miles away like fire lights. "How long have you guys been out?"

The long explanation too difficult for Dan to share so he says, "Five months, down from Alaska."

"NO! You're kidding, aren't you?" Dan tells him no. "Really? You're kidding, aren't you?" He asks us, yelling the same, "You're kidding, right?"

He gives Dan a beer and tells him we should go two miles over to the Greek freighter, the one in the sunlight. "They've been here 28 days and they're lonely. They'll feed you food and booze." Dan thanks him and we paddle on, trying to decide between the Greek ship and the Browning Bar.

"We'd have a sure place to sleep. The owner of the Bar would let us stay there again," said Cha.

"The ship would be wild. I wonder if they even speak English?" I say. "Ha, what if they offered return flight to work our way over to Greece? We'd call home in a week, 'Hey, Mom, guess what, I'm kayaking the Greek Isles right now!'"

"I don't care," says Cha. And we all say we don't care.

"Let's pound to see," I say. "Cha you pound for the Bar and I'll pound for the Greeks. Ready...One two three... one two three." I win and we all go "awww."

"I wanted the Bar," I say. "Me too," "Ya," "The Bar," we all agree and override the Greek choice.

The owner of Browning Bar remembers us and gives us a pitcher on the house and we party again with the locals. After, outside, one fellow who speaks in all rhymes, and laughs constantly, pulls out his guitar and sings "Any Day Now" full voice into the night. About eight of us sit around a picnic table and when the fellow starts drumming on his guitar, I start to jam on the table with my bare hands. We gather rhythm and dance and shout and keep a jungle beat pounding. Laughter fills the darkness until time to wander to bed.

Chapter 16

"Is Time"

August 27, 1981

Walking back from the bathrooms, I talk with a lady. She compliments the music and the drums of the night and I wonder whether we really bothered or soothed her. Back at the kayaks the guys tell me she complimented them too. After a swim this warm calm morning, we paddle under the bridge joining North and South Pender Islands then out through Bedwell Harbor. Sliding into Boundary Passage, Dan and I look towards Sidney at a blue heron and many small white, long billed ducks. The birds sit undisturbed by anything in the midst of a kelp bed, the hazy blue lighting we decide perfect for a photograph. Cha, with the camera, denies the photo with the same apathy I've had about capturing the last part of this trip with my writing.

I ask Dan, "How'd you spend your time waiting for the leg to heal?"

We paddle away from Canada towards the United States' Stuart Island and Danny tells, "For awhile, I read a lot, but soon I just couldn't read any more. I started needing to create. My step-mom got me started making stained glass and I carved wood and that kept me going until the full leg cast was removed and I could kayak." A seal pops up next to us and we laugh at his shocked expression. "Once in my kayak it was like I never hurt myself. I caught salmon and chased whales. I found one gray whale. I'd heard it was tangled in a net."

"I saw that one on my birthday," I say excitedly.

"Seems as though," says Dan, "some divers were able to swim to it and cut off most of the line and the whale sat quietly and let them do it, then just swam away like he was saying thank you."

"That's too much," I comment. "I'd like to know how he got tangled in the first place."

"Probably a fishing boat from Port Townsend or Sequim Bay," says Dan. "My friends Doug and Susie live out in Sequim Bay on a boat they are just finishing, an outrageous wooden boat they made from scratch. I have to take you to see it sometime. Doug says he's almost ready to take it out for a test sail one of these days. Maybe we'll run into him somewhere."

I say, "Our timing is usually pretty good, we'll probably see him."

The four of us paddle over the sunny border, naked as when we passed over the same spot heading north in May. We laugh and talk nonsense gibberish and laugh some more. Denis and Danny drop trolling lines when we see a fish jump. "Eye yo," I yell as the salmon splashes back into the hidden fluid world.

"We need that radical salmon," says Dan.

Denis adds, "One with sunglasses and a bandanna on his snout."

"And tatoos all over his body," says Cha.

"Check out that sailboat, Dan," I say. "It's a nice wooden sailor."

As we paddle closer, now well into U.S. waters, Dan says, "I think that IS the Prism."

And it is and we approach and get asked aboard and meet Doug and Susie, all four of us dressed in our VD towels. We slosh American Rainiers and check out the boat, Mt. Baker growing from the blue haze to the east. Doug built much of the Prism's interior around choice pieces of wood like the central post of knarled hardwood. Every corner Doug designed for maximum space use. Tools pile up in the future sleeping quarters. With only the main sail up we move about a half mile in our direction and soon bid the Prism goodbye.

We paddle on and another sailboat calls us over and invites us aboard for more beers. We soon move on again, paddling past the southeast tip of Spieden where with Deano we had battled the bouncing waves. Down San Juan Channel past Mark and Kammies' home, we paddle around Point Caution and into Friday Harbor. At the docks we answer questions from many other boaters and we call on the phone to customs to legally arrive back to our home country.

In celebration we stalk the town, in and out of bars, the four of us laughing loudly and standing out in crowds like a pack of wolves. At night we lay out our sleeping bags on a green lawn by the docks where during busy times proprietors set up a public salmon bake. Other people also sleep here, bikers and hikers and the likers.

August 28 through September 6, 1981

We set camp on Turn Island in the lagoon we had looked onto in April. Three canoeing law students from the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma camp near us. I talk with them and they very much avoid any talk about school, emptying their thoughts on vacation. They try our kayaks and ask me about our trip.

Paddling to town, Dan and I meet Mark on the Louis 2, his log salvaging tugboat. He gets bids from government and private people for hauling the logs out of the way of boat traffic. Then he sells the lumber. He tells of a fire on San Juan Island a couple of days ago. "An immature eagle flew into some electrical wires down near Eagle Point and was electrocuted. He fell to the ground on fire, starting a big fire that got bigger..."

Mark, a tall stocky blond, slides into a Scandinavian accent and tells of his movements, home being Port Townsend. I ask if he saw any gray whale with a rope and he says, "Oh, sure, I know the fellow whose rope it is. Sure. He was fishing with his gill net out and all of a sudden the whole boat started going backwards, and he saw the whale tangled in it. He had to cut himself loose 'cause the whale was stronger than him."

Cha leaves for the mainland to hitchhike to Bellingham so he can apply to Western Washington University. Denis stays in his tent sleeping off a cold he's had since Ballenas Island. Dan and I walk out to the islet off Turn Island where we had camped last spring, now part of Turn Island with the tide out. Dan sits next to the only tree, facing the sun, his leg laid out like a war-crippled kayaker. Sea lettuce grows all around on the low tide flats, wet and cold. I say, "Art and Carol told us to do this in Port Simpson the day after the storm." Piling the sea lettuce in strips, I form a green cast over Dan's white limb.

"Sea lettuce on the leg," says Dan.

"We can name this islet 'Sea Lettuce on the Leg Island'." I laugh. "And so it is." The incoming tide now covers the land connecting Sea Lettuce on the Leg with Turn. I stretch in the sun, reaching my chest down to my thighs, my legs straight forward, my

chin on my knees. I look onto my five and three inch scars from my knee operation. After awhile we remove the lettuce and the leg looks redder, healthier.

A stink boat motors into our harbor as we sit deciding what to do with a piece of wood Dan found. The wood is a big knot and it swirls to a central point, very little other wood surrounding the spiral.

A father, mother and boy from the stink machine load and row their gear to the other side of the cove and set a camp. The canoe law students load up their gear to leave.

"I think it looks like an ear," I say, turning and feeling the chunk of wood.

Dan handles it and agrees, "It does. It's an ear waiting to be released from its wooden tomb." He takes my machete and begins hacking. I go bid good bye to the law students.

The canoeist named Steve tells, "We were going to paddle to Lopez across San Juan Channel to catch the ferry but we don't want to take any chances if the storm whips in, so we'll just go to Friday Harbor."

"I don't know if I'd feel safe in an open canoe in a storm either," I say.

They paddle off and I hack at the ear for awhile. Dan and I look at it and decide the ear has been released. "Ear it is," says Dan.

"Ear resistible," I add. "Ears to you. Happy New Ear."

A piling pokes out of the water below the high tide line and I wade out, placing the Ear on its pedestal. "To Ear Beach..."

The boy, maybe 10 years old, rows their inflated dingy, "I'm going out to the little island, Dad."

His father answers, "Don't take any chances."

Dan answers loud enough for me to hear, "BUT DAD!"

"Don't take any chances," I say.

We feast on an omelet and bacon and potatoes for dinner and watch two other kids rowing out in an aluminum dinghy from a camp around in the next bay. Climbing out of the boat onto Sea Lettuce on the Leg Island, one boy says, "Awesome Island." The other boy pulls a play gun out of the boat and shoots his friend. The first kid runs over to the twisting tree and yells out, "Awesome TREE!"

Dan says to me, as the armed boy shoots his friend again, "Don't take any chances."

"But Dad" I say. A hawk screeches down toward us, "Aaahh".

Fog rolls in. We hear a fog horn off in the distance, flames dancing up from the fire pit. Behind us rest the three kayaks. I lean against Dan's, fingering beads he has hanging from his rudder's string. "Are these fright beads?" I ask.

Dan, laughing, answers, "Worry beads..."

"Oh no, now I'm really worried... what if the fog gets us or what if an airplane crashes on us," I say.

"I'm worried now," he says. "Worry, worry, worry."

"Maybe we should drink those beers since the plane might crash anyways."

Dan says, "We sure wouldn't want to die with a whole beer left."

"Drink," I say, "Hurry. I don't want the mortician to find a dollar in my pocket that I could have spent, or my last joint." A fog horn, a deep baritone "Duh Dahhh" sounds over the water from every direction.

The next morning we have fresh crab I catch in my trap out in the bay and some cod Danny catches. "Peter is my middle name" he smiles. "Peter the Fisherman."

We paddle, swinging by the Louis 2 to wave Hi to Mark, then on to town. Friday Harbor is full of people; tourists in cars, on bikes, and in boats. Purse seiners and gill netters await the next opening to fish. Many of the familiar faces of the locals seem absent, hiding for the summer rush, but a few hang around the corners and bars enjoying the confusion. In the laundromat Dan and I meet two black guys from Los Angeles and we sneak off to smoke with them. The two are hilarious, one very tall and thin, the other short and round. They compliment us, "You guys probably make friends wherever you go. You live good lives and since you feel so good everybody around you must too." They question us about our kayak trip as we walk back to check our drying clothes. The tall fellow goes into a long speech about "America loves a hero." He mentions names of football stars and basketball heroes and says our kayak trip is the American dream.

I say, "That's a strange idea because to us we have just been camping and playing and getting adrenalin rushes in waves."

"Ya, but brother, that's what the world needs right now," says our tall friend.

Dan and I stuff the clean clothes in our boats at the docks and meet a stocky fellow in a rowboat. We paddle out to his boats in the harbor; four wrecks barely floating. Bob tells us, "This is my fleet. Like it?" He goes on to tell us about laying brick for four years and refurbishing all kinds of boats and he's fished and grew up in California.

"Wow," I say. "You've sure done a lot."

"Ya," Bob says, "I've pretty much been everywhere and seen everything."

"That is a lot," exclaims Dan.

"And I'm the toughest son-of-a-bitch in town. Nobody can beat me arm wrestling. And I only weigh 165 pounds."

"Wow," I say.

"Wow is Mom upside down," says Dan.

Bob asks, "Want to arm wrestle?"

Dan shakes his head no. "Why not," I come back with the question of the eighties, feeling in shape from a summer's kayaking, feeling confident. First we try our right arms, and Wham, he downs me immediately. Then the same embarrassment with my left arm. Wham. "Well, I guess that settles that," I say.

Dan and I paddle back to town and visit the Electric Company. Kerry, from Australia, serves us. She tells of her VD, "I travel and live at ski areas during the winters too. I like to alternate between the north and south hemispheres, a couple of seasons a year in each. I alternate sailing between the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, working my way around the globe. There's all sorts of towns to find a boat to get on, like the last week in April is the Antigua Race week and English Harbor there has cheap accommodations to stay at until you find a boat. And there's the Jamaica Sun Festival in June and July, or the Trinidad Carnival near Brazil in March. Early March you can head to St. Batts in the Caribbean. That's where Jimmy Buffet always sings about." Kerry smiles and invites us to her home later for beers. Dan and I talk.

"I've got to get on some of those clues," says Dan.

"I do too," I say. "But I've got my focus for now, this book will take me awhile. I sure have travel dreams right now though. Too funny, here we're in Paradise dreaming of other paradises."

Dan and I wander the streets and head to Harry's Cafe for the open mike night. I run into Mike, the fellow we drank with in the gazebo, our party night in Ketchikan. Also in Harry's listening to a friend of ours sing are Joel and Linda, the caretakers who we met at the whale watch house on Hanson Island. I mention to them we brought them berries but they had already left. Another Linda, whose father is a secret agent, sings a song about how she keeps falling in love with different men in town and her dad keeps telling her they are really her brothers. Her song ends when she tells her mother of all her father's illegitimate sons and the mother says that she can marry who she wants because that man is not really her father. Linda sits with us while a magician proceeds to rip up the newspaper then wads it and opens it and we are shocked to see a whole paper. Too much.

We paddle back home to Turn Island and on the way visit Bob on his fleet. "Want some music for the ride home?" he asks. Pink Floyd, "Wish You Were Here", blares from Bob's boat. We can hear it pounding across the water until we round Brown Island out of the Harbor.

"Bob's been everywhere and has seen everything," says Dan.

The next morning as the neighbors pick up to leave, the ten year old boy that can't take any chances comes over on our beach collecting rocks. "These are jade," he says about rocks that look like rocks, "and these are agates." He shows me the milky translucent rock.

A log drifts by in the strong current between Turn Island and San Juan Island with a cormorant sitting in the middle. "Look at the kayaker," says Dan. The kid looks and says he doesn't see it. "There," says Dan.

"Oh, that bird on the log. I guess it does look like a little kayaker." His Dad calls him and we watch as the boy talks to his father. The father busies around and yells at the son, "Can't you work while you talk."

Dan says to me, "But Dad!"

Denis still sleeps. Dan and I paddle south around Pear Point, seals following us. We fish and catch nothing, so we gather many limpets and return to camp and make Limpet Stroganoff with mushrooms and noodles and cream of mushroom soup, and onions and spices, one of the best meals I've ever indulged in.

Days pass, Cha returns, Denis feels better. We feast on crabs daily and fresh Dan-caught-cod. We cook kelp into our casseroles and eat lots of corn on the cob. Fog rolls in every morning now that fall is arriving. Denis and Cha head into town for their binge and Dan and I stay on Ear Beach, worshipping the great Ear and Now. Watching a beautiful sunset I comment, "Beautiful Sunset."

Dan replies, "A sea gull wouldn't have to say that."

On Saturday, Denis and Cha still in town, Dan and I paddle in and find the guys with Rob. "Finally decided to join us," I say in front of the Electric Company, Saturday Jazz swinging away inside. He says he brought his kayak and partied with Denis and Cha last night. They slept at a new friend's house in town.

Our gang of five plays lots of hackysack in front of the jazzing Electric Company. Jacques, a fellow from Quebec, joins us for the afternoon. We drink beers in the street and laugh loudly.

In the evening we meet five girls and sit on steps by the street, all ten of us, drinking wine and talking. The ten of us walk the town. We skip-ski in the streets and I soon tire of the city and paddle home alone in the dark.

I paddle slowly and watch the phosphorescence stir off my paddle and bow. A school of bait fish stir up a frenzy of the organic light and the water movement lights up rocks on the shallow bottom as I hug the shore. Somewhere in the night a bell buoy tolls, across San Juan Channel, sounding like the beginning of Elton John's "Funeral for a Friend." Orion, the constellation I feel a link with, now returns for the winter, Betelgeuse it's bright red star twinkling on the southwest horizon. I smell the low tide. The voice of a blue heron rasps in the night and I know from the sound of heavy exhales that seals follow me. I am happy to be alone.

September 7, 1981

After lazing around our Sunday here on Turn Island, today we paddle the five kayaks back to town again and scatter. A heat wave is on us again. I walk upstairs to the whale museum and ask the lady if my naked friends are inside. "They're in there," she points. I find them in the movie room watching films of orca whales.

Dan says, "I think we were supposed to pay to get in but when I got here Rob was talking the girl into letting him go through for free, then I told her, 'Come on, he's in a kayak,' and assuming authority, we marched through."

I laugh. "That's why she looked so funny when I just walked through asking for naked friends." Rob, Dan and I sit in shorts and another man sits too, watching the film. Rob is so excited seeing the whale museum and says "I sure want to see whales, I never have." I say, "Stick around and they'll find us." We get into conversation with the other man and soon learn that's he's a Professor of Psychology in Montreal and he's writing a book on dreams. Denis and Cha also find their way in, laughing.

Denis tells, "That lady at the front desk is pretty funny. We walked through the door and she just pointed back here."

George, the Professor, says he has to catch a ferry so we all go buy a case of generic Beer and sit down at the salmon bake park looking over the water. Rob twists off the top of his beer and says "242."

"What's that?" asks George.

Rob passes around his bottle cap which has pictures spelling out a saying. It reads, "I think the world of you," and a tiny number at the top is 242. Rob says, "All summer Lance and I painted houses and drank a half case of this Beer beer every day and after awhile we started knowing all the bottle caps so we memorized the numbers. I can call out any number of this series, from 223 to 269, like I say 261 and that means 'I can dream can't I.'" We all read off the numbers and Rob knows them all. "'You've only yourself to blame'... 'On top of old smokey'..."

The ferry approaches so we walk George down to the dock. "Send us a copy of your book, George," I say.

"Send me your dreams," he says, "and a copy of your book too, Mark."

We watch the ferry and George emerges on the upper deck. On the count of three we five yell, "Huevo," and two people wave back at us, George and Jaques, the fellow

from Quebec. On three, "Jaques" and on three, "George." The two travelers look at each other and we see them shake hands and point at us.

"That's it," says Rob. "Timing is the essence, the clue to everything."

The ferry pulls away and another ferry which had been waiting pulls into the dock and we see Deano walk off with his backpack and a big smile. On three we yell "Deano."

I say, "You said it, Rob. Timing is the essence."

We rendezvous with Deano and walk back to the Salmon Bake yard to sip beers and laugh together, now six of us.

Cha leaves to visit his new girl friend and Deano paddles Cha's kayak back to Turn Island where we eat crab, drink beers, then fall asleep early.

September 8, 1981

Rob is up early rolling his sleeping bag and packing his kayak. "I've got to go," he says. "I feel I have to work, I have to get back and paint on this lady's house."

"She's set a deadline?" I ask.

"No, I should just make the money."

"You could stay another day."

"I could," Rob says, "but I feel guilty not working. Not everybody thinks like you, Mark."

"I guess when work is necessary, it's necessary," I say.

"It's not really though, I want to stay but... I don't know. I gotta' go," says Rob.

"I'll paddle in with you and see if I can find Cha," says Deano. They paddle away, once again Rob's drive taking him from us.

I yell to Rob as he pulls away, "Don't forget, that plane might crash on you at any time. No whales for you!"

He returns a thanks. On the picnic table at the south end of Ear Beach I find Rob's goodbye note written with sea shells. It says, "242". I say to myself, "I think the world of you too, Rob."

The morning still early, the sky clear, Denis, Danny and I walk around and gather Jack and Jackson. Us five go to our power spot for sunrise. We sit on the cliff over the gravel cove as the sun rises, dancing over the water, shining on the whips of kelp and the beach, giving an orange glow to the green grass and trees. A motorboat passes off in the distance and its wake walks the sun through a glittering dance. The hills lie hazed in the glare and Danny spins Deano's new HDX Frisbee on his finger, the underside fresh sprayed with silicone for easier spin and slip. Jack and Jackson tell us about their days in Hawaii working on a pineapple plantation. "We wanted to do something new so we came here to Washington, then decided to buy kayaks. We met Peter from Easy Rider and he sold us our Sea Hawks."

"How long are those?" Denis asks.

"Seventeen feet," says Jack.

"Ours are the dolphins, only fourteen foot nine inches," I say. "Yah, we heard about you guys living on Jones Island as soon as we returned to the States. Someone thought we were you."

"We've been here three months," says Jackson. "Just living in our tents on the islands. This is a good way to do nothing creatively."

I laugh and say, "That's the essence of VD."

"What?" Jack wonders before we explain nothing.

Dan says, "Peter at Easy Rider Kayaks told me he was once lifted up by a whale, out of the water, and Peter just braced against it with his paddle and slid back into the water."

Denis says, "I've wondered if your rudder, Dan, with the silver dolphin scraped in the black paint would act as a lure to a bigger fish. I've heard of sharks attacking shiny rudders."

I leave the power spot to walk back to camp, but in a rush I speed along the trail and stub my toe. Stopping to check for blood I shame myself that after all this time in a kayak, I should have learned to slow down and enjoy my journey, so I do. I notice leaves flickering like rippling water when I squint, and a purple and yellow flower by the trail, and a seal watching me from the water below.

On Ear Beach I lay out blankets and strip off my clothes and open a beer and laze in the sun. Dan and Denis return from the power spot cliffs and lay down in the sun too, and Jack and Jackson paddle their camp away, waving goodbyes. Deano and Cha paddling in, back to back in Cha's boat soon join us. They smile and hold up a package.

"I know what that is," says Dan. "So do those cows over there in the pasture on San Juan. Why do you think they munch and smile all day?"

"Why not," I say. "And to you cow, I bow to your bovine highness..."

We munch and lay around, five of us naked on the beach, drowning ourselves in Buckhorn Beers, the generic beer already drained. We simply throw the bottles all around our blankets and soon the beach is cluttered, bottles seeming to grow out of the ground like magic mushrooms. Deano pulls out his flute and we pull out three recorders, Dan having purchased one in Friday Harbor. Jethro Tull flutes from Dean's lips, solid melodious tones, and us three play, imitating the song. Our notes on the plastic recorders sound like sick quacks from baby ducks compared to the flute, but we follow Dean's lead, interrupting songs to laugh so hard tears fill our eyes. "Dean and the Ducks," I say.

"Oh, yah," cries out Cha. "Where's your hackysack?"

"Oh," says Deano, laughing as he pulls out his sack. "I put it under the tire of a semi-truck to break it in this morning and it burst its seams. Now we know what hacky beans are." He pinches the sack so a mouth opens and inside we see little white plastic beads.

"Petroleum by-products," I yell.

"But the real question I've always wondered has been answered," says Deano. "How do they finish off the last three stitches so that the seams are internal? I know..." He smiles and doesn't tell us, but after we beg he does, "I found a little man with a needle inside. Dead. He lived out his life's purpose."

Dean puts two recorders to his lips and plays both at the same time, looking like an ant! Vuarnet sunglasses for the bug eyes and the recorders as his mandibles. Denis grabs for the burst hackysack and dresses it up with sunglasses and a stick for the cigar hanging from its mouth. "Hand me a couple of those hacky beans," I say.

I examine them and pass them on to Danny who, after handling them a few moments, lays on his back, Vuarnets covering his eyes. With a hand poised above his eyes, a hacky bean in his fingers, he drops it. "WOW!" He does it again then we all try it. "Hacky beans on the eye," says Dan. "A new gravity sport."

"It's almost impossible not to blink," says Denis.

"I'm kind of afraid to learn to not blink," I say. "That's one of those automatic systems I'd rather not train myself out of." I bounce more hacky beans on my eye and Cha laughs at me.

"Hacky beans in the beard now," he says, rubbing gravel in his hands.

"That beach feels pretty good, eh, Cha?" asks Denis.

"Ninety-nine days on the beach, and oooh, was sea shore..." I say.

Denis points out, "I lay my head one way and I can see the reflection of my eyes in my Vaurnets"

Dan says, "Wow, what a trip. I've never seen my eye that close."

"No kidding, that's wild," I say, seeing my eye half an inch away in my sunglass lens.

We laugh in the heat and continue throwing empty Buckhorn bottles around us. On the pedestal in the water in front of us the Ear still rules. "Ear today, gone tomorrow." We all wear shades over our eyes except Cha. I stare into his blue eyes and say, "You better cover up your eyes. You're vulnerable."

"What?"

"I'm looking right into the windows of your soul and you can't look into ours, that makes you vulnerable. The eyes hide nothing." A plane flies low over the island and I yell, "Quick, drink, the plane, the plane." More Buckhorns grow out of the sand.

A man in a kayak paddles towards us from town but seeing us all sitting naked, he reverts down the beach aways and sits by his boat eating a sandwich. We laugh and laugh at silly jokes and realize maybe the man heard of kayakers having paddled from Alaska and came out to meet us. "I feel like I should go talk to the guy but I think I couldn't keep from laughing," I say. After lunch the fellow paddles away.

I walk out to the north point to see him paddle into San Juan Channel. The current pulls him sideways. A sailboat with an orange sail billowed in the slight wind rounds Brown Island and I see another black sail-like object slowly submerge. I recognize it and yell, "Whales!" Nobody responds. They look at me and out to where I stare and I see another. "Whales!" Nobody sees them or responds. I look at the guys and say, "Are you guys Ear responsible? They're coming this way. Deano, get in my kayak, go out to them." Nobody responds, they look at me like I speak a foreign tongue. "This is your chance to paddle with orcas, Deano, take my kayak, I've been with them all summer." I turn to see about four dorsal fins surface together, one big male fin amongst them.

Danny responds, "Let's go," and he runs to his tent for his camera and Deano, Denis and Cha just sit, uncaring. Danny says to Deano, "Mark offered you his kayak, you'd be a fool not to paddle out."

I yell loud, "DO IT!" and everybody jumps and runs around in a frenzy, grabbing cameras and paddles and towels to sit on and in moments the four paddle out to join our mammal friends. Naked except for Vaurnets, the four charge out as the whales reach Turn Island. I grab my recorder and run around to the northwest side to follow the action. Deano paddles with three females and Denis is out further with the big male which starts slapping the water with his fluke. Smack. More whales keep swimming towards them and I play my recorder, to give all friends music. One baby whale, separated from its mother, being cornered by Dan into the kelp bed along Turn Island beach, suddenly darts from fear out away from shore and dives right next to Dan's orange kayak, missing the bottom

of his boat by only inches in the panic. I run on, faster and feeling complete control in bare feet on the sharp rocks. On the outer point I clear the trees again to witness one orca breach right off the bows of Denis and Cha, then another next to Dan. And a third breach. "Sunny Breaches," I mumble and begin on my recorder, "OOO yeh, up she rises, oo yeh..." The whales play for a good half hour in the flickering sunlight. A seaplane circles above the action. I chase the kayaks and the pod of thirty or forty orcas. All swim and paddle away from the south side, heading down San Juan Channel. I sit and play music quietly and watch my buds try to keep up with the pod, now cruising at a faster speed than the kayaks. Quietly I say to myself, "Timing is the essence, Rob."

In about an hour Cha returns first. I sit on the power spot cliff. He is all smiles and says only, "Man."

The others return and stop off at my spot. Dan and Denis reach over to each other's kayak and hug. Deano says, "Thanks, Mark. Thanks for everything."

"I did nothing."

"Your nothing is everything," he says.

Danny says, "They were all smiling."

Deano says, "They came to Turn Island just to call us out to play."

Denis just sits and smiles and says his usual wordless love. Danny says from his kayak, all four of them floating totally relaxed, "What an Orca-asm!"

"Naked with the whales," says Deano.

"Dean and the ducks go whale hunting," says Dan. "Man I sure braced into my boat and got ready when that calf darted towards me. I thought I was going to get flipped!"

"I kind of wondered if one would land on me breaching that close," says Cha.

"I think whales are aware of what they do with their bodies, probably a lot more than us," I say. I walk back to camp and finding only a six pack of beer left, I throw them all in about twelve feet deep water. The others paddling around the corner say, "What are you doing?"

"Cooling them off."

Deano and Cha make fun of all the bottles and Cha says, "The beach is different now. Everything is different. This is now Buckhorn Beach."

"Ear Beach?" asks Dan.

"That too," says Cha, sitting down next to me. "You know, Mark, I just found out something new. I just saw God again, but not like ever before. That whale that breached next to me, he was God."

"Right on, Cha," I say and run into the water, swimming deep and returning with a cold beer. Eventually everybody dives for beer. Denis and Cha talk and Danny goes to write his nine year old sister to share his life with her.

Deano tells me, "You know, Mark, being married is sometimes hard. You guys really opened my eyes when I paddled with you last spring. And today. I miss all this stuff being married."

"You didn't miss it," I say. "Rob did."

"That's true, but I've got Pammy and we don't do this stuff..."

"Why not?" I ask, diving back in for another beer, knowing it to be the last one.

September 9, 1981

The five of us join at the power spot for gray skies and a light drizzle of rain. The current floods in like a river. Lopez Island across San Juan Channel is hidden in the fog. "Nice weather," I say.

Cha and Dan tell us of three Turn Island deer they spotted at twilight last evening. Cha says, "There were two fawns and a mom and the mom stood up on her hind legs like a bear."

Dan says, "And in the dark we heard what sounded like two seals screwing on Sea Lettuce on the Leg Island; grunts and groans, squeals, then a slap, a splash and silence. A real orgy."

"Sealed with a kiss," I add.

Deano tells, "The raccoon got in my tent last night and ate my granola just a foot from my head. When I woke, he sat in the door of my tent."

"They are gutsy animals," says Dan. "One chewed a hole through my tent and ate my granola too."

A sailboat puffs by, an old wooden boat with windows in the stern. I say, "I'd like to sit in those windows in a storm with following seas. The waves would crash over the glass and I'd be safe. Like waves crashing over the brain."

We paddle to town. Deano sits behind Dan in the same kayak and plays his flute. Along the south shore of Friday Harbor we hear another flute answering us and paddle over to meet Jack and Ruby. Then onward we go to the docks to send Deano home on the ferry. With our boats secured we start up towards town and a man approaches us, "Could you fellahs hold the tail of my seaplane so I can take off a little away from the wind?"

We tell him sure and walk back to the seaplane float and strike up a conversation. "Where you going?"

He throws his bag in and says, "Mercer Island. Just hold the tail and point the plane that way and hang on till I pull away." He looks at us, Deano the only one with a back pack. "Does anyone need a ride?"

We laugh and Deano says, "I sure do." And with hugs and words we send Deano off within minutes.

Deano's last words as he closes the door of the seaplane are, "Timing is the essence."

The plane lifts to the air and disappears into the clouds. Dan says, "Hitchhiking is pretty tough these days."

Cha says, "Yup, sure nuf, yes sirree mmm hmmm." We loop the town, to Cafe Harry's for high octane, the whale museum one more time, Whiteys for groceries, the bakery, the Electric Company for brews and the Mariner for more brews. Leaving, we meet Bob again. He mopes around out front and says, "Did you go to the Uriner to marinate? My Dad owns the place, you know, but we don't get along. I've never received one bite to eat from the Mariner. I almost punched my dad out last night," says Bob, huffing up his chest. "I don't know why fights come to me. I guess if you look tough, guys bug ya. One fight I had in California I was jumped by seven dudes, one of them with a ball peen hammer. I decked the biggest guy first then went for them all. The smallest guy got me in the nuts. You might know it!"

"Did you run then?" I ask.

"Hell, no. They were all on the ground when I finished."

We walk back to the boats and Dan says, "You know what you call a guy with no arms or legs who likes to swim?"

We all answer together, "Bob".

We paddle back to Turn Island and laze the day reading and playing.

Chapter 17

"Pink Shovel Hat"

"Homeward bound: Home where my thought's escaping, Home where
my music's playing, Home where my love lies waiting silently for me"
Simon and Garfunkel

September 10, 1981

My view of the pasture from my tent this morning is totally obscured with fog. I focus on a spider web accentuated with the dew's white frosting. Stretched between thistle and shrub, the web radiates outward from its center core where the spider stretches her eight legs. A lone gull floats off the low tide shore among jagged rocks and moist sea lettuce. The whiteness of the sky and cove blends smoothly together, the merge disguising the horizon. Bull kelp shows me where the water is.

Another spider crawls onto the web. I like to crawl onto webs of others just to find out their perspectives. We all spin different webs.

Today we plan on leaving this paradise and moving on to the next. Crab and cod daily and worshiping the EAR has been nice, but we will be nomadic again. Through the fog I hear the ravens' screech and a hammer of a carpenter. An airplane winds out its R.P.M.'s somewhere in the whiteness.

The fog lifts slowly, revealing the pasture across the water like a developing photograph fading into recognition. Cha stands on the beach, naked, holding his two gallon water jug. "Damn raccoons. They destroyed my water bottle. I caught 'em in the night. My flashlight scared the bastards away but they chewed away the plastic first..."

We pack up quietly and launch with a ceiling of blue sky. Pockets of fog still linger in bays and over islands. Crossing San Juan Channel, we paddle into Upright Channel, between Shaw and Lopez Islands, then up through Obstruction Pass, banks of fog following us a mile behind. We cross Rosario Strait towards Cypress. The fog snakes around us so by Strawberry Island we are again in the soupy clouds. We decide to camp in Strawberry Bay on a NO CAMPING beach. Fog over Strawberry Island divides the sun into shafts of light, elevators to heaven.

Dan and I join in his tent and begin talking about his sister. He says, "She's only nine years old and I'm amazed at what she knows. She's writing an ongoing book. Every day she types more of her life onto pages. And she plays the piano. I hope she keeps growing the way she is."

"Seems to me," I try to add, "that she holds a whole world of respect for you as her brother. You kind of have a guiding power over her."

"I do," says Dan, "and I'm not so sure what to do about it."

I say, "I hope, if I have kids of my own someday, that I can be available for them for the first five years of their lives. I can still do my projects, in fact I must, but if the child needs me, I'll be there."

Dan tells, "It was kind of nice having my broken leg because I spent more time with Annie than I ever have. She has a lot of respect for me. I don't want to misguide her."

I just tell Annie that she is on the right track and to keep playing the piano and typing. She's only nine and she knows more than I ever did at that age."

Dan heats some water for his dinner. "If Annie follows what she likes, she'll learn more than being forced into a subject she doesn't."

Dan pours the noodles into the boiling water. He says, "Annie doesn't have to do what she doesn't want to very often. She is too strong. She uses the words, 'permanent words,' whenever someone tells her to do something she doesn't want to."

"What?"

"Permanent words," says Dan. "I don't know how to explain it."

"Give an example of when she says that," I ask.

"I can't right now, but I will sometime."

"Too funny," I say. "A child's concept that we can't even explain. I hope she doesn't lose her insights."

"She won't if I can help it," says Dan.

I head back to my tent and slowly fade into sleep. The transition from wakefulness to sleep takes me through a world of images, illusions and floating ideas. I flash awake and step out of my tent into the dark, everyone else quiet in their dark tents. Naked and shivering, I urinate on the beach and see Cassiopeia twinkling through patches of fog, reassuring me I am never alone. I realize that now. This moment in Strawberry Bay is the closest essence I can ever have to eternity. Now is forever and I have always been and always will be with Cassiopeia.

September 11, 1981

Denis says, "I saw him run past my tent up into the woods."

I slowly awaken. Danny's and Denis' voices mix into my sleep as part of my dreams, and slowly override. Dan is talking of a fox. "He came up to my tent and started eating the leftover macaroni I left out front. I just watched until he sniffed at my water bottle then I beamed him with my flashlight."

The near full moon sets over Blakely Island. I fall back asleep, waking later to the foggy daylight. A bulldozer and a chain saw roar behind our camp, trees falling and crashing through the brush. I stare out at the low tide, the sand stretching what looks to be a half mile out on the low tide flats. Cha carries his gear down to the water's edge. I am surprised to see him as a giant. What I assumed a long distance is only a couple hundred feet so that Cha looks huge compared to my expectations. Such is.

We load into the boats in the thick fog. Slight beams of sunlight penetrate. An arch of bright light refracts through the fog, like a white rainbow. The bow reflects on the calm water to form a near complete circle between the two arches. Quietly we paddle around Reef Point, the rocky outcrop on the south end of Cypress. We catch the last of the morning's ebb tide in order to squeeze into Guemes Channel. Occasionally one of us stops to tap into the morning's magic by playing our recorder in the fog. A ferry boat passes, looking like a city on the water. As the fog lifts we paddle towards Anacortes in the morning sun. Mount Baker floats above a cloud, the mountain's steep snowfields seeming to drop straight into the water. We paddle past the oil refinery tanks and a mile long dock. Danny points to the huge globes at the refinery and relates his pipe dreams.

"We could clean out one of those and just imagine the skateboarding we could do in there, flying up on the verticals."

On into Padilla Bay, we paddle with the strong current to the railroad turnpike and the freeway overpass above the Swinomish Slough, realizing we left the Ear behind on its pedestal. "No one will ever value that the way we did," says Denis.

South through the slough, we stop at a house where we had filled our water bottles in April. The people are not home. Cha, Denis and I pretend to wear skis and jump high off sand cliffs while Danny takes pictures and says, "Quit it." No way is his leg ready for jumping. Dan and Denis paddle on. Cha and I swim in the slough for awhile.

In La Conner we join on the deck of the 1880's bar and drink beers. A sign over the bar inside reads, "Home Fresh Home," an ad for Rainier beer. Our table outside rocks and rolls, spilling our beer. We laugh and talk of the past weeks of paddling and playing. Another table of a half dozen guys, several of whom I'd met inside, start smoking dubees and my buddies talk me into asking for one for us. I do and the fellow rolling the herb says to me, "This is only for my friends." I return to our table and am unable to speak for a long time, feeling out of place and embarrassed. Dan scolds me for letting the guy's words bother me, that since I am rejected so seldom I forget how to handle it. "I realize that's all it is, but I just feel dumb for even asking the guy anything." I stare at the tilting table and see carved in the wood, "Ethel + Bud." Looking across the slough, past fishing boats and tourists, a sign reads "Warning, Sewer Crossing."

Dan and Denis decide they will hitchhike to Port Townsend tomorrow. Cha and I decide to stay around La Conner for a couple of days. I ask an Indian if we can camp on the vacant lot on the reservation across the slough. He says, "It's only white man who kicks people off the land."

September 12, 1981

We awaken on the Swinomish Reservation, the tribal land facing La Conner. The northwest wind blows and skies are clear. Mount Baker hangs over the town. Denis and Dan pack and leave at sunrise to hitch to the Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival. Cha and I fall back asleep on top of our sleeping bags in the sand. As I close my eyes I notice the moon setting over the reservation. We pass the morning lazing on the sand, then paddle over to La Conner. I walk the streets, up a hill above the town and eat apples from a tree, apples like the ones I'd been gathering since Secretary Islands for my fruit. Blackberries are also abundant around La Conner and I fill my stomach. In the evening we join the rock and roll band in the 1880's bar and I meet old friends I knew from high school. Cha and I sit with three women. One works in Bellingham with Denis' sister and had ferried out to San Juan Island with her to look for us while we were camped on Turn Island. One cowboy buys us beers all night because he says we are heroes and Cha and I eventually paddle back to the res' to sleep.

September 13, 1981

Three Indian boys awaken us early in the morning: Andy, 9 years old, Randy, 11, and J.R., 10. Andy is small and sturdy and brags of the two women he screwed the night before. Randy is almost white skinned, pudgy yet very athletic looking. J.R. is round

from head to toe. J.R. talks of the fights they got in last night, with fists and knives. Andy plays with a rock climbing carabineer. I compliment it and he gives it to me. He then asks, "Got any pot?"

Cha and I laugh at these kids. "They sure are old for their age," says Cha.

The kids talk us into swimming. The water is so cold we only dive in and jump out while the kids swim for a half hour. "I thought we were tough for swimming so much," I say.

"I think we're old men," says Cha. The kids swear at us and call us chickens for not swimming with them for a very long time. We just sit on our sleeping bags and laugh.

We pack and walk with the kids to their homes, trash lying around everywhere, bottles and papers. The kids' parents are very friendly to us. The kids point out all the fastest cars on the res' and who fights the best and who gets the most women. We walk the streets and come to a garage sale. Cha looks at a tri-pod for 10 dollars but he decides not to buy it. Meanwhile, Andy steals a magnifying glass from a microscope and Randy steals a beer from an ice chest. Walking away, Cha and I tell them that it's wrong to steal from their neighbors. Our scolding silences them and dampens our friendship.

We paddle away from the res'. Talking with various people in La Conner, we soon tire of hanging around the city. By night we sleep again on the same beach.

September 14, 1981

Cha and I pack and leave a note on our buddies' kayaks that we will meet them at Camano State Park. We paddle out the Swinomish Slough with the current. The sun is warm for a fall day. Cha and I sip beers and talk over the trip and the problems we have been sharing.

I say, "I don't feel the tension between us that we had before."

"I think," says Cha, "that I relaxed a lot after being separated from you guys. I was so scared to go off alone because of my memories of Europe. When I got on Bill's sailboat and found mass friends all over, I got a lot of confidence in myself."

We paddle past Strawberry Point on Whidbey, across Skagit Bay towards Rocky Point on Camano Island. I tell Cha what I have never told him before. "Cookie and I had a conversation after my birthday party on Whidbey. When we went home to Seattle those days in April to adjust our gear, Cookie told me something I'd never realized. She told me not only her, but Pam and Debbie commented too, that they thought you were a Mark Billington clone. Those were Cookie's words." I look at Cha and he listens and watches me, waiting for more. "I kind of thought about it and decided maybe they were right and that was a lot of our problems. Maybe me being five years older gave you someone to imitate and that was the problem. I felt threatened by someone pretending to be me and you felt like you were merging into me too much. We both felt a loss of individuality."

"Yah," starts in Cha, "I knew that to be for a long time. We do a lot of the same things and I've always liked the way you live."

"Our fights have always been over stupid things but we build tension just the same."

Cha says, "Too often I felt like Beaver Cleaver and you were Wally, my big brother."

I laugh. "That's it exactly. We fight as two brothers do and you copying me is just as a little brother would. I have just rejected it whenever you started to act like me."

"You know what shocked me most," says Cha, "was when you told me to quit trapping you. I never realized I had been doing that to you. I always thought you did it to me. We would fight over silly little words."

"That's where I had problems," I say, paddling, watching the drips roll down my paddle and glitter in the sun. "Words mean so much and when you'd ask me questions that I thought were vague, I would ask you a question to try and clarify what you wanted to know. Too often you thought I was trapping you with words when I just didn't want to answer a different question than you asked."

Cha asks, "What do you mean you fill your stomach when you breathe?"

"Whenever you breathe in, does your stomach go out?" He tries it and shakes no. "Well, you can get a lot more oxygen by breathing with your diaphragm, first filling your stomach then filling your lungs. I've gotten rid of all headaches for years with breathing. It's the magic of life."

Cha tries breathing with his diaphragm but he fills his lungs first then opens a passage to his stomach cavity. "Wo," he says, "that's weird, all the air in my lungs rushed into my stomach. I don't like that."

"No, fill your stomach first, then keep inhaling for your lungs. It's funny that we live so long and can still find new things to do with our bodies."

Cha stops paddling and breathes deeply. His stomach goes out and he keeps taking in more air. He breathes out slowly. "Wow, that's refreshing!"

Cha and I paddle on in silence through Saratoga Passage, along homes and beaches, people out sunbathing and waving at us. "You know, Cha, when you go away to Mammoth it will be so easy for you, getting away from me. Once again you will be Cha, 100%, and whatever you've learned from our relationship can be put to use and it will be all you, incorporated into you. People will only know you as Cha."

"That's true," he says. "I'm really excited to go to California. I'm scared too, but now I know I can do anything on my own. I was kind of glad when I found out you guys were going to be late in Powell River. I wasn't ready to see you yet. I didn't know if we'd be friends when the ferry docked, and when you guys finally did arrive things felt right. I knew when you hugged me things were okay."

A boat with a guy and girl tells us as we pass, "It's starting to rain, we just felt the first drops." We look around and don't see any clouds at all, just blue sky. The guy tells us, "The weather man said it would rain today and I think its starting."

"We'll look out for it," says Cha. We paddle on, laughing. Another group, two men and a lady, yell to us from a house, "Where are you paddling from?"

"Alaska."

"That's quite a trip," they yell. We keep going. At Camano State Park we see all the camps are high above on the cliffs and that no camping is allowed on the beach. We head to the north end and set up camp in the trees above the high tide line. We build a fire to cook dinner on, but after dark a truck drives down to the beach and a flashlight approaches. A ranger in uniform comes over and kicks dirt on our fire. He is young and huffed up with authority and yells at us, "I could fine you \$50 to \$500 for building this fire and even more for camping on the beach."

We say nothing and help put out the fire, pulling logs down to the water to sizzle them cool, and throwing gravel on the coals. Noticing the kayaks, he asks, "Where's your boat?"

"Those are them," Cha says.

"Well," he says, obviously mad, "you'd better just hike up the hill if you want to camp and pay \$5.50 each."

Cha and I look at each other and I say, "Back to the city." The ranger doesn't know what I mean. I announce, "Okay, we'll be packed up and out of here. It'll take about an hour."

"You'd better," says the uniformed man, no older than me. "I'll be back to make sure you're gone. Be thankful I didn't fine you \$500."

"Oh, thank you," I say.

We pack and paddle south to the end of the park and beach on sharp barnacles. Cha says, "I'll help you carry your kayak up."

I answer, "No thanks. I'm just going to unload it and take it up empty."

Cha huffs mad, swearing, and grabs the bow of his heavy kayak and drags it up the barnacles. I hear scraping and grinding as Cha hauls it a couple hundred feet. I haul my gear up in two trips and carry my kayak on the third. Putting out pad and blanket and sleeping bag, I lay down under the stars, the full moon rising over Camano Island.

September 15, 1981

I jump from my bedroll early and jog the state park, up around the camp sights, over steep trails through the woods and back down to the beach. In the big grass field I play hackysack. I focus on the bag. My eyes join it and I try to relate to it as part of me. In theory I never have to drop the sack. I can join forces with gravity and aim for consistency with it.

I jog back towards my kayak, jumping over drift logs. On the biggest log I find, I jump rope, swinging my leather round and round, faster, smoother.

As I jump, a paddle wheel ship passes by, like from pictures I've seen of them on the Mississippi River passes by, steam billowing out the stack. I stop my rope and wave and someone waves back. A siren sounds, "vvvt vvvt vvvt."

An aluminum skiff motors up to the beach and a man yells at me. I stop jumping rope. "So you don't get enough exercise kayaking from Alaska?"

I don't recognize these fellows. I walk down to their boat, my body shiny with sweat. The other fellow says, "Since you're so bronze tan and just came from Ketchikan, the land of gold, we thought we'd stop by and get some money from you."

They introduce themselves as Mike and Gill, both appearing to be in their sixties. "Oh," I say, recalling yesterday. "You were the guys on the porch with the lady that we paddled by..."

Mike says, "Ya, that's my wife, his sister. I used to manage Tongas Supply in Ketchikan for twenty years. Did you go in there?"

"Sure," I answer. "That's where we spent all our money. That's why Ketchikan is a rich town. So are you retired now, Mike?"

"I can only semi-retire because nobody can tell me how much longer I have. If I knew four years, I could budget for that, but I may have forty more. I first retired in Spain but I realized this side of Camano offered the world."

"Didn't you find Spain exciting?" I ask.

"Hell, yes. I find everything exciting!"

Mike tells about Gill, who sits smiling quietly. "Gill was the principal and superintendent of schools in Tacoma and he's retired. He still runs eight miles a day and runs in marathons."

Gill says, "Age is only in the believing. I stay young with attitude."

Mike says, "My wife and I swim every day in the salt water."

They tell us, Cha now next to me listening, of the best fishing spots near. They have crab traps. "Go ahead and take the crabs out. Take all the males, but throw the females back. You'll see our mark on the traps. We get crab all year, but the last three weeks have been the slowest."

Cha says, "Boy, the eagles sure have disappeared since we've been down south."

Gill says, "There are usually a lot here but they all went up the rivers following salmon. We'll be seeing you guys!"

We yell thanks and they motor away.

I swim and run to the park restrooms. Outside the cement building I meet a fellow named Chris, a lone gill netter who just finished the fishing season. He says, "I'm going to leave my boat in Bellingham, but then I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm thinking of going to Mexico and maybe ski through the winter, but I've never been to Mexico."

"Fall is nice down there," I say.

"What do you guys do for money?" he asks.

"Basically we're broke."

"Sounds good. I'm getting tired of being financially secure," he says. We shake hands goodbye.

After noon Denis and Danny come paddling in, having slept last night on Goat Island. They left at sunrise. Laughing, they tell stories of the Wooden Boat Festival, of wild times on the Prism and at Dan's dad's house in Sequim. Denis tells, "Steve and Mary were there giving their slide show of the row trip to Glacier Bay. I guess we were in it, but I got there too late. Steve said they had teamed up with the guy in the kayak, the Cotton Man from Bellingham that we met outside of Buttedale. Oh, I also saw there the other Dennis kayaker who we last saw in Powell River."

Danny tells a story, "I met this blonde girl who had just come up from California. We got to talking about the kayak trip and she told of her fun in California and somehow I mentioned VD. She knew about VD, too."

Denis adds, "Mark, you know when Richard left us from Robsin Bite and he said he was driving to California to give a girl a ride back? She's that girl. Richard spread VD in California."

We fish in Elger Bay where Mike and Gill had suggested. I take a couple of their crabs back to our illegal camp at the state park. We filet a half dozen fish and boil crabs. One fish, looking like a little shark, beaches itself on the gravel. Why? We throw it back and it soon beaches again, flopping up on dry ground. It bears a row of vicious teeth and Danny thinks it's a mackerel.

Cha and I star gaze from the beach before the moon rises, the night very clear; I find Arcturus, Draco the Dragon, The Big and Little Dippers, Theseus, Pegasus and Cassiopeia. Soon the moon rises red on the horizon and washes out the stars.

September 16, 1981

I leave at sunrise, the other guys still in their sleeping bags. The morning is calm and magic and I need to feel it alone, without words. The morning sky is red. The sun reflects off house windows to the west on Whidbey, though the great ball of fire hasn't risen high enough to clear Camano Island and strike me directly. A hooded Bonaparte gull dives for breakfast from thirty feet into the water. A loon laughs. I feel clean, clear, excited. I have a project. I will obligate myself to it. My book. I must write it when this trip is over, edit it, and learn. I've never written a book before but all I have to do is Do It. Before I learned hacksack I didn't want to try it because I didn't know how, but I learned when I decided to do it. Same with skiing. Until I decided to do it, I couldn't. How self defeating if I decide not to write my book just because I don't know how. Do it! I must. It is a project with an end in sight, like this kayak trip. Seattle is near now. I've always had an end in sight. Maybe that's why marriage frightens me; because if I choose that path, I choose only death as its termination. Divorce I will not accept. Divorce is wrong if my original choice to marry is done with care. "Waiting is." But I do obligate myself to life now, to care for myself and to care for others. To love and live. Maybe a focus would help me more, a lifelong focus. A wife. A child. Tears come to my eyes. I have doubts.

The sun strikes me. The moon is still high, three quarters full. Birds squabble and squeak against the high cliffs. A slight wind blows the pulp smell from Everett. Lumber, America's renewable resource; rape the land, foul the air, build a big house to live in and hide from the scars and stench, and get a job at the pulp mill to pay for the huge house. Ah, a perfect circle, nothingness obscured. A jet flies above from the Whidbey Naval Base. A sound of freedom.

Nearing Camano Head, the south end of the Island, I hear hammers pounding, cows mooing, chickens cluck clucking, sheep baaing, gulls screaming. A salmon splashes off my bow. I stop on the Head for breakfast; a sandwich.

Two and a half miles of water to cross and I arrive at Gedney Island on the same beach we had stopped at in April for a quick break. A couple acres of driftwood lies piled up from the storm tides. The hill above the spit is mostly covered with fresh green alder trees, some maple, and dwarfed evergreens. After pitching my tent so the guys will find me when they arrive later, I start a counterclockwise walk around the island to discover what is, thinking nobody lives here.

Salmon fishermen in sport boats float off the beach, many of them. I walk on, finding several driftwood forts. As a child, fort building seemed almost instinctual. To build a house. I long to do it. A return to lost traditions. Seems like traditions were established with purpose, like the nuclear family as the basic cell for society. If divorce is so easy, the basic cell is mutated. How can a body be healthy with sick cells? Yet mutations which survive are the means of evolution.

On the west side of the island I am surprised to find homes, new structures, real estate signs, dirt roads, cars and trucks. I thought I was alone... I was. After slipping on my bathing suit I carry, I wander on, stepping lightly in bare feet over sharp barnacles. I

meet two ladies and a man. The older woman says she was on the Odessa, the Russian Freighter in Alert Bay on the Fourth of July when we were there. They tell me I will need shoes to go on and I should meet a man and his wife on the south end of the island.

I venture on and meet the couple in a nice cabin among other cabins. Vic and Marion live in Seattle but have been coming to this island, which they call Hat instead of Gedney, for 25 years. Inside their home, Marion tells me as she hands me a beer, "Vic just retired the first of this month. We're kids again." Vic just smiles behind his glasses, his belly hanging down happily. "He worked for Joshua Green, then People's Bank." A painting on the wall shows the back of a naked bald man kicking up his heels. The caption reads, "Free at Last."

Marion wants to make sure I call my mom. Being a mom she knows the cares, "But our phone and power is out."

"I'm going to Everett to call P.U.D. Do you want to go with me, Mark? We can do some fishing on the way back," says Vic.

"Why not?" We row out in a dingy to Vic's boat and motor away to the big city, a half case of beer at our feet. Crossing Possession Sound the prop starts to slip so we kick in the auxiliary motor. We pull into a boat harbor at the mouth of the Snohomish River. The dock attendant is happy to see Vic and yells out, "Victoir," (pronouncing Bic Twah). We walk about the shipyards and Vic introduces me to a girl about my age, saying, "Meet my Ketchikan friend. Want to move out to his tent?"

The girl snaps Vic's red suspenders, then he snaps the front of her elastic blouse. With the prop fixed and the phone call made, we fish our way back to Hat Island, not feeling one bite on our lines.

"You're a piss poor fisherman, Mark."

"I know. So are you, Victoir."

We motor around to camp and three other tents are now set. The evening sun drops over Whidbey Island. I jump off Vic's boat, shove him away and bid him farewell, I'll see him tomorrow.

The other guys followed my beginning when they set up their tents, so all our shelters sit on the beach. Waves roll in from the northwest. The water is now within twenty feet and still rising. We start building dams with driftwood and sand and weeds and the tide comes closer. I feel high enough to be safe, and so is Denis' tent, but Cha is off wandering so we build his dam. "We're a bunch of Dome idiots," I say, the first of the water breaking through the dam, filling the moat. Dan digs a little deeper right outside his door and unburies an eight inch pink shovel.

"The Tool," he says, shoveling more sand on the weak points of the dam. We glance at Cha's tent and it is still safe. Denis and I just sit watching Dan protect his home. "The pink shovel will save us," he says, packing more sand and diverting the water.

In time the tide recedes and I mount the pink shovel in front of Dan's tent on a stick. "Pink Shovel Beach" I announce with my voice deep and loud. "The pink shovel saved the home!"

September 17, 1981

Foggy morn. Sand fleas. Yikes. Millions all over my tent. Random boingers. Aimless beings. Yikes. And their individual randomness adds into a constant noise. The

skin of my tent rattles like in a pouring rain, each drop an aimless boinger. My tent screen is smothered in the thick sauce of flea.

Dan and I escape to our kayaks to circum-paddle the island, to troll for salmon all around Hat Island, like a slow Mexican hat dance, only without the fleas. Last night Cha met a man building a home on the west side. We see the man working on his home again, so we beach. A woman hangs her head out of the upstairs window of a different house and screeches at us, "Heyyy..." We smile at her and realize immediately that she is toasted, or even baked. She says in her squeaky voice, "I was watching 'As the World Turns' and looked out my window and saw it was turning even faster out here. What are you doing in those little boats?"

The story is told again and I add, "We are the Great American Heroes." She almost dies laughing and choking and tells us to wait while she comes outside. She does, with paper and pen, and scribbles notes about us for the local Hat Press, but I doubt she'll ever be able to read the writing.

Dan and I escape this one too, paddling on, under an old pier and around the point, unsuccessful with any salmon. We go to the home of Victoir and Marion. They sit in the living room with a man named Chuck who is very big and looks maybe Indian. He's from Marysville and had a heart attack earlier in the summer. He is here recuperating in his vacation home. His wife works in Marysville. Marion invites us all to come later for dinner. We accept and paddle on with no more luck fishing.

By two in the afternoon the fog lifts. As we approach Pink Shovel Beach, Dan reaches into the water and scoops up a herring off a leaf of kelp. "Alright, you caught a fish. Eat it, now, raw," I say.

Dan fakes eating it and says, "Yum, and nutritious!"

I jump rope and swim and relax until we are ready to leave for dinner.

We paddle around Hat again to our friends' home.

After introductions, Marion shows us how obedient her little dog is, a little black pooch with Norman Rockwell Saturday Evening Post eyes. I laugh at the dog.

"Mark, you want dinner or not? Don't laugh at my dog. Come here, baby." She pampers him, but the pooch doesn't move. "Come on puppy." Soon the dog approaches. Marion wants him to perform dances; he sits and stays.

"Atta Pooch," I say. Marion threatens me jokingly with her eyes.

Victoir guides Denis and Cha outside to his bulkhead by our kayaks and shows them his project. A saw rests within a half way cut two by four sticking out of the ground, his job only half done. Cha zips off the rest of the board as I come out, then I take the saw and cut off the one other two by four poking out of the ground.

Victoir jokes us, "Now you've done it. It took me four days to cut through the first half of that one board and I still had a week's worth left on it. And with the other two by four you cut I had my work cut out for awhile. Now you guys really blew it." He has us all laughing so hard that we can't talk. Back in the house we sit drinking beers, Denis laughing at the naked man in the "Free at Last" picture. Victoir says, sitting back in his chair, one hand on a beer, the other on his belly, "You guys better go get jobs now, and support me or my social security checks will bounce."

Marion adds, "Ever since Vic has retired he's been having a constant celebration, drinking every day. He thinks life is a party."

"It is!" Vic says with a smile.

"Yeh! Bic Twa!" I cheer. Chuck walks in through the door with a big pot full of his special soup. Marion dresses the table with her pasta and some rich red sauce, a giant green salad and lots of fresh beer bread. Denis pets the pooch and it yelps.

Marion says, "He had staff in his ears and just got an operation, so he's sensitive. Come and eat." Vic pulls out more beer for us.

After stuffing ourselves, eating all the food presented, we talk of our arrival in Seattle. Marion makes us all call our folks to say we are okay and then she asks, "So you will come through the locks in Ballard at noon on the 22nd? Your folks will be there, we'll be there, so you be there too!"

We thank them for the meal and hospitality and apologize for taking away Vic's summer work. Vic gives us a bottle of Ripple Wine Punch. We paddle away into the dark night. Vic toots us off with his bugle. "Honk." Away from the light of the houses I am surprised by the number of fish we see darting under water, stirring up phosphorescence. We didn't even get a nibble fishing today.

Denis says, "The fish can't even swim a straight line, they just swerve and weave slalom courses."

I say, "I guess they have no reference points to fix a straight line. Or maybe they have a goal but they keep falling off it, then find it again."

"Or no reason to care to go a straight line," says Dan.

"Fish with VD," says Denis.

"Ahh," Dan yells, "a bat just flew between my paddle and my face." I could hear it, "wop, wop, wop".

Back at camp we scare away a black cat snooping our tents. Sand fleas have already arrived, but not in the numbers of this morning. In my tent, listening to the tick, tick, tick of the creatures I realize something new. Victoir joked about cutting that board, but he was a little bit truthful. That sawing was his focus, his work. Work lends purpose to life so that people aren't just random boingers, so that man is a higher being than a sand flea. Even a fictitious purpose will suffice. Goodnight.

September 18, 1981

Arrrghh. Sand fleas, many more than yesterday morning. They are thick over every inch of my tent. They have even wedged in through my screen zipper. I need to climb outside so I unzip fast, jump out and zip up, then return the same way. A thousand boingers hop inside my tent now and I begin to kill. Kill, squish, pop them boingers. They are aimless, they are unpredictable and scary. With every push of my thumb, with every death, I squirm, until the last boinger in my shelter is dead. I scream out and slap the fabric of my tent so the sand fleas outside bounce off. But they return again and blanket the tent. Aaaaaaa. The attack of the sand fleas. Help. I fall back asleep.

I awaken again with the sunrise, the moon high above, the water calm. We heard yesterday that rain was predicted. This morning I thrive for more body rushes, the speed and adrenalin and muscle of skiing or white water kayaking. I need more body rushes. I am excited to throw dynamite and ski this winter. I want to go to Mexico and to learn to surf better on rushing waves. And I must write my book. What a circle. I finish the kayak trip and must start it all over again in memory. Sand fleas have now disappeared, back to their holes in the ground where aimless beings belong. I swim and sprint on the beach

and enjoy the morning sun. Clouds approach from the west and wind blows from the Southeast.

Now the clouds cover and my naked skin is no longer warm enough so I take my holey wool blanket and drape it over me like a poncho, hanging to my navel in front and to my calves in the back. Blackness approaches on the water from the north. A sudden blast of cold wind blows. I run on the beach, naked except for my poncho. I roll in the sand and dance, twisting in air, jumping and flowing my arms around in circles.

We have three and a half days to paddle twenty miles to Seattle. A party will be waiting for us whether we are there or not. The storm lasts only minutes, the wind calming to five or ten knots. Dan laughs at me as I still dance, energized from the dramatic weather. He says, looking at me in my cloak of rags, my long beard and uncombed hair, "Hail, Jesus of Gedney."

I stop, embarrassed, and say, "No. Cheese of Gedney. My folks have always called me Cheese. So be it."

"He has spoken. Cheese of Gedney," announces Dan. I dance on down the beach.

Cha is ready for play too. He climbs from his tent with Zinc Oxide covering his nose. He sets his kayak on the beach, its nose also white from the Marine Tex patch. Dan photographs Cha with his arm around his kayak. Denis and I just stand there laughing because Cha and his boat have grown to look alike over the months, both wearing sunglasses on white noses.

We hike up the hill and see many signs of the fire which must have destroyed the old evergreens. I find an apple tree and pick fruit for the rest of the trip. At camp we open Vic's bottle of Strawberry Ripple Wine. I soon refuse to drink any more and I crawl out of Dan's dome and slowly pour my Ripple Wine into the pink shovel. "I spill this blood on Pink Shovel Beach," I yell. Cha dashes his cup out on the sand too, unable to drink any more of the syrupy wine.

Now rain falls steadily, the wind calm and the sand fleas numerous. I hear Dan playing his recorder as I doze off into my dreams.

September 19, 1981

I awaken to the sand fleas crawling all over my tent, not boinging. They march slowly like fans waiting to enter the Rose Bowl. Every once in awhile I flick my tent. They rain to earth, yet they return, marching slowly up, up, up. I imagine finding my friends' carcasses, devoured by the random boingers. The patch on my screen door is slightly ripped off. A single file line of sand fleas enter to get me. Ah...paranoia...

We join on the beach to talk. Dan tells how he has changed his attitude on skiing. "From now on, nobody will see me fall."

We pack and paddle around Hat Island to bid Vic and Marion goodbye. They say they'll see us at the locks. We paddle across Possession Sound to Mukilteo. A sailboat with five ladies passes us, thrilling everybody. At town the wind picks up and a man says we can camp in the parking lot of his lumber yard. We do and call a friend, Neil, who lives nearby. He visits in his truck and sits with us on the city bulkhead. He puffs down cigarettes as we make fun of them.

"You laugh," he says, "but this way I know how I will die. I am in control. John Wayne knew too. The Duke lived until his last cigarette killed him. I'm safe to drive fast and all I eat is white bread and I like it."

Denis says, "I met a guy once who saved the coupons from his cigarettes to buy his coffin when he dies." We laugh and tell stories and go to Everett to see "Excalibur," the movie of King Arthur and his sword.

We sleep in the parking lot next to a pile of creosoted logs, on the bulkhead above a slight sandy beach, the ferry dock to Whidbey in sight. "Urban kayakers, once again," says Denis.

Chapter 18

"Home"

"To empty one's mind of all thought and refill the void with a spirit greater than oneself is to extend the mind into a realm not accessible by conventional processes of reason."

The Language of Drawing by Edward Hill

September 20, 1981

We paddle from Mukilteo into the wind. Houses and railroad tracks line the mainland shore. After four miles, at Picnic Point, we decide to camp, still two days from our scheduled arrival at the locks. We land on rolls and layers of sea lettuce, much like fat on an overweight belly. The wind blows. We wear wool and all tread barefoot, except Danny, whose feet never had time to toughen completely. A train passes by above the beach. I feel the roar of the rolling machine when it is a long distance off. When it finally approaches, the ground shakes, the trees blow and wave. Wind picks up. The storm begins to bend trees. Waves crash on the beach, thrashing the piles of sea lettuce. Along with the high winds, another power approaches; a flash. And another. I see the streaks of lightning but I can't hear the thunder over the wind. We climb up to the railroad tracks and pick berries as the rain starts.

In my tent I think about the arrival home and my possibilities. A whole life to live and the power of choice. These days I'm beginning to think anything is possible. There is no limit, only thresholds to break through. I remember back to the days learning how to ski, how a field of bumps, moguls stacked up five feet high, frightened me. I couldn't ski then. But now I've experienced the feel. Likewise, there are things I can't do now that maybe with exertion and focus I can learn. People claim levitation is possible. Sitting in my tent with the wind practically lifting me off the ground, I now wonder. Because I don't believe something is possible will only make it less probable to experience. Some people believe levitation can and does occur. But to know it's true is also closed-minded because the possibility that levitation can't be done is eliminated. Is the only impossibility the ability to overcome all possibilities? If the ability to overcome all possibilities is possible, I must label that "God". If all possibilities exist, then God exists. Like Cha exists? But what about the possibility of God not existing? Words, words, words. I know the One from experience and it is more than me. I only tap in to that greater self. That greatest self, common to all life, must be God. My path must be Vacation Dynamics: the power of emptiness... the void, leading to Unity, and duality.

My tent door is zipped closed against the wind and rain. My world is confined to the inside of this tent. Whales or spaceships or anything could be going by outside my tent right now and I can't deny them just because I don't sense them. I peek out the flap of my door and see a purse seiner. No, I see colors of lights with shades for distances. Only my memory filters the vision and I decide I see a purse seiner. Mijou defined to me a purse seiner. In order to communicate with people I need to follow conventional definitions. But to define is to set boundaries and maybe what's real is outside those boundaries. Am I trained not to see and feel certain things? I feel nothing. I feel everything.

Believing something possible, one has a much greater capacity for success. If I know someone has high jumped seven feet, it will be easier for me to do. Choose, focus, exert.

Yet, I don't believe I can jump up seven feet.

People seem to reach the same conclusions. Is it because the same evidence leading to logical steps are apparent to all? It is as if the knowledge of the past floats in the air and I just need to free my mind enough to receive these messages. Or are the thoughts in the genes? My ideas are not new. Or are my genes only receptors? Hey Slug, send me a message!

I have always tried to maintain my optimism. I wonder if concentrated positive emotions could be contagious. Laughter is. Negative vibes sure seem to be. I feel them when I expose myself to them. That is why choice is my savior. I choose nothing. I choose everything.

The wind shakes my tent even more. I wonder how paddling to Seattle will be, still eleven miles. The waves roll white caps from the southeast. The low-pressure system is here. It's autumn. I sleep.

September 21, 1981

Rain, wind, waves. Today is the autumnal equinox. The Olympic Mountains peak through the clouds revealing their new accumulation of snow. The winter will be a good one. My skis wait.

We paddle. We must. We've had summer for ten weeks. It's time to be tough again. The seiners are right there offshore fishing. They're tough.

We paddle from Picnic Point into the 30-knot winds. Wet and slow. I stroke my kayak ahead of the others and after a couple hours, I only approach Edmonds, four miles from this morning's camp. Stopping at a seine boat, I yell up to the fellows on the flying bridge to look around for my buddies. The waves swell too big for me to spot them. One fisherman signals that three are in sight.

I paddle, watching the shore almost not move. The waves crash me constantly. I can barely make headway into the wind. Enough, I tell myself. I paddle to the ferry landing at Edmonds and beach, water dripping from every inch of my body.

Within a half hour the others arrive and I convince them we will call a friend and a truck and go home, now. "We can go to my bro's house and shower and party and paddle through the locks dry and rested tomorrow."

Danny questions the evasion for a second. Chris, a longtime friend, comes in his pickup truck. We load and leave.

At Paul and Cookie's house in Ballard, we empty the kayaks and put them in the middle of the neighborhood street. All of us are clean, after warm showers, wearing our VD towels. Chris shoots a series of photos of us. I stand on my hands in my kayak seat, my towel falling around my chest so I am revealed. Cha runs around naked. We decide maybe Seattle is not ready for us.

September 22, 1981

After a fine time with Paul and Cookie we load our four kayaks into Loady Lee's pickup truck, along with my bro's kayak for Lee to paddle. At our launching point in Golden Gardens Park, we hacksack until 11:30 so we will be right on time. We load and paddle through Shilshole Bay. I paddle by myself, singing under cloudy skies, "The bluest skies you've ever seen are in Seattle... Like a beautiful child, growing up free and wild, full of hopes and full of cheers, full of laughter, full of tears, full of dreams to last the years... in Seattle" (another television song). I paddle along wondering what path I would have followed if my Dad and Mom hadn't decided to move me out of Southern California when I was twelve.

Dan and Lee paddle behind, Denis, Cha and I together. Cha starts to blush and I feel weird too. I say, "I think we both just got hit by the same wave." Denis sits calmly. As we kayak around the bend, the locks come into view. A bugle horn blows. Our families and friends stand on the observation deck. We paddle closer and see TV cameras pointed on us. The boat locks are full, so we paddle up to the crowd. None of us have much to say. I hear the interviewer ask Cha what was the worst thing that happened on the trip. I want to tell him of the sand fleas, the aimless boingers. Peter and Barbara of Easy Rider Kayaks throw us sausages and someone hands us champagne. Vic and Marion talk with our Moms. I see Cha's Dad on the other side of the locks, away from the gathering.

Cha slides over to me and whispers, "I didn't know what to say. They had me on film." He is blushing.

"Tweet tweet blah blah." We laugh and feel safe together among the crowd. Radio people and newspaper reporters ask our folks questions. "They don't know our kayaks are empty," I tell Cha.

After we socialize, go through the locks, and socialize more, we return through the locks and paddle back out to Golden Gardens. I send my kayak away with Lee and, self contained in my knapsack, I join Dan, Cha, and Denis in Dan's Dad's van.

We drive to Denis' Mom's house and turn on the five o'clock news just in time. The show starts off with a film of us paddling around the bend where we first saw the crowd. The girl announces, "And later in the hour we have a story about three men who don't do things the easy way." This gets us laughing. At one point during the news cast the announcer continues by saying, "And more dismal news this evening..." Another focus of the news is on the illegal gathering of eagle feathers. The next shot is of our kayaks. Mine has a twelve inch eagle feather tied to my bow string. The announcer talks of our trip and draws the camera in close to Cha. "So, did you have a good trip?"

Cha answers on the prime time TV, "Yah, uh huh, sure."

"Would you do it again?"

"Oh, sure, yah uh huh, sure, mm hmmmmmm..."

I Can't See the Wind

Kayak Journals from the Inside Passage

April second in 1981, three guys in their early twenties, Denis, Cha, and Mark, set off from Lake Washington, through the government locks into Puget Sound, and paddled north from Seattle. September 22, 1981, the guys returned. They'd been to Alaska and back. The three kayakers are in their sixties now, with children and grandchildren of their own.

The adventure was a lifestyle these guys called Vacation Dynamics. Professional skiing in the winters was their work passion at the time. Almost six months in kayaks, immersed in island lifestyle, helped shape values that affected the rest of their lives.

The Inside Passage is a group of islands and fjords stretched more than a thousand miles between Olympia, the capital of Washington State, north through British Columbia, Canada, and into Alaska. A few channels pass "outside", into the open Pacific Ocean, but mostly the Inside Passage wanders through the protection of thousands of islands. The kayakers paddled about half of the whole distance.

Denis, Cha, and Mark camped and cooked and loved the world and experienced each other and shared many moments with the wonderful residents along the way. With their kayaks they hitchhiked on a fishing boat north from Nanaimo, Canada, to Ketchikan, Alaska. They paddled north a bit, then kayaked all the way back to Seattle.

In the tradition of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* for the fifties, and of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters written about in *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* by Tom Wolfe regarding the sixties, this book is about the freedom seekers from 1981.



Mt. Baker from Mt. Constitution on Orcas Island