AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Tracy Daugherty

These essays are an attempt to rebuild memories that explore the nature of work and family. They explore how work knocks against the joints of the body and against the joints between family members, and, as time passes, how the next generation inherits the family line of work only to strain against family tradition. How does work ebb and flow through our lives? When does work become an artist's passion? How does the family at work mark the same child, individual, and adult with a kind of debris called memory? These essays explore the tension between our desires and our choices, and how the two struggle to connect.

These essays also want to test the strains on the tensions between art and craft; between work and education; and between apprenticeship and formal education. *Headwater* is also about time passing, what we do with our time. At the core of this writing is an appreciation for how the skilled hand translates work into gifts of time, and gifts of time translate into art, so that these memories, ultimately, are not the past.

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Headwater

by
Jacob L. Martens

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Jacob L. Martens, Author

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And finally, most of all, to my family, for believing.

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DEDICATION

For Father and Daughter

Headwater

Foreword

As work ends, sweat dries, and the source from which it springs—dries and withers too, but the work of labor that brought about this headwater has already laid the riverbed, it has already built the house beside it. Only the products of labor remain. The things are in tension with the actions that created them. A moment of work passes and nothing remains of it except a work of art, or nothing—the process is lost, only to be saved by memory. This is mystery, the seed of storytelling and the teaching of craft.

After this moment, there is nothing left but that which has turned to stone, the way memory turns to stone, each memory like a stone in a riverbed. Here I have flung forth such stones on these pages, but the river of time keeps springing from its headwater and rolling each stone, pebble, and grain of sand, turning them, rearranging them, and moving them one stone closer, with each passing moment, to the sea. Reader, be suspect of the memories told here.

What I tell you now about headwaters is all I will say these essays are about headwaters. When a memory percolates from wherever it comes, it becomes the raw material out of which I build structures with the carpentry skills that my father passed on to me through an apprenticeship of wood and shelter. I have sweat with my father, beside him, but I have also left his side and found my own labor.

This branching off, as each individual in the family must, as my daughter and my son will, is the central preoccupation of these pages. For the last two years, these essays have been my work, and they will continue to be my work as I craft them into art, and I will only call them art when I finally give up the attempt and lift away my pen. Only then will I have more fully mapped the course of this river.

But for now, I will continue to have these memories and tell these stories. And each time I tell them, or remember them, they will be told differently, because time has shifted the relationship of the stones, and when they roll and clunk, a new surface

breaks the flow, a new arrangement changes the water's tune over the rock. So, reader, it may be a loss of your precious time to navigate a river into the underworld of memory that has only been—as it can only be— charted at its headwater. But welcome, if you must.

As I write now, the world outside is in flux. Spring seems early this year, and when I go for walks I still kick fall leaves. The branches that only a few moments ago seemed black have turned pink and puffy overnight, inciting the buzz of insects to gather their pollen and nectar. The cottonwood and willow leaves on the edges of Stewart Slough outside my window popped last night, and the breeze comes, and they quiver. They wave and shimmer the sunlight, not knowing what will come in the fall, or if knowing, not caring. Their job for now is to gather the heat of the sun, turn it into sugar, and feed the underground roots.

I think of these leaves at work, that their work is not more different than this work of my pen. I give memory—that part of me already deep underground—sunlight, and memory sends up water that keeps my brain wet, that wets my eyes and makes clear to see what this living is, what this is to feel alive in the spring wind. Thus, the storyteller's job is to break apart and to rebuild the puzzle of time spent here. What a gift this job is; may your time be so kind.

My life keeps changing, and the work does not end.

Treasure

I used to listen to my father get up early to go build houses. One morning when I was five years old, I got up to watch. He was starting a fire in the woodstove in the kitchen. He crumpled newspaper, stuffed it into the firebox, then paused as if he had stopped to read something before wadding it up. He turned and glared at me, his wiry moustache locked in a frown, its ends hanging down past his jawbone. "Go back to bed," he said, and I did.

Over twenty years later, I can still see the yellow crack of light around the bedroom door, and I can hear him. The cedar snaps in his hands as he breaks each shake into kindling and loads it into the firebox. He says something to himself—or to my mother, probably still naked, who hurries past him to the bathroom. He strikes a match on the inside of the cast iron door. I imagine how he holds his breath as he passes the flame from one corner of newspaper to another, the way I did when lighting the fire early one winter morning during a visit to his converted barn-house with my wife and five month old daughter.

Sometime the night before, the fire had died out. Felina was cranky and keeping my wife and me awake. The air on my cheek stung. I arose and replaced the quilt over Felina; the skyline over Greyback Mountain was lightening hues of blue below the star-speckled blackness. I went outside and came back with an armload of wood; I crumpled the paper, stacked the sticks, and struck the match. The wood crackled and the flames rushed up the stovepipe. Upstairs, Felina started to fuss. I pulled her out of her playpen, wrapped her in a blanket, laid her against my shoulder, and carried her downstairs. By the fire I stood patting her back and swaying, shifting my weight foot to foot, waltzing her in circles. I hummed softly. My father came down, and I was slightly embarrassed that he'd caught me dancing. "Good morning," I told him quickly, but he didn't return the greeting, or if he did, I did not hear him. All our lives we all knew Dad was especially grumpy in the mornings; he'd usually sweeten up after coffee. He was in his Mr. Roger's sweater that matched his salt and pepper streaked moustache.

"Not warm enough for you?" he said as he corrected the flue.

"For Felina," I said, letting it roll off.

He made us strong French roast with whipping cream. I opted out of the sugar; he always seemed irritated that I didn't like it the way he made it for me. He sat on his potter's stool next to the fire while I gently rocked his first grandchild. Together we watched the sky lighten, the features of the landscape turned gray and sharp. Frosty dew fuzzed the curled brown heads of Queen Anne's lace in his field. We talked about the deck I had just finished building for a customer; about frozen lumber at the jobsite; about the low grade wood these days, when the same S4S stamp still meant surface four sides. We talked about numb fingers fumbling nails and the danger of a newly-knurled hammerhead.

While the sun rose and the frozen earth began to sparkle, Felina squirmed away from my grasp, from being thrummed against my shoulder, and she impressed upon me that she wasn't going back to sleep. I handed her to Grandpa. He stood her on his lap and talked sweet to her, holding her in his sun-spotted hands, his potter's hands, his fingers spread wide, his fingers swollen and browned from years of carpentry. I looked at Felina in my father's hands and listened to him coo as if she was the brightest red glaze in a batch of pots fresh from his kiln, and I envied her.

On that long ago morning when Dad sent me back to bed, when the flames rushed up the chimney flue and the fire's low howl rumbled in the tinkling stovepipe, I had jumped back in bed and snuggled, trembling in the cool crack between the mattress and the wall. I anticipated him coming home from work that night, when he'd be in a better mood and I could slip into his shadow and watch him work around the farm without feeling I'd burden him with my help. I waited for him to come home before he had even left.

I lay there becoming the observer, listening as he and Mom spoke in hushed tones about something I know now was probably overdue bills or taxes. The kettle clicked as it warmed up and finally rose to a whistle that faded when the heat was removed. Mom's fork scratched the bottom of the cast iron skillet as she scrambled

eggs and tended pork sausage, the smell penetrating my room, its sizzle like rainfall. Dad's coffee beans rattled in the electric grinder until the pitch of the blade and whine of the motor indicated the right grind.

The second time I woke up, the house was still. Occasionally, a piece of firewood popped or settled in the stove. By now, my father would be at work somewhere in the cold drizzle—half-hour to the north in Tacoma or Puyallup or even further to some suburb of Seattle; sometimes he even took a ferry across the Puget Sound to go build a house.

After we sent my sister off to school, I spent the morning rubbing sleep from my eyes, sitting in my father's chair by the fire, admiring the woodwork and the joinery I thought he had put into his chair. I sat balanced on its broad arms and took care not to tip the chair into stove's hot white porcelain side or gunmetal cook surface. Mom scraped the last sausage bits from the skillet.

"Why don't you draw?" she said after setting the skillet on the stove to crackle and hiss until all the water dried. A water drop dripped from her knuckle and skittered across the stove. She set me up with a pencil and paper. I climbed up onto the other arm which boosted me up to the table, and I drew a picture of our house that my dad built in the woods. While I drew, I rolled my tongue around my mouth, and stopping to poke my first loose tooth with my tongue; the heat on my back felt good.

In 1974, two years before I was born, my father moved his wife and five month old daughter from the Los Angeles area to the small logging town of Eatonville at the base of Mt. Rainier in the Washington countryside. A year later he purchased ten acres of Weyerhaeuser logging slash for five thousand dollars and built our home from materials he had salvaged by tearing apart a building on a military base at Fort Lewis, Washington. By today's standards, it was a small house for four people. Its footprint was 24 feet by 24 feet, about 800 square feet counting the upstairs loft, but that was as big as he could build with the material he'd been able to salvage. The architecture was Craftsman, not by design but by necessity—a simple single gable roof with shed-roof

dormers out the front and back. The front of the house had three windows: one was five by eight and had once been the storefront of Eatonville Telephone Office. The window pane still had lettering and a telephone embedded in the glass, a phantom shadow that could only be seen in the right light. The second—the kitchen window—was a standard four-by-four aluminum framed sliding window; and the loft's dormer window was leaded stained glass that seemed so old that the glass had no color. It was long and narrow; it sat horizontal in the frame, and it was my parent's headboard. I had been born up in that loft, and one day I would realize that most people had been born in hospitals, so I may have thought about that too when I penciled the house my dad had built.

I drew the front elevation— the eastern side that faced Mt Rainier's white summit which rose like a first tooth above the treetops—in rectangles and squares. I drew a long rectangle for the roof, two lines down from the ridge for the centered dormer, which I couldn't seem to get right. Unlike many other kids' drawings I've seen since, my drawing had no front door: It was hidden on the north elevation. The porch, with its steps, its post and beam and brace from which hung our brass bell, our "doorbell" and "Come 'n' get it" bell, its angles, and its peel pole railings, was simply too complicated to draw, so I didn't try.

But I did draw the chimney pipe that projected through the southern gable end, turned up at an elbow, rose above the ridge and split to a t-top, a t-top that always emitted two gray curlicues of smoke that rose and bent in the breeze. Down on the left front I included the rain barrel, and opposite, where the porch should have been, I gave the scene symmetry with a huge stump. I loved to leap from the stairs up onto that stump and see how far I could pee. Between the stump and the barrel, along the ground, I drew humps to represent the river rocks laid side-by-side like teeth to make the border of the flower bed.

I wanted to draw Dad like he was in the photograph on the hutch by the front door: Dad standing in front of the house holding the King salmon that he claimed had towed his boat across the Puget Sound, fish blood leaking from its anus and dribbling down his wrist. I thought about drawing Bart, the bear-like dog sitting at Dad's feet,

tail thumping the ground, looking up at Dad's fish, drooling. But this, too, was beyond me. So I finished the sketch: a sun in the west over the house, a bird squiggle vee, a popcorn cloud.

I laid the pencil down across the drawing and asked Mom when Dad was coming home. In a few hours, she said. I climbed from the chair's arm and perched on the top rail of the chair-back with my feet in the seat and looked around. Inside the house, our bedroom and the bathroom were the only rooms defined with four walls and doors. The rest of the house spilled into its other parts. The ceiling above the dining/kitchen area opened to my parent's loft. The post and beam construction divided spaces and lines by their given spans: a four by twelve beam, as a rule of thumb, spanned twelve feet. Trees that had once stood in our woodlot had been felled, stripped of their bark, and were positioned in every corner and midway point. I could see the beams and joists at work, jointed together, holding up our home. The coffee stained ceiling joists were marked with nail heads or old holes and waffled hammerhead blows, or new nails half-sunk from which hung braids of garlic, bundles of sage, sprigs of thyme from the garden.

I stood in my father's chair and turned to the wall. Splinters bristled in the rough sawn planks, and I brushed them softly with my fingertips. Behind and above his chair four items hung from tiny bright finish nails: a set of homemade hot pads that matched the paisley tablecloth; two painted porcelain tiles one showing a bearded man in one corner swinging an axe and in another corner the same man sitting by the fire. Between the scenes were these words: "He who cuts his wood is twice warmed." The other tile showed a bonneted woman standing over a woodstove. It read "Blessed are the good cooks"; finally, a matchbox holder that reminded me of our rabbit feeders. When Mom wasn't looking, I pulled out a few matches and admired their cedar sticks and red stone-like heads. They smelled like Dad. I turned again, leaving the matches, and hopped out of my father's chair and skated my socked feet across the waxed wood floor over to the ladder that stood between the refrigerator and the kitchen counter.

At the ladder, I stuck my head between the third and fourth rungs, wormed my way through, twisting to my back, crawling through until I had locked my ankles

against the rails, and I let go. My head fell back like a pendulum, throwing the world upside down, fingers brushing the floor. "What are you doing, Mom?" I asked. I hung from the ladder and watched Mom rinse celery for tuna salad. When all the blood had gone to my head, I righted the world, pulling myself back up to my father's ladder.

Then I climbed up the angled backside of the ladder and dangled and stretched. When my fingers felt smashed from hanging, I dropped to the floor, then crawled back through a rung foot first like it was a picnic bench. When I was about two, I used to sit like that and chew the ladder tread and taste its peppery aroma. Even now, thinking about it makes my mouth water. Its treads were about the size and density of my father's hands—two-by-sixes.

Up, up the ladder I went, hugging it, clinging to it, looking up to the forbidden territory of the loft. I leaned out over the kitchen, and looked down on Mom and saw the grey skin of her scalp. Two treads from the top, I asked permission to go up by myself. Without railings, we must not have spent much time up there as toddlers. But I had been born up there on a shower curtain, over a bucket, at the top of the ladder, and now I realize it was like being born on the edge of a cliff. On the day I was born, my two-and-a-half year old sister—Felina's age now—climbed the ladder—her first solo climb—and peeked over the ledge, ready to see what new thing I was. As a father now, I can't imagine how my parents dealt with the worry, how Mom managed to carry me up the ladder to nurse me in the wee hours, or how she felt the time I climbed up five rungs, then came crashing down.

The loft smelled like down blankets pulled from the closet for winter, like a mix of sausage, coffee, wood smoke, Mom's shampoo and Dad's sweat. The heat up there made me sleepy. My parents' waterbed was in the front dormer and I went to Mom's side of the bed. It felt safe. In the window sill on my father's side, I saw something I wanted to see closer. My Dad's half of the bed—and his half of the loft—was open to the kitchen below. I worked my way to the window, holding onto the waterbed frame. It was a two-foot ledge. At the end, there was a statue my parents kept at the head of their bed. It was a bronzed plaster statue of a naked man and

woman— a couple I still assume were Adam and Eve— kissing, locked in an embrace that, as I realize now, suggested more. But then, I simply turned the statue carefully and looked at it from all sides, not sure why it made my stomach feel odd. Adam's biceps hid all but the flanks of Eve's breasts. I tried to imagine my parents in the same position, but I couldn't because Adam looked like he was attached at his calf to a tree stump which put them outside, and Dad didn't tower over Mom as much as Adam did Eve. Standing next to my parents' bed, I felt like I was looking at something I shouldn't have. Sometimes, that same something was in Dad's woodwork.

In the south end of the loft near his desk, my father kept a wood carving that I'll always believe is a full scale model of my mother's body. When they had first met she had been bleached blonde, a bikini contest winner. After two children, her body no longer matched the wooden pattern he had carved: light spilled down the crease of the wooden woman's spine, the small of her back, and sat on the curve of her hip like the shiny spot on an apple. Her front side faced the wall mysteriously. When we finally moved away from that house when I was seven, I watched my father carry her down the ladder, the small of her back nested over his shoulder, and his hand lay over her black belly. That was when I saw her completely for the first time: from her sternum to shoulder, around the front side of her left ribcage, she was split open and twisted in dry splintered strands like firewood. Up by her heart, coal black whorled wood hinted at the tree's death. He had carved the body he could from the split trunk of black walnut, working away the wood to find her body, running his hands over and over her humps with finer and finer grit sandpaper till her auburn swirls shone.

But at five, I simply crouched low to look at the wooden body; I also stayed low to keep from feeling the vertigo of standing too close to the edge in my father's narrow loft. Directly below me, in the cracks between the floorboards, I saw Mom stepping side to side as she placed the top slice of white bread first on one tuna sandwich, then the other. Not long after, she called me down for lunch.

I climbed back into the arms of Dad's chair to eat. The hardwood surfaces felt warmed by the fire. I once thought that he had built this chair the way he built two tea hutches. Although I recently learned of its true builder—the famous furniture maker,

Gustov Stickley— even now, over twenty years later, the illusion is almost too strong. Then as now, the chair fits together solidly, built of oak stained the color of Dad's creamed coffee. In the flat of each chair arm, a thick black tenon joint rises out of the arm like a huge square cufflink. The grain in the arms is speckled with slits and is peppered with pores. To my young eye it looked rough, but to the touch it was smooth, so smooth and polished that the crocheted runner draped over the back often slumped out of the chair and onto the floor of its own accord. Its willy-nilly movement felt like the kind of decisions my father seemed to make for the family, decisions that split my childhood in two.

In 1983, when the economy slumped and no one was building houses, Dad announced we were moving away. That spring, we moved from the Eatonville countryside back to Southern California, where we emptied our things into my grandparent's garage. We stayed for the better part of third and fourth grades. Dad tried to get permission from the county to build a house on piers on an acre of creek bed outside Oak View, a creek which would ten years later scour the land away with a roar of mud, rock, and debris. Instead, we found a feasible lot in Ventura. There in a decrepit neighborhood of old oilfield shacks, including two we needed to demolish first to start construction, Dad built a new home. It was beautiful— the only house on the street with a round window above the front door and cedar siding that changed into fall colors over the years. But since school started growing more intense, I never again seemed to have the time or the urge to draw home.

Our new house was larger than the old one in the woods. He built it to code. It had carpeted stairs; he built redwood railings designed to prevent toddlers from slipping their heads through. None of the building material was salvaged from a torn-down military base or had washed up on the banks of a river. Our new walls were white—gypsum, but Dad left some woodwork natural, like the birch door skins. I was ten by the time he was applying the finishing touches. One time when I came home from school, the house smelled like burnt orange peels. I asked him what that smell was and he told me it was his favorite wood preservative, a fifty-fifty mixture linseed

oil and turpentine. The oil-finish popped the wood grains and made me see bird's eyes and ghosts' mouths in the whorls and knots.

The grain in one door was especially terrible. At the mill, in the process of peeling the birch log into door-skin (a process not unlike unwrapping a lollipop stick, only with a mammoth razor blade) the blade peeled two knots to look like two long white horns. Centered in the door like a portrait, a caped, horned, and goateed figure appeared to me one day, and behind the figure the background wood-tone was almost the color of orange flames. I wasn't sure if it had been his conscious choice, but the figure stood guard over my parents' room where, inside, they kept the color television, the family's new hearth.

The Stickley chair had been moved to my father's bedside, and on the arms where I used to sit now sat a digital alarm clock which my sister and I glanced at nervously as its red letters neared five o'clock, about the time Dad usually came home from work. Usually, if he caught us watching television, he'd only change the channel, but his gruff tone of voice was enough to make us feel miserable for not working on our homework or being absent from that place altogether. We found out later that it was his habit to drop his keys and wallet on the television set, and when he did he could still feel the TV giving off heat.

Although I didn't understand at the time why my father never seemed happy to be home from work, I found times on the weekend when I could shadow him without feeling I was the source of his misery. Once, when I was twelve, I found him in the garage and watched him sharpen a flat chisel on the honing stone. Soon, Dad started explaining to me about the best angle to give the chisel an edge, then he stood behind me as I held one of my great-grandfather's chisels which I'd found poking out of his brass championship cup and had wanted to sharpen. I was both mesmerized by the shower of orange red sparks and frightened by the clatter of steel against the howling grindstone. From the machine, we honed the blade on the stone, then polished it on a strip of leather. We tested my edge, running a chamfer into a block of black walnut, and then he showed me how to carve. He drew a five-petaled flower and gouged out a curl of wood to show me how to cut away from my body. I carved his design; he

called it relief carving. Oddly enough, that was the last time I ever saw him carve wood.

Later, when I was sixteen, I realized his mood after work was not due to anger so much as to pain. One weekend, we were tearing down the old Model A shed in the back corner of the yard. He was pulling down a rafter when I saw his shoulder give out. I can still hear it pop, and I see him as if hanging for an instant, as if stretched out in the air. He stopped and curled over, his face contorted in pain as one arm hung straight down into the dust and he kneaded his shoulder back into place.

Later, at dinner, he told us that during one of the last plays of the last game of his high school football career—at Homecoming, no less—he'd dislocated his right shoulder. The doctor taped him up, but he couldn't ride his motorcycle home one handed. Instead of calling for help, he ripped the tape and drove himself home that night. Over time, the cartilage and ligaments reattached and he never went back to the doctor. After high school, my father learned carpentry from his father and spent his career swinging a hammer when he had no smooth joint to swing it with. Still he sunk nails. After work, he often did not have the strength to throw a baseball. Only this time, as it turned out, tearing down the shed that day, he injured his other shoulder, and again, he avoided going to the doctor.

About the time I graduated high school and had started to be Dad's roofing apprentice, Mom coaxed him into taking a ceramics class at the local community college that she had taken. Dad was hooked. The wedging and throwing of the clay was actually good therapy for his shoulders, it turned out, and now after work, he looked forward to getting off the roof we were shingling and going home to trim his latest pot. He liked it so much he searched the county for a used wheel; he found two, bought them both, and set up shop in the garage. Once Dad set his mind on a form, he grew obsessed with a throwing a perfect form: he pursued an ancient jug—the flat bottomed Greek amphora. Each pot came out a variation on the last, with sensuous hip-like curves, with handles inspired by the dog's lolling tongue resting on its toy rock. He threw his pots in two pieces, and his work soon appeared seamless. Dad always trimmed his feet leaving tool marks on the bottom of the foot like a coiled

rope. "Art Pots: 2000 Years under the Sea," he later called them when Mom started to take photos of his pottery, then enter the photos in the country fair. She always had her own style of promoting him.

When he first set up shop, his work was too fragile and prolific to transport his greenware to the college for firing, so he built his own kiln with a bed frame that he chopped up, had my sister's new husband weld together. Then he lined it with high fire refractory brick and other space-aged fibers, the same materials used in the space shuttle. To fire his kiln he used a blow torch that he had won years before at a roofing supply barbeque, the only raffle prize he had ever won in his life.

Soon after completing his first bisque fires, he started to make up his own glaze formulas of zinc oxide, barium carbonate, tin oxide, kaolin, feldspar and bentonite. But I worried about him after he shooed me from the garage one day while he was weighing out elements. Dad told me cyanide and lead toxins poisoned the glaze and made it dangerous to weigh and measure the dusty raw materials. I feared he would poison himself; he only used a pollen mask or bandana for protection. Once I watched from the back door as a cloud of dust rose as he mixed the powders together before adding the water. I held my breath for as long as I could, but I could still smell sharp, irony dust.

Opening the kiln after glaze firings became a family event. Although recently married, my sister still lived nearby, and she often came those mornings after the fire. His pots came out still hot and tinkling, glazed from cerulean to blood red to copper to gun metal, all on the same vessel, using the same glaze formula. We liked to admire his work fresh out; it made him grin. Along with his pots, each of us would have something we had made of our own to lift from the kiln--a mug, salt and pepper shakers, a sculpture. I had been taking evening classes in liberal arts, classes like photography and music appreciation, and, inspired by an Andean winds concert I'd attended at the college, I started to form music-makers. I made rattles and ocarinas that tinkled, tweeted and shrieked, shaped like rocks, birds, turtles, fish, and rat-faced monsters. I finished many with my father's blood red glaze.

After a while, the rest of the family stopped making trinkets, but Dad's pots started to fill the halls and splash red and copper light on the walls. The jugs lined the patio and appeared in various related clusters around the yard, a strange kind of procession. He rotated the better ones inside or outside as new favorites were pulled from the kiln.

Later, I quit my apprenticeship roofing and transferred seven hundred miles away to a four year college in Northern California. At forty-nine, Dad quit roofing the same day I did. He quit working altogether and spent his time working on art pots. It was Mom's turn to get a job, he decided, since she'd finished a teaching degree and was eying another in social work. At first, Mom tried to promote his art at a local gallery. They told me how slow it was when we talked, the three of us. They told me how they tried to participate in a downtown art walk; lots of folks gawked, but not aware of the challenge of copper reds, they did not buy. Unfortunately, when he finally sold a piece it wasn't enough to pay for his materials. As they told me how miserable it was to sit for an art walk, I was worried but not surprised, for his vases had little use but to display dried flowers. The low-fire glazes did not seal completely against leaking water, that—and because he only sold red pots. But Dad did find work, he told me. A Japanese man at the local college had commissioned Dad to build him his own kiln and to make an urn for his mother's ashes.

It felt strange to think Dad was making funeral urns; I encouraged him to buy new stock glazes and make coffee cups, thinking he could retire on doing something he loved, but pottery was not a craft to him. It wasn't production; it was an art; he told me it was form over function. He made coffee cups on a person-to-person basis, like the few he stamped with nuts and bolts, glazed them gray, and called them his manly mugs. Why did his art need to be dishware? Why did it need to be of use? I tried to suggest diversifying his market: Why target a few with disposable income and the ability to color coordinate with copper? Thinking entrepreneurially, I suggested calling up funeral homes, selling wholesale. But he didn't; he made red pots. After a while, Dad complained that his arm hurt from holding the phone and we said goodbye. There was nothing I could do for them.

By the time I finished my bachelor's in English, I had spent my roofing money on five acres of inexpensive forest land in Cave Junction, Oregon; had dug a well on it; had built a small cabin; and had sold it all, its value rocketed by the Y2K scare, but overall, my payoff was no where near my father's had been on his country landscape because he had started a family on his. I didn't. I gave up that particular romance and chose college, and there, by the time I finished, I had also married. Not long after our wedding, Mom decided to buy her sister's place in the Cave Junction countryside even after I warned her it was hard to find work out there. There was no swaying her; she wanted to be near us and back in the country. After eighteen years of city living, it had closed in on them. They sold the house, along with much of its furnishings and its yard full of pottery—some of which he shattered, buried, or sent out with the weekly garbage—
to my sister.

I had warned them of the risk: the barn-house was full of mice and the roof leaked. But for them, the views of fields, forests, and Greyback Mountain—the solitude, the atmosphere— all made up for it, they claimed. They moved in late November, and Dad hadn't been inside until then. Any disappointment they felt that first night as the sieve-like roof leaked winter rains all over their belongings—while they set out pans, bowls, and buckets—was countered by the good news that my wife and I were expecting our first baby. Somehow, for them—as if they knew I would start a family—the pregnancy justified the move. They had both just started their fifties and Felina would be their first grandbaby. He put his pottery on hold and worked through the shop room by room making it air and water tight while he and Mom lived in rooms sectioned off with plastic to contain the construction dust and to keep the place warm.

Most of the plastic was gone by the time we visited that winter when Felina was five months old, although parts of the house were still under construction. The construction was taking its toll on Dad's body. The dust had started to form sties on his eyelids, and he always seemed to have scratchy cough. When he held my daughter that morning, the backs of his hands were chiggered with scabs. Eight months after that visit, I moved my family five hours away. By then, I had quit construction; I gave

up my contractor's license as if his trade also threatened my body. I moved away to study writing at graduate school, and almost a year into it, when Felina was almost two, we visited again to find the house even more complete.

On that recent visit, I saw—almost three years after my parents' move to Cave Junction—that my father's Stickley chair had re-emerged from storage not to sit next to the fire but to sit in its own room. Now it sat in what they called the family room, and it sat alone, the lone piece of wooden furniture in the cold room, and it was covered with the same brown and white runner that had so often in my childhood slipped mysteriously to the floor of its own accord.

The family room walls had been painted raspberry sherbet and the ceiling orange sherbet. The Stickley chair shared the room with a vinyl chase lounge; a couple of plastic lawn chairs; some books; some plastic storage containers full photo albums and my Grandma Millie's crocheted blankets, their lids doubling as coffee tables; some picnic baskets full of Eatonville photos; and several pots lined the walls like a procession of stone balloons, evidence that Dad had resumed his search for the perfect form.

On that recent visit, the family went for two walks a day—one in the morning and one in the evening. The first morning, Felina walked between her grandparents, holding their hands. Every few steps she would count to three and lift her feet off the ground, expecting to be swung forward. By the time we reached the road and had looked at the angus cows and the miniature horses in the neighboring fields, I noticed Dad wincing every time Felina swung forward.

"I don't know how her arms can take that," he said.

By that afternoon, Dad was in one of his moods—maybe it was his shoulders, maybe it was his head; either way, it was pain—so that evening, Mom, Felina and I went for another walk down the lane, this time without him. I asked her if they had thought about making a will, something I felt I couldn't even bring up to my father, but it turned out they had been discussing it; they just didn't know a lawyer. "It is only for safety," I said, "in case you get in a wreck on Redwood Highway. So the state won't automatically take over." But inside I was thinking of the time my mom had

quoted my father to me over the phone: "'I'm having an aneurysm,'" he'd said, and I imagined him squeezing his head, popping Advil. I tried to be optimistic since both my great-grandparents had lived into their nineties. I hoped both my parents would be as lucky, and I tried not to think about their deaths. We talked about how peaceful the countryside was, and Mom wanted to know if we would return to the country if they left us the barn. I told her I didn't know and changed the subject, hopping the ditch to pick blackberries. Felina sat on her grandma's shoulders and I stood in the ditch sampling some berries. They were sweet; the hard seeds broke between my teeth. I handed some up to her. The blue sky framed her. Felina's lips and teeth purpled, and then she leaned down and tried to push some into her grandma's mouth.

The next day, just before we left, Dad told me—as if Mom had talked about the will in the night after we had all gone to bed—that the most valuable thing he had was the chair. "It is a Stickley chair," he added. I still wasn't sure what he meant by that; I had always assumed it was his woodwork. I was surprised as it sank in that he was not the maker of the chair. Then I remembered I had heard Dad mention Stickley before, a long time ago at the Ventura house when I had asked why he didn't do woodwork anymore. I think that's when I first learned it wasn't his woodwork but Stickley's, the furniture maker. I had forgotten about it then, but now I wanted to know whose art I had admired for all that time. This time, I went home and did some research at my university's library. As soon as I got home from the library I called my father and read to him, excited, barely containing myself. It wasn't that a Stickley Mission Oak Style chair could sell for over a thousand dollars, but rather, I thought, I had found the reason behind my own life's movements back and forth from the calm country to the busy city. The rural and urban tension seemed as much matter of form versus function as my father's unbending determination to craft art for the sake of art. It was the same tension on our disagreement on economics of his artwork. Since Dad had insisted his pottery was purely art—rather than a craft's need to be of use—I was anxious to read him more. I had always assumed arts and crafts were as interchangeable as glue and paste.

"Have you ever read Gustav Stickley," I asked him on the phone. "Do you know about the Arts and Crafts movement?" I asked.

His answers came back abrupt; he was kiln sitting, and had just started to candle the flame. "No, I haven't read Stickley," he said.

So I read him passages of Stickley's Craftsman Homes, from 1909; it was a book full of floor plans and words I thought might have inspired what he told me once was called by his San Fernando Valley hippy friends as "getting back to the garden." So I read , "'We advocate a return to cultivating the soil as means of obtaining the actual living—that is, of looking to garden, grain patch, orchard, chicken yard and pasture for the vegetables, fruits, cereals, eggs and meats consumed by the family....a little farm of five or ten acres.'"

"That was us in Washington," I asked, "wasn't it?"

Dad cleared his throat. "Guess so."

I asked him a few questions, trying to make a connection where there didn't seem to be any.

"No, I said I never read Stickley; no, none of my friends did either. No, I never picked up the chair because I liked Stickley or the Arts and Crafts Movement, nor had he a particular attraction to Craftsman architecture."

"The Craftsman bungalow floor plans in my book look very similar to the Eatonville home," I insisted.

"Really? Listen—"

He sounded like he wanted to go and had been a good sport, but I kept talking, trying to fill the silence, trying to find something. "How did you get the Stickley chair, anyway?" I asked, thinking that would satisfy my curiosity with something he himself perhaps did not realize or care to admit, whatever that could have been.

He said he picked up the Stickley because it was left in a remodel, a complete overhaul, some Depression Era house in Eatonville. He took it because the owners agreed the place was to be gutted, and they had left it there. It looked like a good chair, a solid chair.

His answer wasn't what I wanted, but I wasn't sure what I had wanted either, so I read on, summarizing at first, hoping he would at least relish in the do-it-yourself attitude that he had instilled in me and that I was now reading about in Stickley's ambitious home-making project called Craftsman Farms, a summer school he'd set up in the New Jersey countryside, because, as Stickley writes, "'Every man, sooner or later, hopes or intends to build himself a home.'" I read on. "'As things stand now, most men hire out some one else to do this sort of thing which practically amounts to hiring someone else to think for them in matters that most intimately concern their personal life and surroundings.'"

Suddenly, my father interrupted; his tone changed; he seemed annoyed. "I never went to university," he said. "I never read about art or was able to talk with others about it. I never had a chance to study art from books."

I was paralyzed; I closed my book.

"Hey, my arm hurts from holding the phone," he said. "And I've got to go check the kiln."

"Yeah, mine too," I said, and we said goodbye.

On that day, over twenty years ago, when I was five years old and was finishing my lunch and was studying the drawing of my house, I saw my father's truck come down the drive and back up to the woodshed. I dropped the last corner of my tuna salad sandwich. Dad was home from work early. I slipped out of his chair away from my drawing and the warmth of the stove and I ran out to see him. His black ball cap was covered in dust and was extra dark from sweat that had absorbed into its bill. A patch said his name in orange letters—Terry— which was also the name of the lumber company where he'd picked up the hat. His eyes flashed at me and I saw him smile under his bushy, Yosemite Sam moustache. He handed me his thermos while he pulled out his beer from the back of the truck.

"Dad, I got my first loose tooth, want to see?" I said. I'd been working on it all day, pressing it against the ladder with my tongue through my lip. I opened my mouth, half afraid he would try to yank it out, but I pushed it forward with my tongue. "That

one there," I said. it sprang back into place and I pushed it forward again for him to see.

He bent down, rested one hand on the back of my neck, pulled me towards him, put his big sap and glue stained finger on my tooth, and rocked it gently back and forth.

I felt a shifting in my jaw.

"What's that," he said, lifting his finger from my tooth and pointing at my chest.

When I looked down for what I thought would be a food stain, he snubbed my nose and tussled my hair.

"Unload the truck for me, Jake the rake," he said, letting the tailgate down. He lifted me up into the truck bed and set me down, and I bent over and started to hike blocks of two-by-four between my legs. I loved to play in his piles of wood scraps, finding blocks to boat through mud puddles. Dad went in, and by the time I was done, he had returned and gone past me, out to the barn, and I could hear a tool buzzing.

Clamped in the vise was a roughly formed duck, and he was cutting in tail feathers with the Dremel tool. The tool roared; it chattered its raspy teeth against the hardwood, and it seemed to comb lines into the wood. It sent a shower of dust across the shop bench; black walnut smelled like its own flavor of burnt apple-cinnamon, and it left a raw, peppery sensation in my nose. The Dremel tool pitched minute chips like fastballs into Dad's flannel-shirted belly. The Dremel's cooling fan, as he turned the tool at different angles, blew sawdust into the hair on his arms.

"Look at this," he said, brushing the dust off his hand and releasing the duck from the vise.

I had been looking at his chisels and at the blood-red handled X-acto knife used to skin the rabbits; I was looking at the Uncle Sam "I want you" poster stapled to the wall. Once, many years later, when I was old enough to be drafted, he told me that when he showed up with his draft card, he was told to get in line; it turned out to be the Army line. The recruiter decided the Army line was full and took him to the Navy instead where he was sent to patternmaking school, where he made top honors; had he

lost too many points, he would have been removed from the school and sent to fight on the ground. Instead, he made wooden patterns in the relative safety of a ship woodshop. The patterns he made were sand cast, filled with aluminum, then tooled smooth. Dad's ship repaired bombed out river boats or mine-blasted ship hulls; his woodwork repaired hatch cranks and door knobs.

"Look here," he said. Dad showed me how he was using a duck decoy as a model for his carving. He lifted the roughed out duck to me. "Pull there," he said, pointing out the mallard duck tail which looped up and curled back over on itself. I pulled, and he gripped the duck firmly. The wood was stiff at first; then it slipped apart. A secret drawer pulled out of the back end of the duck. As the wood surfaces slid apart, the pitch of the sound lowered as the drawer opened wider. The wood smelled spicier inside the drawer, as if its black walnut essence had pooled in the empty drawer. I pushed the drawer shut and tried it again a few times; it was easier each time. He clamped his duck back in the bench vise, turned the Dremel back on, squinted, leaned in, and grazed more grooves into the wood, cutting a tail feather. After a moment, he stopped carving, lifted the tool gently away, glanced over at me, then flipped the switch. The quiet of the countryside flooded the shop; then the chickens across the driveway cackled, and I realized the radio on the workbench, with its red eye lit, was softly playing.

My father looked at me and put down his Dremel tool and stared off at something across the shop. He crossed the shop and picked up a piece of knotted pine one-by-twelve that was leaning up against the goat milking bench. He placed the end of the board up to his cheek squinted.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm looking for a crown," he said, and he flipped the board to its other edge and sighted down its length again. "You want your own treasure chest?" he asked. "This is good stock."

I nodded. Sure I did. He had already made one for my sister. So right then, he unclamped his duck, put away his Dremel tool, and started to measure and lay out marks on the pine. I watched as he sawed the boards to length, slicing his pencil lines

in half; then he set up a jig on the table saw and razed one-quarter inch by three-quarter-inch dados. The pine dust added a new orange-cinnamon flavor to the air.

And as I observed him, and as he paused, as usual, I stopped him to ask what kind of wood was this? "Cedar," he said. I picked up another block. "Alder," he said, and I repeated the names back to him, storing each smell away with its name, testing myself. I already knew alder because I had seen him turn a chunk of alder trunk (which smelled like river mud) into a box with a hidden compartment. It still looked like a small chunk of firewood until he sanded and varnished the lid.

When he had finished buzzing the grooves into the ends of the boards, he held them up and asked me to decide which surfaces I wanted to be on the outside of the box. The edges of the boards looked like Jack-O-Lantern teeth, every other one missing. He must have seen the puzzled look on my face because he explained how it worked. "The pins go in the groove," he said, "like fingers of clasped hands," and he demonstrated. "It's the strongest joint, this dovetail, because the grains crossed each other." He tamped them together for a dry, snug fit.

Dad glued and clamped the joints, and the dark end grains of the dovetail ran up the corner like wood that had been zippered together. He left it clamped up; meanwhile, he set up his table saw for another phase of the project. "This box will have a tray in it," he said. "A false bottom. I'll make a secret treasure compartment to stash stuff."

I liked that word, stash, and I repeated it to myself.

At the dinner table that night, Dad settled into his chair, and I sat on the edge of my seat eating my food. I stared at the candlelight flickering behind its crystal mantle. The candlestick was melting low. I'd always wanted to be the one to get to blow out the candle; somehow, I thought if I hurried eating I could blow out the candle before the flame started to jerk, then jumped free and burned the house down. I loved to watch the smoke curl up in its wispy, lifting loops; to see the red cherry on the wick fade, then blacken.

"Don't eat so fast," Dad said. "Slow down and chew your food."

"My tooth," I said, "feeling it slip forward."

After several more minutes of family talk—what my sister had done that day in school, what mom and I had done, what Dad had built— he pulled the candle over towards him. I kept my eye on the flame.

"Can I blow it out?" I asked.

"Maybe," he said, "but first, watch this." He lifted the mantle and the flame darted side to side. "I can run my hand through the flame, see?" he said, and he did.

"No, don't," I wanted to say, but I was afraid to speak; he knew something about fire that

I didn't. His hand slid through it and the flame danced and ducked between his knuckles.

"It doesn't hurt," he said. "Try it."

I shook my head no.

"Come on," he repeated.

When I shook my head no again, he reached down and pinched the wick between his fingers. It was gone: no smoke: no cherry.

"Hardly any smoke that way," he said, rubbing the soot and wax between his thumb and his first finger.

I vowed I'd do it myself next time.

That visit to my parents when Felina was five months old, she stayed up late with us after dinner. Dad sat in a white plastic chair with Felina on his lap, her five-month-old neck strong enough to sit back against his chest. They seemed to be watching basketball—the LA Lakers and the Seattle Sonics—but since the volume was off and the reception was bad, the ballgame was difficult to follow. Dad jostled her gently and picked up a book to show her. Felina gummed her grandfather's scarred knuckle, and he read to her about elephants. That's when I saw the carving of my mother's face, the one beside the TV, her hair dark and straight and black walnut, as in real life. As I looked, I heard Mom in the kitchen, scrubbing a skillet at the sink.

On the hutch I saw another carving my father had made for my mother, an abstract kind of sculpture, like the nutmeat of a walnut. Inside was a hidden drawer that I had seen him open once, the day he presented it to her, but I didn't know what she kept in there. I saw the fine lines that delineated the drawer. I stood up; the woodstove heat was dry, and sweat trickled down my collar. From the futon, I walked past my father and my child, and I pulled open the drawer, tugging hard at first, until it slipped from its joint and let go, sliding open with a kind of hollow sound.

Inside, I found a few earrings, rubber bands, paperclips, push pins, safety pins—the kind with duck heads, rings, buttons, and honor pins from my mom and my sister's Girl Scout days, from my and my dad's Cub Scout days. I stirred these things around with my finger, and I uncovered our baby teeth. One of them was still packed with dried red flesh in its root.

Meat

Almost three years ago when Felina was only a few weeks old, I started to clip her fingernails. The film-like nail curled over the ends of her fingers and toes and seemed as thin as newsprint. My wife was glad I'd taken over the task because, at first, she had squeezed the baby clippers too soon and had snipped the skin on Felina's fingertip. A red line of blood had formed, but quickly healed. So now I slipped the blade under the flaps and clipped the white slips of nail. The nails seemed all pink against her skin, but each clipping vanished into the orange carpet.

I held down her tiny finger under my thumb and tried again. Felina clenched her fist and tried to pull her hand away. I opened up her fist again and looked at the nails. They were like huckleberries. The whites of her moons had not yet risen, so I tried to push back the skin growing over her nail. But Felina was too young to care about moons, and she jerked her hand loose. She started to cry, and soon, my wife wanted Felina to nurse.

When we first brought her home from the hospital I had laid her on the bed and asked her all the questions I anticipated her asking me—about gravity and the blue sky and the movement of clouds, why clouds didn't fall from the blue sky; why starlight wavered, and what happened to the moon when it wasn't full. There had been so much I wanted to show her then; but I realized it would have to wait.

I watched her nursing, listened to her suckling, to her little gasps of air, and I remembered one day twenty years before when my mother clipped my fingernails. Mom sat with me in her lap on the rag-rug next to the woodstove. She smelled like homemade bread. With my free hand I was playing with the round moss agate pendant that hung on a thin silver chain around her neck. Usually, she only wore it when we were going to town, but sometimes, like that day, she just liked to dress up. The silver dollar-sized circle of stone was mostly black, but when I held it up to the light, I imagined I saw the leaves and branches of an oak tree, and behind that, thunderclouds backlit by the moon. After she had finished with the clippers, I thought she would let me go; I was hungry. But Mom wanted to show me something that day; she started to

scrape my nail with her thumbnail. It hurt. I tried to pull away. I was five years old and could really wiggle, but she held me.

"Hold still," she said, "I want to see your moons. Your cuticles are growing over them."

"What?"

"Yes, the moons from your cuticles," she said. "This part," and she dug with her thumbnail as she pushed back the curtain of skin that had crept over my nail. Then I saw the moons rising up out of my cuticles. The white of my nail looked exactly like the full moon that we had watched the evening before as it rose over the tree line that surrounded our farm in the Washington countryside. So I let her push my skin to the quick, and was glad to see my moons rise.

"You have good circulation," she said, and she showed me: she pressed the blood from my fingertip, and we watched how fast the color returned.

"Oh," I said after a minute. I was losing interest. Mom had talked recently at dinner of going back to nursing school. I told her I was hungry, and she sent me with a basket outside to collect eggs.

It was spring and that fall I'd start at Weyerhaeuser Elementary down the road with my sister, but living on the farm gave me experiences that later Heather and I would only sing about with Felina in the most general of childhood jingles. On the way to the chicken coop, I also had to feed the geese and the rabbits. Their kibble was stored nearby in the woodshed. As I approached with their food, the pair of geese started honking and they charged me as I neared their cookie sheet. The dog stayed behind me snapping and barking at the geese, but never got too close. The white pair stretched their necks and honked in my face, snapping their tangerine bills. I had to grab one's neck with the soft, meaty part of my hand so it wouldn't pinch me as it tried to snitch food, and I had to kick at the other so I could get close enough to their dish to dump their grain. After the geese had quieted and started snapping up their food and coughing in their water dish, I heard the bunnies banging the wire as they hopped around. I proceeded to the rabbit hutch, stepped up on the old nesting box step, and turned the latch Dad had nailed to the hutch with a single nail. I poured alfalfa

pellets into their dish; their food smelled like Mom's green vitamins. Their red marbley eyes always scared me, almost more than the geese. About the same time the geese started making all their noise, the goats had run over to the corner of the pen behind the rabbit hutches and started bleating at me. Every morning, Dad fed and milked the goats before he left to go build houses. By the time I did my chores, the goats were hungry again, but then goats always seemed hungry. Their bleating was a lonely sound that broke the woody silence like the jake brakes of logging trucks out on the highway.

In the barn, I scooped a coffee can full of chicken scratch and then carried it across the driveway, around the bedroom-sized mud puddle my sister and I played off as a lake. At the coop finally, I flung the chicken feed through the wire because the rooster was particularly nasty. Any time Mom went in there to fill the water, she had to beat the rooster in the beak with a two-by-four. Sometimes his beak bled. Some hens cackled and some clucked and one shot out of the hen house. The rooster strutted and crowed, and I threw feed on his back; he flashed his black, gold-rimmed eye at me. His ruddy comb jiggled, his claw froze and curled mid strut, limp; he stood on one foot, his spurs bared.

I ducked around the hen house, and the rooster seemed to forget me, and finally I turned the latches on the nesting boxes to collect the brown eggs. When I opened the hatch the smell of ammonia in the chicken shit came to me. I was just tall enough standing on a beam end I'd salvaged from Dad's scrap pile, but I almost had my nose in the straw of the nesting boxes. One sitting hen blinked her lizard eyelid and looked down at me. I was afraid she'd peck me on the back of my hand when I grabbed for the eggs in the box beside her. I grabbed fast. She spun her head around to look at me closer, stood up, clucked in alarm and strutted out to scratch with the others. She left me an egg, warm in my hand. But it had a booger of shit on it which I tried to wipe off on the hay. It was about then that I heard jet's thunder in the distance and grow closer. I knew the sound would come a long time after the jets had gone overhead, and I looked up in the cloud-broken sky and found three jets flying over our house in delta formation, so high they looked like paint chips. I put the rest of the eggs

in my basket, closed the hen house, and followed them towards home till their rumble died away and the trio disappeared behind some rain clouds.

Mom steamed us eggs. It was magic how she made the orange yolks turn pink. After we sopped up yolks with toast, I wanted to draw the jets. She got me a pencil and paper and then scrubbed our skillet and set it on the stove to bubble dry.

I drew the jet from the side as if I was in the wing and the whole page was my window. First I drew my longest line along the ground about a third of the way up. On the upper right corner of the page, I pointed the jet's nose to the left, and the scoop under the cockpit I gave teeth. I penciled a bubble for the pilot's helmet. I drew jet wash curled like hot-rod flames. In the other corner, opposite the jet, I drew a helicopter with stick people at the controls. Then I drew a barrel on the wing of the jet and from that a dashed line skimmed across the page and connected with the helicopter, then burst into a scribble of flames. I made explosion noises, then wiped spittle from the paper and smeared some lead. Down on the ground I drew stick people, armed them, and then connected them to each other with dashed lines that turned to scribbles of bloodshed on contact. I drew two tanks; the tank beneath the helicopter reduced the tank under the jet to rising smoke, then trained its dash on the jet while at the same time a missile dashed from the jet towards the tank. When everything had been destroyed, I set down my pencil and told Mom I wanted to send my drawing to Grandma and Grandpa.

"Why don't you write them a letter?" Mom asked.

"I can't spell."

"I'll write out what you want to say, then you copy it," Mom said.

And the dictation went something like this: *Dear Grandma and Grandpa, Thank you for the money. I bought a model airplane. How is your garden growing? We planted corn and Laura and me hoed broccoli. I like the jets that fly over my house. I hope you like my drawing of them.* Mom spelled out my words in all caps, and I copied the letter and sent it off to Southern California, which Mom told me was about a thousand miles away.

It had started to rain outside and the soft sizzle against the roof made me want to get closer to the sound, so Mom followed me upstairs to find something else to do.

Upstairs, Mom had a spinning wheel set up, and sometimes I'd sit and watch her card the wool, brushing it free of any seed burrs or alfalfa stalks, rolling it into locks for spinning. But that day she said I could weave on the loom. We were going to make me a vest, she said. She'd been planning it, and the loom was all set up. All I had to do was pull down these four wooden levers in different patterns, and she had it all written out on a little piece of paper that she taped to the loom: levers 1 and 4 down, then 2 and 3, and so on. After the levers were set in my mind, I ran the weft of yarn through the warp, then pulled the beater bar, just like she had said. After watching me for a few moments, Mom lay down to rest. I liked the way the loom's yellow strings creaked each time I pulled or released the levers. I kept running the shuttle of yarn that she'd spun through the warp strings, and after a while of following the numbers, I stopped to admire the a few inches of black wool I'd woven into my vest.

Mom got up because I had grown silent. We looked back over what I had done and Mom said my counting had strayed from the pattern, but that was okay. I yawned. The heat of the loft, the sizzle of the rain, the squeak and tamp of the loom, and the sound of Mom's breathing had made me tired, too. Mom lay down and I followed her. I sunk into the waterbed beside Mom, but I couldn't sleep. I looked up and watched the raindrops hit the skylight above their bed.

The sky was mottled grey but seemed too bright to look at. "Let's read," Mom said, and she picked up our book that we had been reading. Even now, the only thing I remember about *A Dog Called Kitty* was the paragraph that Mom coaxed me to read that day. I can still see the paragraph on the upper third of the page, right side. As we held the book against the sky, its paper seemed a dark white. As I read and belabored long words, I imagined Kitty climbing out of our chicken coop, his paws just catching the loops of chicken wire.

In the middle of the paragraph, when I turned to watch Mom mouth the word, I saw its silver streak come down. A drop of water hit her in the bridge of the nose.

"What was that?" I said, looking up, trying to figure where it had come from.

"A slow leak," Mom said. She laughed and wiped the drop out of her eye with the edge of an afghan. "It happens once in a while. It won't happen again," she paused, "for a few days."

"Does Dad know?" I asked. He had built our house, and I couldn't believe the roof had a leak.

"It's really not worth his time," she said, then laughed. She pulled an afghan over us and took the book out of my hands and read to me. I studied the moss agate and watched her larynx bob, then I slept and the rain thrummed down.

Later that afternoon, I asked Mom what was for dinner. Every day I asked her the same question, and she almost always answered in the same order; she first listed the meat, then the starchy side dish, and finally the vegetable. That day, she wanted to show me where my dinner came from.

"It's outside," Mom said, "Let's go get it." She had changed out of her dress and her moss agate. Outside the window, an occasional drop of rain streaked down, silver in the sun's yellow light. The rain had stopped for now, but the gunmetal clouds still hung low and puffy against the trees. Mom laced up her boots, put on her red baby-goat-feeding jacket, and put the tan felt hat on her head to protect her glasses from the rain, like she always did when she went out. This time, she picked up the leather scabbard with the knife Grandpa Ben had made from a leaf spring and she held it against her thigh. "Follow me," she said.

I followed her outside. Everything smelled green and had a musty smell like alder bark. We walked out by the rabbit hutches and Mom laid the knife across a nearby stump. I could see the geese's white bodies on the other side of the goat pen. Moon and Coco started to bleat at us, and Sneaker reared up on his hind legs against the fence to get a better look at us. His goateed chin hovered over the rabbit hutch, and he turned that wild eye with the gold slit at us. Mom walked to the more crowded rabbit hutch and reached in. The wire bottom banged as rabbits tried to get away. She pulled out a big white rabbit by the scruff of the neck. It kicked at first, then she curled

its rump under, and it grew still.

"Want to hold him?" Mom asked.

"Okay," I said. My heart was pounding. She placed the animal in my hands and I hugged it close to me. It was still for a moment. Mom picked up a length of two-by-four, then petted the rabbit's head. She pushed its ears flat. I felt it calm, and I calmed, like neither of us could believe what was happening.

"Can you hold it out away from you?"

I pushed it away from my body and Mom lifted up her board. The rabbit jerked its back legs and its claws stripped skin off the back of my hand. I grabbed the ears but dropped it to the ground. It sat and thumped its hind leg against my wrist, and I let go, but Mom scooped it up, and carried it over to the nearby stump and set it beside the knife. Some of the white lines across my skin had opened and turned red.

"We should have started here," Mom said. "You'll be okay."

I wasn't sure if she meant me or the rabbit.

We petted the rabbit again, smoothing its ears back. Mom stepped back and I kept petting, holding its ribs down against the stump. My hands were getting warm; my scratches stung. Only its nose twitched. I saw the board swing down, saw it land atop the rabbit's head. A high pitch crack sounded. A twitch went through my hands, and I let up. The rabbit stayed, its red eyes still staring at us. A dribble of blood came out its nose.

"Hasenpfeffer," Mom said. She stretched the body across the stump and brushed its last raisiny pellets from the stump. As she unsheathed the knife, she began to list the ingredients—
the onion, sage, and thyme from the garden—that would season this dish, then she crunched off four rabbit's feet.

"Do you want to dry these?" she asked.

Lucky rabbit feet were popular at school, and my sister had asked for a purple one last time we went to Thrifty's in town. She wore it on her belt loop, and I had a green one I sometimes carried around. I shook my head "No."

Mom tossed them into the bucket. Then went the head. She pulled an "X-acto"

knife out of her coat pocket, removed the safety cap, and slit the hide up each wrist and down the belly. Everything smelled like bleach. I held the carcass against the stump and kept it from rolling. She started to peel its skin off its body. I was surprised. There was little blood. Mom hooked her fingernails at the cuffs where she'd cut off the feet. The marrow was as red as its eyes, almost electric. She started to pull off its coat, and she had me hold the leg while she tugged against the membranes.

I felt the warm, wet muscle in my hands and looked down at the moons in my thumbnails. I watched as Mom's thumbnail severed a layer of clear tissue from the hide. Her nails separated the layers of skin.

Now, I carry these secrets with me—the feel of the goose's neck; the warmth of the egg; the grease of lanolin on my fingers; the cold, wet blemish in my father's handiwork; the warmth of this meat, cold the way I remember it now. The next day I had opened the fridge and looked upon the left over stuffed rabbit carcass; its rib cage spilled the stuffing's raisins, all swollen, and plump with juice. At dinner the night before I had picked the raisins out, placed them one by one into my napkin, then licked the meat juices off my fingers.

And the other day, at almost three years old, I clipped Felina's nails. There was dirt and paint under her nails, and her moons were starting to rise; the little white sylphs had broken the edges of her cuticles. Her nails had grown sharp now and more brittle since she had been three weeks old. After I had clipped them, I held her close and smelled her, I sniffed her baby ear.

"Tell me a secret, Daddy," she said. She meant the one I had started to tell her almost every day since the beginning of the term.

"This summer, when I get done with school, I'm going to take you fishing—"

"Real fishing?"

"Yeah, reel fishing," I said, knowing she didn't catch the play on words, "and you're going to catch a big fish."

"You catch a big fish and I catch a little fish," she corrected me, and she made the hand sign for little, curling her hand into a partial fist.

I tried to reason with her. I measured out a trout between my hands, given the size of the gold treble hook we would use. I thought about the half-moon up in the sky that will hang over the lake, and how while we're waiting, I'll try to explain to her where the rest of the moon hides, and suddenly, when we're looking at the deep blue sky, the bobber will start to jerk. I will reel in this trout and it will flop on the bank and pick up bits of dried debris. Felina will run from it until I pick it up and hold it for her. It will open and close it jaws and gasp until I slit it and my thumbnail pushes its tissues into the lake, trout spine bumping under my thumbmeat.

Woodshop

During my second year of college and for four years that followed, I used to get up early with my dad to go shingle buildings throughout Ventura County. We usually roofed houses, but it was summer, and that day—a day we would later realize foretold the end of both my own and my father's roofing careers—we packed our lunches and prepared to go roof the C wing of my old middle school.

As a sixth grader, about a decade before that day, I would have waited in bed until I heard my father start his truck, heard it sputter down our hill to the stop sign where the gravel crackled under his tires as he crept forward, gunned it, then faded down Ventura Avenue. Then I'd get up, pack my lunch, and ride my bike to school. In the course of several fourth periods in the C wing woodshop, I'd make myself a sanding block, and, for my mom, a spice rack.

Looking back, now that I'm about to finish my graduate writing program, I'd like to think I took sixth grade woodshop to recover the orange spice smells released by the wood when the dado blade buzzed through pine. I remembered the smells from when I used to watch Dad cut joinery in the barn, before we moved away from the Washington countryside when I was eight years old. In woodshop, I passed the ruler-reading test, then the safety test, then I made a sanding block— because it was important to make the tools first, Mr. Hughes had said as he looked over the rim of his safety glasses— then I copied a pattern for the spice rack, like all the other generations of kids that had built the same spice racks for their moms.

The spice rack still sat on the back of Mom's stove and mostly held salt and pepper shakers. Every morning, Dad's whistling tea kettle bathed the spice rack with steam. The heat made the pine weep gold droplets of sap right through its polyurethane finish.

Most mornings, I left Dad alone and kept quiet—we all knew he didn't sleep well and that it took a while for him to manage his pain. From upstairs, I heard the kettle begin to whistle. It grew louder until the heat could no more raise the pitch, then the latch to the bathroom door popped open, a sound that always made me jump. Dad

turned off the gas and poured the water through his coffee grounds. I liked the sound of that falling stream of coffee, splattering into the pot. It was the quiet part of the day when our neighborhood was still in the shade, and Mom stayed in bed after a long night of studying for her teaching credential. That day, the day Dad and I would roof my old school, I stayed in my room and looked at the syllabus for my evening statistics class.

When I came to the kitchen, Dad was almost finished pouring water through his coffee grounds. He leaned against the sink with his back to me, his shoulders hunched. Out beyond him over the neighbor's roofline, oil rigs hammered the ridge above the Ventura River. I could hear the bearings moan as the cranks bottomed out and strained to lift oil from deep down in the earth. Their languorous rise and fall made it look as if they moved through a clear, thick syrup.

"Morning," we mumbled to each other.

"Thanks," I said. Dad had left the peanut butter and jelly jars out for me on the bread board. Their lids sat lip down beside the jars. He had laid his used butter knife, wiped clean on his bread, across the top of the peanut butter jar. His sandwich, tucked in its plastic baggie, sat on top of six glass Sue Bee honey jars full of water inside his lunch box, which sat open by the door.

He sidestepped me as I reached in the strainer for a teacup, and I felt bruised to think I had gotten in his way. His shirt was already darkened with sweat; it smelled like a forest, like punk wood alive with moss. He poured me a cup of hot water, then crunched his toast and sipped his coffee. When he had swallowed his last bite, he made sure the lid was cranked tight on his thermos. He placed a banana beside his sandwich, snapped the lunchbox closed, picked it up, and left the room. I heard him stop in the bathroom; the pills rattled as he poured some from the Advil bottle, then he went out to the garage to smoke.

I had only a few minutes to get ready. I filled my plastic water bottles from the water crock, toasted two slices of wheat bread, and I slathered up two frozen slices that would thaw by lunch. I had just started to eat my hot sandwich when Dad opened the garage door. I hated to think how his shoulders felt lifting it over his head. Then he

started the engine. I grabbed a napkin for my half-eaten sandwich, closed my lunch box and headed for the garage where I slipped my feet into my granule-filled Converse and laced them up.

That was when Mom appeared and kissed me goodbye. She wiped jam from my cheek. Then she and Dad held each other, or rather, she held Dad close as if lifting his arms hurt him too much. They kissed long, and their lips unlatched with a little pop of air. Then I closed the garage door while Mom stood on the other side in her bathrobe, waving. I got in the truck. We drove away. It was six-forty-five, and Dad liked to be on the job ready to start work by seven when the city noise ordinance lifted.

Dad's empty thermos cup was in its holder, so I offered to pour him some coffee. I always loved how uncapping his thermos started with the squeaking seals and ended with a gasp. The steaming vapor rose up and disappeared in the cab. His dark French roast smelled nutty. We talked while he drove; it was always easy to talk about work with him.

As Dad sipped his coffee and sucked it from the tips of his moustache, we talked about how the school's long building and the four-in-twelve pitch would make the work easy; we talked about the state's policy changes this year that had required us go get fingerprints before we could work on the school, should we come in contact with students that summer. A few weeks earlier, we had laughed at the regulation and, later, when we walked out of the county Justice building, we laughed again because handling the sandy- backed and granule-coated asphalt roofing material had, as we suspected, damaged the whorls on our fingertips.

"How many squares does it say on the job card?" he asked.

I pulled out his clipboard and leafed through the cards. "A hundred and twenty-five squares," I said.

"Three tab?" he asked.

"It is."

"Gravy," he said. Three tab shingles required the least handling.

I agreed, and so we joked about the color, wondering if some high end executive would choose some fluffy color for its catchy name like *Ocean Breeze* or would they match last years' work.

The previous summer we had also roofed that middle school. The state hadn't demanded workers to get fingerprinted then. We roofed the gymnasium where I had played dodge ball, climbed the rope, and tried gymnastics; we roofed the cafeteria that doubled as an assembly hall. One time toward the end of sixth grade, I had been called up by the principal to receive an award in that assembly hall. I should have known by the quiet applause that when I looked down, the plaque would not have my name on it. Instead, Victor Marquez's name was engraved on it, one of three boys nominated for Boy of the Year, Sixth Grade. I interrupted the principal's speech in front of the whole sixth grade, handed the plaque back to her. "It wasn't for me," I had said. I hadn't won the popularity contest. Mom was sitting in the front row, and Dad was at work, and I don't remember what he ever said about it, but Mom was confused, she told me later. I walked back to my seat. I felt the principal say Victor's name. The room burst with applause. I sat down, stared at my socks bunched up around my ankles, one higher than the other, hoping the tear would not break, the lump not keep me from talking to my neighbor, the kid with the limp, who patted me on the shoulder. Popularity was a stupid award anyway.

I was still studying the job card. "Inspection", it read at the bottom next to an asterisk. "Inspection," I read aloud. "What's that?"

"I don't know," Dad said. "Maybe there is dry rot repair."

"Maybe they'll be checking for fingerprints." I looked up as we turned into the school parking lot. The sun was just burning through the fog, and it looked like a blister.

We started shingling on the northeast corner of the roof, and we crowded into the same corner. I always felt sluggish starting around Dad, especially when I had to kneel above my work, he stood and seemed to hang out over the eave. As a kid, his open loft, his open sun deck, and the open hay loft had given me a fear of the edge.

Dad broke away from me in the corner and lay starter and shingles along the eave. I ran bleeder strip up the rake. I raced to return to the corner and build up racks before Dad returned. Below me, I thought of the corner of the quad where I'd used to lean on the pole and wait for Coach Morris to finish his lunch and let us out to the playground. We couldn't wait to pass the awkwardness of lunch time by playing ball. We didn't follow the sidewalk but stampeded through the holly bushes. From the roof, the holly bed looked as trampled as ever, its bone-colored trails eroded by years of kids tromping to and from the playground.

It took three shingles to build a rack, and once I got the hang of it, I liked to do it because the rack established the staggered pattern so that no two consecutive slots in the shingles lined up. Four years earlier, the first day on the job, Dad had shown me how to use the gauge on the roofing axe, how to score cut marks with the hammer face. Then, his hands had moved too fast to follow, but now I was able to daydream about grazing blackberries in Oregon while I cut shingles and nailed them down.

"Let's move it," Dad said. He had returned to the corner and built the first rack while I was cutting more bleeder strips. He slammed a bundle of shingles down for us.

To build a rack, I flipped three shingles over, slots down, then hooked the gauge over the right hand end of the shingle and marked the first cut five-and-five-eighths inches in on the first shingle, double that on the second shingle, and triple that on the third. Then I twirled the ax over and pulled the hook blade through each mark. It took muscle to make a straight cut; I had it down, but Dad always cut as if his hook blade was hot.

The rack's cutback design used each piece of the shingle; it established the stair-step pattern. I raced to nail down the rack from largest to smallest pieces, flush along the margin of the bleeder, then filled in these stairs before my father lay them, each time making the run longer until it reached the ridge. Soon it was no longer necessary to cut racks. For a short while, we had established a triangle shape; its advancing edge was a long stairway. Then somewhere halfway between the ridge and the eve, Dad made the mezzanine level where he dropped down and surged ahead of

me, and I spent the rest of the day trying to overtake him. We kept each other paced this way.

We had about ten squares down by nine o'clock when I noticed Dad stop hammering in the middle of his run. He was looking up, staring at a strange man walking up the south side of the roof. The man stopped on the ridge and stared down at us; he wore a yellow polo shirt and looked like my high school algebra teacher.

"You weren't supposed to start without me," he said to Dad, who had stood up and holstered his ax. "I'm the inspector. My name is Noble," he said and held out his hand.

"There was no dry rot," Dad said. He shook Noble's hand and introduced me as his son. I stayed kneeling, nailing. I gave him a nod.

"The sheathing looked great," Dad said.

"No, don't you understand? This job calls for a full-time inspector," Noble said. "The school district paid for an independent full-time inspection."

"A what?"

"Here's my card," Noble said. "I'm the owner of the business."

I started pounding nails again, listening as I slid shingles into place slower and hammered them softly.

"Where are your nail guns?" Noble asked. "What length nails? No nail strippers?"

"We do it all by hand," Dad said. He waved his fingers like a magician would. Then he turned his back on Noble walked back down to his run and kneeled back on the roof, pulled his ax out of his tool belt, and loaded his hand full of nails. "I've been doing this thirty years..." Dad slid a shingle into place set the first nail with a tap. "And I've never..." Dad slammed the nail down. "Been called back..." Dad slammed three more nails down—Ba-bam, ba-bam, ba-bam, ba—letting his ax bounce on the last nail head. "For a leak."

We both leered at Noble. Noble didn't say anything at first; he looked down into his clipboard.

"Looks like we're getting graded on this one," Dad said to me in a softer tone.

He turned and faced his work again. A bead of sweat splattered the tar paper where he was about to lay the next shingle.

Noble cleared his throat. “I thought OSHA had outlawed those hammers,” he said.

“Not on my roof,” Dad said “I got all my tools in reach, and I don’t trip over any hoses.”

Noble bowed his head and walked past me to the roof we had already laid. He smelled like Old Spice. I did not look at him. He started kicking at a tab with his toe.

“We’re not doing anything different,” Dad yelled over at him. “And don’t scuff up our work.”

When the day warmed, the scaly shingles turned soft and could easily scar. That was why Dad decided Converse tennis shoes were best for us. He called them roofing slippers. We often sat on our feet anyway, and the gummy soles, the rubber-tipped toes, and the canvas at the ankle—although more comfortable than boots—quickly wore away on the points of the tiny granules.

Noble sat down above us on a full stack of shingles and started to watch us. “Always used a gun myself,” Noble said after a while.

Dad snorted and kept pounding shingles. I remembered one time when three of us wearing tool belts had started to hand nail a roof, and next door, a crew of four started to double gun a similar roof. We finished and left them with their noisy machines.

“Excuse me,” Dad said when he went up to the ridge for more shingles. Noble got up and moved to the next stack of shingles. “Why aren’t you still roofing,” Dad asked. He ripped open the brown paper bundle.

“Fell off a ladder and hurt my back,” Noble said. “Got an insurance settlement, and now I’m running my own business making fifty bucks an hour.”

“Don’t be using our ladder then. It’s old and the wood is brittle,” Dad said. “Bring your own ladder. You ought to be able to afford that.” He grabbed a bundle of shingles, flexed them, then whipped them to snap the glue and loosen them apart from each other. “In fact, can’t you come back when we’re all finished?”

“It’s not in the contract. This is what—”

“This is fucked,” Dad said, and he started spreading his shingles down the run. The sand on the backs scuffed the granules on the fronts as they slid apart and slapped the roof. Between their slapping and my hammering, we blocked out whatever else Noble was saying, but we could not stop his gaze from landing on the tops of our heads and shoulders.

After a while, Dad called for a break. He opened his thermos and poured himself a cup of coffee. We ate our bananas. As soon as Noble went down for his thermos, we started roofing again. At eleven thirty Dad stopped for lunch. We dropped our nail bags on our wrappers, and, without our tools weighing us down, we floated across the roof, down the ladder. Without saying anything to Noble, we drove down the street and parked in the shade.

“This would have been an easy job,” I said.

“I’ve had worse,” Dad said.

“Really, like what?” I waited, but he did not elaborate.

Instead, he found an oldies rock station on the radio. We ate and drank water and listened to the Grateful Dead singing “Uncle John’s Band”.

We watched Noble drive off.

“Shall we?”

I nodded, mouth full of peanut-butter and bread.

We worked alone for another forty-five minutes. Then Noble appeared again sat himself down on the next full stack of shingles. It was a ways down the roof because we had started to knock down as many stacks as we could. He sat and I heard him huffing from his climb. “What kind of hours do you guys keep?”

“What ever we feel like,” Dad said. “Don’t tread on me.”

We worked another half hour, counted our wrappers, decided we’d made quota, and left for the day.

The next day we brought our radio and played Mariachi music. We played the Spanish station occasionally anyway because we only listened for the rhythm, so as

not to be distracted by lyrics of love and longing. "My mother is Mexican," Noble started but that was all he said. We kept pounding and did not look up.

The third day I brought a tape called Jodler that I had received from a friend in high school as a gag gift. I'd only listened to it once, and I thought it might help drive off Noble. As soon as I pushed "play" the German yodelers started to pump their accordions, lift their voices, and climb their scales. The lyrics were craggy, mostly, and then occasionally there'd be a plateau in the pitch as the singers straddled their vowels between peaks and over valleys. But Noble only sat and stared, clasping and unclasping his soft hands. I tried not to look at him, but when I did, he was gazing at a distant horizon, perhaps into the Topa Topa Mountains, or perhaps to the B and A wings that could have been next summer's work had we not quit later that August. His dark eyes would not meet mine. As the morning fog burned off and the sun started to melt the asphalt glue on the shingles inside their bundles, Noble's body shaded shingles from the sun. He kept them cold.

Unexpectedly, the foreign tunes made us forget our numbed nail fingers, our bloody and torn cuticles, our knuckles splintered with asphalt chips, burning with fiberglass dust. The vocal riffs, carried on the scrambled melodies of dueling accordions, pushed us up our shingling runs. We started to give the songs our own titles: "The Hawaiian Cowboy", "The Village Phone", "The Goat Farmer". The music drove us, ran us down green slopes for more shingles, and as we became familiar with songs, we picked up different nailing patterns and raced the yodels to the end of their breath, up, up the climb on our knees ridge-ward where the snowy breeze would break through and revive us, while slowly, fiber by fiber, the action wore holes in our jeans and snagged our skin on the shingles.

The un-stress/stress of the wailing accordion and the Germanic voices laid out the rhythm of our nail sets and nail slams. Somehow the music beat echoed our hammer blows. We shingled line by line, in five two-syllable movements, separated by the pause of a grating shingle: we pulled the next shingle down, set it in place, gauged it, and drove four nails: set, slam; set, slam; set, slam; set, slam. Each bounce

off the slam became the recoil for the next set, like echoes between villages, and the nail hand fed the hammer nails, and the nail hand fed the nails shingles, and the singers pumped our blood with music. In the middle of the music, in the middle of our rat-tat-ta-tating, in the middle of one song, a goat bleated and cowbells clanked, and Dad started to chuckle.

I looked over at him.

He looked over at me and grinned big, then he bleated at me.

I bleated back.

We grinned together. The music faded away between songs. The goat farmer led his bleating goat away down the lane, like a daydream of my childhood. The bleat got lost over the hill.

I could feel the laughter coming up.

After that gap of silence, a new song came on and we shingled back into the rhythm of it. Our fingers kept flipping out nails and pulling back right before the smash. The buildup of skin on the back of our hands had become numb to the nicks that tore it away. As the music drove us up our shingle runs, we shifted our weight from our hips to our knees, dragging our feet in their slippers, crawling our way towards the ridge, rat-a-tat-ting with the music, which carried us on the edge of its wave. The stairway of our shingles became the front edge of a wave that we moved up and across that building, drying it in with layer after layer of shingles. We became the swing of our ax and slam of our steel against the scales we nailed to the roof that day.

I kept laying my run, but when the accordions faded to speaker hum and the "play" button clicked off, I jumped. As I reached the ridge, I felt the sea breeze spill over and cool the sweat on my skin. I heard the echoes of my father's hammer-fall bouncing off the walls of the B wing across the quad. The blows bounced off the walls of my seventh and eighth grade English class. I looked at the edifice that could have been any old school room. But inside Mrs. Brug's classroom—that was where I had first discovered writing. I remembered her posters in the front of the class listing "Modes of Higher Thinking", words like "synthesize", "evaluate", and "analyze". I

remembered writing from Michelangelo's point of view, and how I read a three inch thick novel about Sacagawea, and then moved on, never again daunted by length. Somehow, Mrs. Brug's classroom was the chamber that turned back the echo of my father's hammer blows. And right then, I knew I would not be roofing for the next twenty-five years of my life. Although it was an illusion, it sounded like other roofers in the neighborhood that day were also nailing things down with their hands, like others helped keep the mountain call in the current of the air after an age had passed and the music had died.

I stood tall and felt my cramped muscles loosen their grip on my bones. I ripped open another wrapper and cracked apart the shingles. Gravity pulled me back down to where my father's roof ended and where mine began. As I returned to start at the bottom again, I fanned out the shingles like a deck of cards, just above where they'd be nailed. I flopped my body onto his work with a groan. His work had already begun to melt; I raced to nail down cold shingles so I could sit on my own work.

"Hey," Dad said. He stood up and climbed the ridge to restart the music.

"Sorry," I whispered, still his son, still his apprentice.

I took a deep breath, and while I waited for the music to start again, I looked at my roofing ax, the one Dad had given me when I first started to work with him. His hand had smoothed down the grain in the hickory handle. I slipped my hand into his old grip.

The wood felt smooth. His calloused hand had once smoothed the wood, had once sanded away the factory-turned finish. I felt where his thumb had worn the hickory away, smoothing out a place for itself, and now for my thumb. We had worn hickory away, slowly, daily, with each shift, each squeeze, each brush against our skin. It was varnished with his sweat, now mine. I gripped it and felt the weight of its steely swing. It was like my woodshop teacher had said—first make the tool, then make something with it. My ax was a good tool. The handle had a clear, thin finish, like syrup.

The old song began again. I reached into my bag and a nail poked into my raw fingertip.

Naming

At sundown one evening last August, my wife, our daughter, and I, linked hand-in-hand, walked down our street towards the nearby Jackson-Frazier Wetland. The air smelled of burnt grass and my wife, Heather, told me there had been a fire in the wetlands that day. Fire trucks had come, sirens wailing. As we walked, Heather also told me that lately our two year old daughter had been approaching strange men at the grocery store and asking, "Are you Daddy? Are you Daddy?" Just then, we turned the corner at the end of our street and Felina freed herself from our hands, flapped her arms and said, "My leaves, my leaves," and she ran ahead on her toddler legs to the bridge over Stewart Slough. As she ran, she reached her hands above her head, and her body turned black against the sun's glare. My wife and I broke off our conversation, and we quickened our pace to overtake Felina.

Although the shallow slough that drained the wetlands was dry, the bridge railing had horizontal gaps a toddler could easily slip through. Below, the creek bed was purpled with peppermint plants that surrounded islands of riprap. The slough's banks were planted with willow and cottonwood, and the branches poked through the railing and whipped walkers.

"Willow. I want willow leaf," Felina said, wiggling her fingers.

Usually, we asked what kind of leaf it was before we picked it, but this time, she had already answered. I reached up and picked a willow leaf from a high branch. Heather picked a cottonwood leaf. "What's this one's name?" she asked.

"Cottonwood," Felina said, then stamped her feet. Felina pinched her cottonwood and willow leaf "walking-friends" by their stems, and we held her wrists again as we turned north, crossed the street, and headed toward the entrance of the wetland.

"Who am I? What's my name," I asked Felina.

"You're Daddy."

On cue, Heather explained the rest of the story as Felina wiggled free and ran ahead of us again. Without Felina between us, I threw my arm around Heather and

pulled her shoulder under mine. We fell into step and our hips shifted together momentarily like they did those first nights together, when we walked to the nearby cemetery after she got off her swing shift at the grocery store.

"Usually," Heather was saying, "most strange gentlemen had smiled and walked away, but one nodded at me and winked. Just after the man left, Felina added—to late for him to hear, of course—'Daddy is at school.'"

Her story made me think of all those mornings Felina had clung to her mother, her fist bunching Heather's shirt. I remembered watching from the cab of my truck as Heather stood on the porch and whispered something in Felina's ear. Back then, I had been going to the jobsite, and my clothes had been cold and crunchy from the previous days' sweat. They had smiled and waved as I pulled away from the curb. I wondered at what age I had begun missing my own father, when work seemed to consume him. What stories had I told about him being gone, and did my mother pass them on to him, and did he too wince?

Now, six months later, when the leaves have gone, when the slough has filled, breaking the peppermint away, she still calls the twiggy trees by their names. Felina tells me when she stirs in her sleep at 1 am that she needs more. "More what?" I ask. "More of you, Daddy."

But now it was that August and the heat of our bodies soon built up. We broke apart and caught Felina as we neared the second bridge crossing Stewart Slough. "What is that tree?" I quizzed her like she was one of my students.

"Willow," she said correctly as she held up her willow leaf, as if to compare name to leaf.

She seemed as pleased to learn the names as we were to hear her say them. By studying one the of wetland's exhibit boards, I had spent the summer learning the names of the plants exhibited in our outdoor museum, and I passed those names on to her. We played their sounds and rolled them off our tongues. I liked to listen to Felina grapple with long, multi-syllabic words like cottonwood, to hear her hit all the right notes, for the pure joy of it. With our daughter it was mostly about word games; it was

novelty, we thought, purely for the form of the word, no lesson on survival, no lectures on medicinal uses. Purely its sound came to us, the way it felt in the mouth, the way her little voice boomeranged our pride. She would never need to boil willow bark for pain-killer tea, like the people who first lived here, like the people who systematically torched the sedges.

On the footbridge we found that the firemen had left sooty boot prints stamped on the boards. At first, I thought the neighborhood rumor was true—someone had lit the footbridge on fire. But it wasn't so.

Testing again, I asked Felina if she could say "onomatopoeia". The three of us tapped and tromped a tune on the bridge boards. "Stomp, stomp, stomp," Heather said, urging Felina on as she did all day. As a kid, I used to bike over a footbridge that played like a xylophone; I especially loved when my tires buzzed, and the boards jumped, loosening their nails holes. Here, this bridge's beams were too thick to pick out notes between the boards. After our noise faded she said in her little voice, "onomatopoeia." I had taught Felina onomatopoeia, and she had responded to me until recently by singing, "My husband, my husband," a tune she probably picked up in the car when the radio dial lingered on country western, the only station that seemed agreeable to her and her mother. I finally taught her onomatopoeia meant snap-crackle-pop, which, although not entirely accurate, was close enough for a two-year-old. Heather wanted to teach her the feel of "soliloquy", but because we thought "soliloquy" was an abstraction, we thought the word's sounds would soon pass from her vocabulary. But now, two of Felina's favorite words have made anything possible. "Probably," she says. "Can you say absolutely, Daddy?" she asks. It sounds like something my dad would say. "Absolutely," I say.

Earlier in the summer when Felina first turned two, we discovered that bird names had the music too. All summer we had been stopping at the kiosk near the entrance to the wetland boardwalk to study the poster that logged some of the birds that visited and were claimed to be visible from the boardwalk. We had been studying the pictures of birds and I had been reading off names while she had said, "What is

this one called?" Her finger pointed from bird to bird, and I repeated the names for her. We repeated this nightly.

But that evening when I wanted to press on into the park and see how much the fire had consumed, I lifted Felina up to eye level to study the poster; she pointed, tapping her tiny fingernail on the Plexiglas above the bird pictures.

"Spotted towhee," she said. "Great horned owl. Great blue heron. What is this one? I don't remember. You say it."

"Yellow breasted—" I started, paused a beat, and she finished:

"—warbler," then she continued: "Virginia rail; sora; green heron; great blue heron; scrub jay; northern harrier; sharp-shinned hawk; rufus hummingbird; common yellow throat; western tanager; marsh wren; Bewick's wren."

After she had named all she could, Heather and I looked at each other. Would we run out of things to name?

Higher up on the bulletin, the poster listed names without pictures. They almost didn't need photos, so I lifted her higher and read to her. I pointed at the words and savored the sounds and pictures their names made: red-winged blackbird—its voice the slap of rain against the lake, western wood peewee, wood thrush, song sparrow, tufted grouse, but then she wasn't as interested without pictures to give meaning to the words. She wiggled out of my arms, slid down my legs and turned and ran into what the kiosk called "another world, a wild landscape of tangled shrubs, wooded glades, and vernal pools."

In the cooler air, in the shadow of the Nootka rose and beneath the wild pear and apple trees, sun-warmed blackberries usually smelled like baking pie; this time it smelled like burnt straw. In the first twenty feet down the trail, Felina wanted blackberries. Like me, she'll eat blackberries anytime, even forget potential poisoning for them. Heather prefers not to eat them because their stony seeds bother her teeth, but she liked to pick them for us. Vines hung from the trees and their black orbs stood out against the pink roses.

"Don't eat the orange blackberries," Felina said.

We each ate a few black ones, the juice turned our lips and fingers blue-violet,

like the coming twilight, and we walked deeper into the dark wood. Felina ran up to the first widening in the boardwalk. An exhibit seemed to footnote lumps of Nootka roses, rabbit trails through the silver grasses, and in the distance, the western horizon above Samaritan hospital. “What’s it say?” Felina wanted to know. The text lauded the wetland’s abilities and functions: flood control, water purification, habitat protection, and an escape from the city, but I didn’t tell her that. “Nelson’s checker mallow,” I said, reading a caption. “Nelson’s checker mallow,” Felina repeated after me.

Because the black sooty boot marks lead the way to the burn, but even more, because it was growing dark, I led my family down the eastern fork of the loop. Huge apple trees darkened the path; an exhibit sign said the fruit trees been planted by birds droppings. Green apples with red-blushed shoulders hung over the boardwalk, and I paused and stretched to pick a few. Most had a few brown spots that marked the worms. I tapped the apple with my fingernail. “Hear that apple, Heather? It sounds crunchy,” I said, and I bit right in between the brown scars. Tart and crisp, the acidity cleaned my palate, and the apple meat seemed to crack apart under my teeth. I offered a bite to Heather and Felina. Heather refused, even though she liked green apples, and Felina bit down through the apple flesh that I had arranged for her, worm-free. Her small bite piggybacked the dent I had already made. She spit out the tart fruit. It landed on my shoe. She wiggled out of my arms and ran ahead again. As we followed the smell of the scorched sedges strengthened. After a few more bites I lobbed the apple core off into the bushes.

The boardwalk wound through the groves of wild pear and apple and skirted the pond that was filled with reed canary grass. A black swath ran through the northeast edge of the pond, dangerously close to the fruit, oak, and ash groves, and the boardwalk. In one place, the fire had moved so fast, it passed under the boardwalk without damage to the boards. Black wisps of grass that once grew through the cracks had curled like burnt paper. The firemen had surely adverted a disaster, I pointed out. If the fire had gone much further into the dense brush….

Felina ran ahead without seeming to care about the black scorch, and Heather walked on after her to make sure she did not fall off the boardwalk. I stopped and

surveyed the scorched earth; I liked the strong scent like sawdust in my nose. I liked standing where the fire had burned only a few hours ago, as if it was still smoldering, giving off gasses. It wasn't a large burn, at least not as large as it could have been, not as large as it smelled. The firemen's boot tracks ended, I noticed, and I ran to catch up with my family. It occurred to me then that Heather hadn't said much to me for some time; she hadn't even commented about the fire.

"What's wrong?" I asked when I caught up to her. "It's not dark yet." Since she had become a mother she would not go into the wetlands after dark although before we met she'd sleep the afternoon away in our neighborhood graveyard. Last time we tried for a night walk, she heard voices on the wind and her fingernails cut into the back of my hand. It was people she feared. The smell of the fire was fading, and the trees had that light quality of dusk when colors seem to brighten moments before they dim. On one side of the trail the European bittersweet, a poisonous "garden escapee", draped its vines fruited with gorgeous blood drops over branches of a Hooker willow. Even the tint of red on the salmon egg berries was poisonous and intoxicating.

Heather didn't respond, but kept walking. Felina admired the cattail growing the opposite side of the trail. "Cattail, Mommy," she said to me, tugging on my hand, "Cattail, cattail." Often I have heard her call me Mommy before correcting herself. I thought about all the uses of cattail: its roots tasted like potatoes; its shoots when picked in early spring were the texture of young asparagus; its leaves, tough as artichoke, were excellent for basket weaving; the upper most male part, the peduncle, the spike, gave pollen so rich it made a good substituted for wheat flour; and finally, Felina's make-believe hotdog on a stick—the female flower—the soft brown fluff was once used for ancient diaper filler, and for Sacagawea's menstruation.

"What's going on," I asked my wife again, coming closer.

"I need a job," Heather said finally. "You have your school. You have something to talk about. People to talk to on a regular basis. I'm nobody. I know the grocery checkers by name, but that's it. The rest of the time she won't stop naming things, repeating things. I can tell you all about Elmo and Big Bird. She's the person I

talk to most. I want to be of use. I want a thought of my own besides 'Mommy mommy moo, daddy daddy do, baby baby boo.'"

"Mommy mommy moo," Felina sang, then stopped walking and wanted up into Heather's arms. "I take care you, Mommy." She wiped dry tears from Heather's eyes.

"Thank you, Baby."

Heather set Felina down and she ran ahead again to tell us the birds listed on the signs.

For the rest of the walk Heather talked about discovering, recently, her fourth price tag error at the local supermarket, a chain she had worked for years prior to having Felina. "Labeling errors like that could cost the store thousands in fines from Corporate, as well as from sales of under-priced inventory," she said. She had talked to the crew and they all said the file maintenance person needed a helper. It was graveyard, one or two nights a week.

"You won't see many people then," I said. I held her hand and brushed my thumb over her knuckles.

"But it's something," she said, "making sure the labels are right."

"When will you sleep? With Felina."

"I'll be okay." Her voice lifted.

"Okay," I said. "It'll be good for you." I sucked in berry pie air and anticipated schedule changes, bracing for her exhaustion. The air cooled suddenly. I knew what it was like to fall asleep, book open, trying to read *Go, Dog! Go* to my daughter.

The central paradox of our predicament was that neither of us could get what we wanted. I wanted more time at home, she wanted less.

In the next few days she tried to talk to the store management, but they must not have trusted her simple desire for part-time work. They forgot her name. The manager treated her like a stranger when he rang up her groceries. My schedule filled up, locking us down to routine as usual.

Change in our life was slow until it was sudden, like fire which cut a black swath through the reed canary grass. "Nothing endures but change," Plato is quoted on

one of the wetland exhibits.

That night, we noticed an area that had been chipped and clipped to stubble with a Brush Hog. Benton County Parks was working on a program of disturbance to keep the wetlands the same, to try to preserve the natural prairie from the influx of weeds. Then we walked into the last grove of Oregon ash, wild pear, and scrub oaks. An exhibit called the branches of the Oregon ash candelabra-like, tough, and invasive. In the light, the branches had turned red-black.

"Do you know what poison oak looks like?" I asked Heather. She didn't. As I pointed out the leaves in clusters of three, I realized I had in the past made a conscious effort not to talk to Felina about the poisonous and harmful plants. I recognized them and said their names to myself, but now, to protect my family, I had to make sure Heather knew them too. The crimson blush was beginning to frost the poison oak leaves like the red horizon that filled the air with a salmon-colored haze. I noticed that poison oak could easily hide in blackberry leaves. I saw how the white lantern-like berries and the red glow of the leaves could all catch the eye of a two-year-old, her hands curious to feel its leaves and berries twirling in her fingers like the cottonwood and willow.

By the time we made it out of the wetlands to the sidewalk by our street, the white umbels of Queen Anne's lace glowed in the day's last light. I realized I only called it Queen Anne's lace; it could also have been, among other things, poison hemlock. It was draught from the root of that plant that had quenched Socrates' questions.

Before I could stop her, Felina bent down and broke off a stem of Queen Anne's lace, its flower head like a tight cluster of baby's breath.

"Stop," I yelled. "Not that kind."

I scooped her up and held her close. She began to cry and she lay her head on my shoulder and sobbed. I felt a tear through my shirt.

Heather slipped her hand into mine.

"Why, Daddy?" she asked.

I did not utter its essence. I thought of that night's school work waiting for me

at home, and I wondered if my dad had also envisioned his next day's labor.

Heather placed her hand on her belly. She rubbed circles, the way she did when she was pregnant.

We walked home, crossing into pools of orange street light, and we smelled the grass fire in the reed canary grass.

Shelter

Early last June, at the end of my first year of graduate school and even before I had turned in my student's grades, I drove my wife and daughter down from Corvallis to my parents' barn house in Cave Junction, Oregon. We had hurried because my sister and her one-year old daughter had flown up from Ventura two weeks earlier and were nearing the end of their visit. My sister and I wanted our daughters to spend time together, and we wanted our parents to spend time with both their grandkids, at least for a few days. That trip, like all trips since we had became parents, was all about the grandchildren. We figured our children were our gifts to our parents; they somehow replaced us. As we drove down the mountain highway, I looked back in the mirror and saw our two year old Felina asleep in her car seat. She wanted to give her Grandpa Terry a watercolor painting she had painted for him that morning, a painting that was now toasting in the back window.

As soon as we arrived and opened our car doors, we felt the first heat wave of the summer. The air smelled of fir and cedar. At first, the country seemed silent; the house, the trees, and the air—all was still. Then I heard Madrone bark crackle in the heat; it curled up like wax paper, and shed its red scrolls into the air. The flakes fell to the ground. As if on cue, a locust snapped the air into a buzz that seemed to flood the whole outdoors.

Mom answered the door in her kiss-the-cook apron. "The baby is sleeping," she whispered. "Hush, Einstein," she called to the Pomeranian barking at us from Dad's pottery studio, the next room past the vestibule, so we all moved in there quickly to hush Einstein and finish our greetings. The studio air felt cool and the concrete was cold through my socks. Dad entered wearing on his head a black bandana with skulls and crossed bones on it followed by my sister wearing a lavender "Mommy" shirt I was sure we had sent her as a gift. The dog spun around our feet as we hugged, then jumped up on Felina and licked her cheek and clawed her painting. Grandma reached down to take the artwork from Felina, but she held on to it and turned away from the dog and Grandma.

"No, it's for Grandpa," Felina said, and she handed it to him.

Dad thanked her, then he looked around for a thumbtack.

Felina crawled up into the rocking chair to watch him hang it on the wall. The next moment Felina screeched. She howled. She slid out of the rocking chair, ran to me. Her voice jerked on each footfall. She climbed up my pant legs and into my arms. She grabbed fistfuls of my shirt and then pushed off my belt and launched herself over my shoulder. I squeezed her tight to keep her from vaulting all the way over me.

"What's wrong?" we all asked.

"Monster," she said.

There on the floor below her painting was a ceramic mask painted neon green. It had pointed teeth with huge gaps between them; a hot pink, eel-like tongue, and bugged out eyeballs.

"That's just Grandpa's mask," I said.

"Time for a change of scenery," Grandma said, and she carried Felina away upstairs to the toy baskets.

Dad left to make lunch, and my sister thought she heard her Penelope. My wife went to unload the car, and for a few moments before I followed my wife to help, I was alone with my father's things.

All my life I have always liked to look at my father's workspace to see what he was making. His walls, his bulletin boards, his tools lying about always seemed like a window into him; the things lying about spoke for him and conveyed more than he would ever bring up in a conversation. When we first arrived, I had noticed right away a kind of shrine Dad had made at his desk. Now that I was alone, I went back for a closer look. The US flag was draped between nails on the wall above his desk and he had pinned a label to it that had said "Old Gory." Piled up along the edges of his desk were shrunken skulls which he had made from clay. Some had fractured bones with black porous fibers of marrow; others had missing teeth, and they had all been stained in tea and coffee, like they'd all been buried, then dug up. A clay shinbone crossed through one skull's mouth. In the center of his desk sat his mother's Bible, the one he'd made the cover for when he was eighteen, before he was drafted into the Navy.

He had tooled a fish into the tan mineral leather. His father had given the Bible back to him about ten years before, when she had died.

I moved across the room to his bulletin board above his wedging table, where he had always posted his most telling and prized scraps, like old birthday cards and other artsy things. I saw his old driver's license, and in the photo he looked about the age I was now, late twenties. Underneath his picture was a label that covered all his information with the word "visitor," and next to that was a *National Geographic* photo of an exhumed skeleton underneath which he had written "Welcome home." After seeing that, I wanted to go outside in the warmth and help my wife, but something else caught my eye, something that made me think back to the past.

An old news clip from the Ventura County Star captured Dad roofing one of the oldest houses in Ventura. In the picture, Dad seemed to be standing on a six inch ledge as he nailed another shingle on the Victorian mansard roof, continuing to lay the diamond and oval pattern of cedar shingles. The first part of the caption talked about Dad and his apprentice preparing for the weather; the rest predicted the storm coming later that week. I stood thinking about the summer after high school when I had headed for Washington countryside in my Volkswagen to look for my childhood, and how I eventually came home that fall to be an apprentice with my father instead. I'd been my father's last apprentice. Going to work with him had made up for a lot of the time I had as a child longed for him to come home from work, just to be together. I'd helped him through his last years roofing, and when I left for school, he quit roofing altogether and had been in a better mood ever since. But now, I was worried looking at his stockpile of homemade bones.

Our daughters were on opposite nap schedules. For two weeks Penelope had been waking with crying fits at five-thirty when the sun first lightened the sky over the Greyback Mountains. Felina and Penelope would be awake at the same times for about an hour in the morning and about two hours around dinner time, otherwise, one was waking for lunch, the other going down after the meal. So we sat around a lot while watching one baby play at our feet. I wanted to watch Dad throw clay, but he

seemed content to make coffee and sit, passing time with us. That first day, Dad was the normal morning grump I had known growing up, but as the day wore on, his words only seemed to grow more abrasive.

"I can't believe all the food we're throwing away," Dad said after breakfast, and he dumped cereal milk down the drain.

"Running a twenty-four hour café here," he said to himself after he had asked what we wanted for lunch.

After hearing these remarks, I vowed to my wife we were going grocery shopping.

When everyone else was asleep or downstairs I heard him ask my sister when she was leaving. "I've got Friday written on my calendar. Not till Saturday now, huh?"

It was only Wednesday.

Later, my sister and I were alone in his studio; Laura wanted to show me some pottery she had made while Dad was working on another piece. While she was getting her project board out of the drying cupboard, I asked if she knew what was bothering Dad. "He has been like this for two weeks," she said. "It's the pain, just like when we were growing up."

"What happened? I thought throwing pots was making his arms better."

"Didn't you know?—he just finished roofing Monty's house—for free," she said. She set her project board on the table and showed me a series of Penelope's baby hand prints that she had pressed into the clay.

"He's roofing, for free," I said, more to myself, not sure which part bothered me more. I could see there had been a struggle to get Penelope's handprints. Felina had been the same way at that age. "I wish we could make something together," I said; I envied her. "He never does any clay when we visit. We just sit or go for walks. It makes me feel like that's all they do with their lives anymore."

"You just have to ask him," she said. Growing up, my older sister had always been the go-between, the one to speak for me. She showed me a mold that Dad had carved to make wind mobiles to sell at the Shakespeare Festival over in Ashland. The

lettering he'd carved in the clay mold was backwards; it read in all caps, "Cursed be he who moves my bones—Wm Shakespeare".

"Monty isn't going to pay you?" I asked him the next day. It was midmorning and it was already hot. We sat in plastic lawn chairs in a little patch of shade in his front yard. Felina had just finished watering the garden with her grandpa and had gotten muddy and was inside getting cleaned up, so it was just me and him. The wet earth smelled like an overheated cast iron pan.

"He was good to you. He towed you home," Dad said, referring to the time my Volkswagen engine blew up and Monty towed me one hundred and fifty miles back to his place.

"I paid him back. I paid for his gas, paid for the tow dolly," I said. "I worked off the time on his fields and fences."

"He is always so angry fighting people to get jobs done," Dad said. "I wanted to show him that some people can do nice things for others."

I sat quiet, rocking back, flexing the plastic legs. I wondered if they would snap. Dad didn't seem to hear me, and I felt bad to think Dad had felt justified to pay my way after all this time had passed. I listened to Dad tell me some of the fiascos he'd seen on the job already, the ones I knew from experience working with Monty—the wrong parts, the framer who had wanted to fight, the lumber yard shipping the wrong sized windows, the time lost to friendly but idle gab. He felt sorry for Monty. The thermometer hanging in the scrub oak read one hundred degrees.

Dad looked at his watch. "There's something nice about roofing when you don't care how much an hour you're making," he said.

I agreed, and I remembered the time I had spent roofing the cabin in the woods just across the valley, or the times as an apprentice when I'd been happy just to be there with him. Now that I knew he'd roofed, I saw that the back of his left hand was covered in what we had always called dog paws—calloused bumps that formed on the knuckles from holding the shingle in place while setting the nails. There was probably fluid around his knuckles, too, that he could feel squishing around when he moved his

joints. His fingernails were worn down, and his cuticles of his first and second fingers were black with blood and tar. His hands, hips, and back muscles had just began to break in again, as mine once had when I returned to work after a long absence. I could almost feel his ache.

Dad looked in his mug and got up. "Want another cup of coffee—with honey," he asked. That was the way Mom liked it. Usually, I preferred cream and sugar.

"No thanks," I said. "What I really want— I just want to chop wood, do some real work."

"Fine," Dad said. He stood up and looked off into the woods for a minute. "Wear my gloves."

"I don't mind blisters," I said. "My hands haven't gotten that soft." All my life I had never known Dad to wear gloves.

"I dragged that log through poison oak," he said. "I hate getting poison oak. I'll get them for you."

I followed him back into his house, past his studio, and into the garage where he handed me his gloves, and I put them on.

As Dad brought me the tools he wanted me to use, I pulled down the first round to split. He showed me to the splitting wedge and the sledge hammer I could use. I set the wedge on the wood, crouched to hold it, and I let the weight of the hammer drive the wedge into the wood so it stood on its own. I liked the soft plink of the metal against metal and the thunk the wood made against the ground. With the wedge ready to begin its work, I stepped back and raised the hammer.

Dad started to walk back inside for his coffee, but he stopped and turned to me. "Don't miss," he said. "That's my best handle and I can't get them like that any more."

I slammed it square on the wedge.

It reminded of the time I first apprenticed to him. He had set me up with a full bag of tools—the old Stanley Wonder bar that was so worn down from sliding under

shingles to pull nails that the flat bar was rounded and the nail-notch was almost gone; the hand knife that was slightly rusty from misuse; the roofing axe with the fresh blade. That first day, he had put a sharp blade in my axe. He told me that for all his other apprentices he had always waited to put the blade in weeks later, after they got the hang of shingling, so when he put in the blade, they always cut themselves that first day. I had shuddered because I remembered the time my mom had shingled with him and she'd come home early one day with a slit in her jeans and a mouth-like gash on her kneecap. So he was going to start me out with the blade from the beginning, and I'd cut myself that day, he'd said. Besides that, he told me three other things I needed to know to be a roofer: be smarter than the material you're working with; know how many nails you have in your hand; and think like a drop of water.

It was hard work splitting that punky old wood, but I pounded and wrestled through the first few rounds. He didn't really need it split, but I needed the labor. My hands were beginning to burn, and my shirt was sticking to my back. He'd had two truck loads of wood dumped by his woodshed; it had come already split by a high output machine at the mill. He'd said he was just letting it season, so I couldn't stack it, which is what I really wanted to do for him when I'd first seen the pile.

That first day on the roof, he'd been right. I thought I was going to make it off the roof without cutting myself, but in the last half hour I noticed a stinging sensation on the back of my wrist, and when I drove a nail I noticed a drop of blood hit the black shingle.

Dad stood near me with his coffee, and he watched me split wood for a few minutes. "That's pretty loud," he said. Only once the hammer glanced away and brought the old grey hickory against the mushroomed edge of the wedge. I checked quickly before Dad said anything and saw the blow scraped only a splinter from his handle. I wanted him to help me, or just to stay near and watch, but Dad turned and walked inside.

Black was the color of Monty's roof. That man had been dreaming about replacing his mobile home with a custom home since I last lived there that summer almost ten years earlier. I was angry at Monty for accepting my father's gift. He was a

younger man than my dad—and a moderately successful equipment dealer, backhoe operator, and concrete contractor. I knew he was speculating on selling that house and moving deeper into the woods. The whole investment was nothing without the good roof my father had given him. Though tempted, I would not bring it up to Monty, my father had his right to give gifts. But I expected my friend would eventually work out a fair trade.

I knocked apart another round. It was getting easier; I was learning the material. I wondered if Dad's gift had something to do with his family's Mennonite background. In the middle of the same school year that I was, at that moment, sweating out of my system, I had begun to research Mennonites, a name I had casually heard dropped at family gatherings all my life, a name which I had come to associate with the Amish, and in turn, barn raisings and hand tools—and, somehow, even my childhood on the farm— where the community (which would have been my uncles) built each others' homes with gifts of time.

I realized if I placed the wedge in a hairline check, the drying air would have already begun a natural split. I stacked what I had cut to get it out of the way and had begun again. I was dripping. I had hours more splitting before me. I daydreamed about getting him a truck and splitter, then maybe a tractor and a plow he could use to disc up his field, plant hay or fescue. But all that took money.

The night before, that first night of our visit, Dad had asked me how I liked teaching. He had asked if I could see myself continuing to teach or would it be better to do something like carpentry in the day? "I like teaching," I had said, "I could really get into it." "Yes, exactly," he said, "but could you still do your art?" "Of course," I said. He told me he had been reading big name thrillers. "Did you know the hammer is the number one murder weapon?" he asked. "No," I said. "Do you ever think about your students as potential characters for a novel?" he asked, then continued: "You know just enough about them; you could speculate all the things that could happen to them as they come and go from your life." "No, not really," I said.

And now, as the wood popped apart under my wedge and hammer, I didn't know anything. After all the years of classes, after all the compositions I had scored,

after all the papers I had written, it was my hands that remembered how to swing the hammer, to think like a drop of water. I had long ago forgotten the hard facts and detail of biology or Mo's scale of hardness in geology. Even the details of all the stories and all the theories I had known and had taught that term were already fading from my memory. The last round I would split that day was in wedges. The dust that had puffed up from the gravel on each blow smelled flinty. I set down the sledge and felt empty. I wondered where Dad was.

My wife stood before me holding a glass of cold water. I took off my father's gloves. The dew on the outside of the glass felt good on my forehead. I held the glass with both hands and felt the meat of my palms burn. I drank it down and thanked her.

"All your pounding is keeping Felina awake," Heather said, "and Laura's worried it's going to wake Penelope."

I looked at my red palms. I pushed on the blisters that had bubbled up through my skin. I walked in and tried not to look at all the skulls on his desk, then I went and said goodnight to my daughter. I still couldn't believe Dad had shingled that roof.

Early Friday, I announced we were leaving that morning. My mom and sister understood. Not long after that, Grandpa got out of his mood and warmed right up. Eventually, just before we left, he asked Heather to send him more of Felina's paintings. We promised we would since we had little space to store them all in our apartment.

"Sorry I made you feel so unwelcome," he said to me finally through my half-opened window as we started to creep toward his rocky driveway.

"No, no," I said through the lump that had formed suddenly in my throat. "It was time to go." We exchanged our *love yous* and drove on. My shoulder blades still burned as I snaked through his woods. It was that pain of coming back to work after a long time away.

As I drove away that day, my father's questions came with me, pressing. Could I make work—my students—the subjects of writing? I didn't know. I'd never tried.

What could I take from my students? What would teaching them take from me? Maybe he really wanted to know from where I drew my material. Maybe I was his material for his work, just as I had found gifts of time for my material. It occurred to me that it had been I, aged thirteen, who had brought him home his model—the glow in the dark skull from the Disney Land gift store.

During our telephone conversations in the months prior to that visit, I had encouraged him to make skulls to sell at the Shakespeare Festival—to make something that he could sell besides his copper-red vases. People would buy up skulls, I had said. I imagined him unable to keep up with the demand for skulls, nailing orders down like a shingler. Perhaps I felt guilty because I had stopped roofing to get an education, something my father was too tired and worn to pursue. When I stopped roofing, he stopped too, perhaps because I was leaving him. I had not considered what it must have taken to make skulls with his hands. Those skulls had never housed brains; that skull with the shinbone in its jaw had never turned on a neck to the sound of her own name, to the sound of her student's voice.

Maybe I had taken material from my students. On the first day of school the previous September, I had asked my students to tell me the stories or the histories behind their names. I hoped the activity would help me remember what to call them, but I found that many did not know their own stories, and they didn't seem to care. I knew fragments about my background because I carried on an old Mennonite family name. Years before, my great-aunt Esther, the family historian, kept telling me how my namesake and his family had worked the wheat fields in Russia for Catherine the Great. They were Mennonites—hard working people, she'd said, and Jacob J. Martens, her grandfather, had become a Mennonite pastor once he and his family immigrated to Canada just prior to the turn of the Twentieth Century. Generation after generation had been farmers and carpenters, and later in life they took up other things: my grandfather had become a building inspector, my dad a potter, and me a teacher. In 1920, Aunt Esther and her parents immigrated to Dallas, Oregon, just up the road from Corvallis, where my grandfather, the first natural born citizen in his family, had spent his boyhood.

At first, it was only a subtle coincidence that I'd been accepted to a school so near my grandfather's first home. But my students disdain to share their histories spurned me on to find out more about mine, since I was so close. So that first spring break of graduate school, I flipped open the phonebook to "churches" and saw the word "Mennonite" in print for the first time. The following Sunday, just after Easter we visited a local Mennonite congregation. I was surprised to find people there who wanted to hear the stories that Aunt Esther had once told me. We felt heard amongst the voices. The people there knew good literature; the pastor's sermon sounded like a National Public Radio commentary willing to struggle with the mystery of Christian faith. "Love them all," the pastor said, quoting his grandmother, "and even the most difficult questions will still make sense." Near the end, people stood up all over the church and shared their worries.

At the end of the service, a few ladies invited us down to the basement to tie quilts. For the next hour, Felina ran in circles with another little boy, while Heather and I tied square knots to bind the quilts they were making as gifts for their seniors who'd be graduating high school that year. When I left that day, I knew a handful of people by name and they felt like aunts and uncles I'd heard about in family conversation but had just met for the first time. I felt like I could be an individual in that community. But that visit only dug up more questions of what it meant to have a Mennonite name, and then what it meant to be Mennonite, so we kept attending. One day that July, after church at the potluck, I was pleased to discover an unusual cranberry salad and whacky cake that tasted just like my grandmother used to make. I realized I could not discover the answers to my questions at church as much as I could back at home, with Dad, so a second visit that summer was in store.

When we called up my parents to tell them we were coming again, they said they had a surprise for us; Dad had changed the house, and we'd have to wait and see. We also wanted to let Felina's grandparents celebrate her birthday, so that July, about a month and a half after our first visit, I packed my and my two-year old daughter's bags, loaded them into our small red truck, and set out again. We hoped that this visit would be more relaxing; the drive itself would certainly be different.

Earlier that same day, my wife had packed up and taken our family car to a church conference in Central Washington, so I strapped my daughter's car seat into the passenger seat of my truck. It was the first time Felina and I had gone on a road trip together, just the two of us. She was used to being alone in the back seat, so I came prepared, as usual, with a book bag bulging with things to keep her busy. At first, as we drove through Corvallis and the twenty minute jaunt to the interstate, Felina went through her books and made up her own stories, and one by one, she dropped all her books, then all her toys, to the floorboards.

As we turned onto the interstate, however, she seemed content to look out the window. I pointed out the fields speckled white with sheep; I showed her a great blue heron hidden in the reeds by the ditch. The bird stood as if waiting, small as the photo in the kiosk at the Jackson-Frazier Wetland back home. Before it could unfurl its neck and lunge at its prey, we quickly passed; its gray body blurred into our blind spot. I turned on some classic rock oldies, and Felina kicked her feet against the glove box. She called it funny music, but soon that song was over and she fidgeted with whatever gadget I could reach and give her. Before she lost that toy, I turned down the volume and started another game:

"I see something red," I said.

Felina pointed at a semi heading north.

"What's its name?"

"Big truck."

I praised her for guessing what I had in mind, and this game went on for some time.

After a while, Felina tired from our game, so I put on the "kid's tape" Heather had sent with us. It turned out to be lullabies played by a symphony. We were headed down a long grade and the Sutherlin Valley opened up before us. The music played just above the engine's hum; it softened the tension of vehicles rushing willy-nilly past us down the hill. Before us, summer's haze filled the valley's green fields and blended into the scattered buildings. Fir and madrone oak brushed the hills evergreen and

mahogany across the valley, and each more distant range grew a shade lighter till the most distant hills blurred into the almost white sky.

"It's a long way down," Felina said.

I did not answer her, but I listened to the lullaby and almost felt like we were falling.

"It's a long, long, long way down," Felina said again.

I agreed. After another moment of music, Felina reached out her open hand to me.

"Here," she said.

"What?" I held out my palm.

"Here is a blue balloon for you," she said, and she dropped the mimed balloon into my hand.

We pulled balloons out of the air at home all the time; but we had never played balloons on the road before. I thanked her, and Felina reached up into the air just above her head and pulled down another—a red balloon. She kept pulling down balloon after balloon and I kept thanking her for them.

A semi passed us, and our little truck shuttered and the wind shifted us in our lane. Other cars rushed by, and I imagined what our game of charades must have looked like to passengers in other cars. I imagined what the cab looked like filling up with rainbows of balloons. Soon, the balloons I was letting drop to the floorboards would rise above my lap, making it difficult to steer, then to see, so I grabbed a balloon from her. "I'm throwing this purple balloon out the window," I said. The window was rolled up, but I threw my balloon against the glass, and out it flew. I grabbed the red, the green, the purple. I slammed balloons over my steering-wheel arm and into the glass. Out they flew. In my rear view mirror, I could almost see balloon after balloon sucked under and over the cars following us. Some bounced up over semis and the wind tossed them onto the shoulder. Felina caught on and started to pull some down and throw them out her window.

"Stop," I yelled, and I thought quickly of something else to do with them. "I eat them," I said and tossed the balloon in my hand to my mouth like I had just

emptied a handful of peanuts. "Num," I smacked my lips on one balloon after another.

After eating a few balloons, Felina started to eat them too. "Num, Num," she said.

I didn't realize what had come over me.

"No, I pop them," I said, and I opened and closed my fingernails into several balloons.

"No, no," Felina cried, and she squirmed and tried to take them back from me, reaching with her fingers spread.

"Enough," I said. "All the balloons are gone. Here, I put them all back," I said, and with a scooping gesture I returned the lot to the air above her head. I turned up the lullaby while she continued to shed tears, until she seemed satisfied. After we played a few more rounds of "I spy," she yawned and did not answer me anymore. I glanced over. Her eyes fought, closing to half-slits, then her head fell to the side, and I watched her lids seal and her fingers uncurl.

I thought about my parents at the end of the day's drive, about all the parenting I had just undone by getting too caught up in my daughter's storytelling games. Ever since I had gone one Sunday to pick up Felina up from the church nursery and had seen her pulling down balloons with the other little girl, I had been in love with that game. I encouraged Felina's storytelling because storytelling had brought me to graduate school, and everything I wrote was a balloon pulled down, and everything I spoke was caught in balloons, like in comic strip dialogue. Our gestures were meaningless without turning them into language.

The highway climbed into the mountains and the evergreens cast jagged shadows across the road. The engine strained and we passed through a strobe of light and dark, something I had vividly remembered myself as a child, half-asleep in the back seat with my head bouncing against the glass, the Buick hitting the bumps like the click of my grandfather's film projector, when the film of my father as a child ended and began slapping the reel.

Just then, I knew the answer to my father's question. I was given my material at home.

At first, nothing seemed to have changed from the last time we had been there. Felina was still asleep when we pulled into their yard and I cut the engine. The same locust sound snapped the silence and the heat filled the air with smells of sap and hay. Dad was already in the front yard when we pulled in, but we had not seen him. He had just taken off his tool belt and his Levi's were speckled with sawdust. We hugged, then I roused Felina and carried her towards the house. Then I noticed a new front door the color of clay. "I'm giving the place a new look," Dad said. The old homemade door had not even been square, weatherproof, or—until my father beat on the frame and adjusted the hinges—functional. The old one had not even had a door knob, so I had hesitated when I was first prepared to barge through the old door, but this door worked perfect.

"Is this door-skin plastic?" I asked as I examined it closer, not believing my father would ever give up wood.

"It's the best," he said. "It's fiberglass; it won't warp, bend, or dent, and it's a better thermal block."

Inside the cool vestibule, Felina awoke fully and hugged her Grandpa and Grandma. I noticed Dad had also put a door on his studio; I walked over to his studio and put my hand on the knob.

"It's a mess in there," Dad said.

I opened the door a foot and felt even cooler air hit my face; it smelled slightly damp like moldy clay. The dog started to bark at us and I closed the door again, feeling for the pop of the latch strike. It worked perfect, the way all Dad's doors worked, and I thought of how an old yellow blanket had once long ago covered that doorway, back when the place had been our relatives' house. Mom wanted to serve us lunch, so she took Felina upstairs to play with the rubber balls and the plastic chameleons while she put something together. The dog would not stop barking so Dad walked in and I followed him, curious to see what he had made lately. His studio

contained even more skulls than last time; some were beaded together with copper wire and hung from a wooden staff. His copper red arrangement of ancient-shaped pottery seemed like it had grown, but when I asked Dad said he hadn't made anything lately. Felina and I would not spend a lot of time in Dad's studio, I decided. Recently, at home when we went out for night walks she had started saying, "You can't see monsters with your eyes open," and I didn't think she needed to see any more monsters.

I walked back outside to get our things. Dad followed me. "You can help me with a project, if you want," Dad said as he took Felina's bag.

"Yeah, I'd like that."

We set our bags inside and he told me more about the door. The door was a custom order that someone had returned to the building supply because it was too short, but it was tall enough for our family, and he got a good deal on it. The unit was wider than a standard door because it had a panel of windows on the hinge side, and to accommodate to the extra width Dad had to cut out the wall and chip out the foundation with a cold chisel. I saw crumbs of concrete lying next to the footing. A small strip of concrete skirted the threshold and I could see where the surface went from smooth to pocked with the star point of his chisel, as if he had removed the concrete pebble by pebble. "Hard stuff?" I asked, then bent and ran my fingers over the beat surface. He agreed. I imagined him crouched down beating on the stones, then it occurred to me that Monty probably had the right tool in his barn, if he'd only asked. I stood up and rubbed the dust between my fingers; a puff of hot wind came around the corner of the house and I caught the scent of cement dust.

"I have to build a porch over my new door," Dad said. "I got everything all cut out, and I bought the sheathing this morning. You wouldn't believe how expensive the lumber was."

"You should have asked Monty if you could put it on his account," I said too quickly, but Dad seemed to ignore me.

"Sixty five bucks for this stack of one-by-eights."

"You put those through your sunroof?"

"Yeah, I hope we have enough."

I wished I could give Dad my truck, and I offered to go get anything else he needed, but he declined.

He had decided to offset the cost of lumber by using poles off his land to frame the porch. The rafters were already cut out; the posts, braces, and beam were already nailed together; and the pier blocks were set and leveled, ready for me to help him put all the pieces together.

After lunch, Felina lay down for a nap, and Mom stayed inside with her, so it was just Dad and I. We stood up the post and beam, braced it off, and stood back and looked at the structure. Before we nailed up rafters, I needed a hammer, so I asked him for it and he went to get it. I liked how the timbers retained their form, how the knots looked, and how sometimes a little nipple of wood rose up, a preformed branch. The poles looked yellow and uniform because he had felled the tree and stripped the bark in the winter when the sap was right, like the time before when I watched him peel a strip and then slide his hands between the layers of bark and wood, through the cambium juices, and the bark had come off in big chunks. His fingernails had scratched lines on the inside of the bark, and the scratches in the cambium had quickly dried a darker sepia.

Dad brought me his bigger hammer. "I can't swing this one anymore," he said as he put it in my hand. It was heavy.

After we had laid out the rafters and nailed them down, Dad started to cut through his pile and lean boards against the sides. I pulled a board up, flipped the board back and forth until I decided what would be the best side to look at and then tacked it down. Then Dad climbed up on the roof too and we worked side by side bumping elbows. Once he started nailing, I felt like I couldn't keep up with him, the way he slammed those nails into the wood, the way he left half-moons with his waffled hammer face.

Although Dad had always been a good estimator, it turned out we were going to be a board short. The sun was getting lower in the sky but I asked him again if I could go get it for him. He didn't answer me but went inside. A moment later, he came

back out and handed me a cold beer. "Thanks," he said, then we sat and drank a beer and looked at what we had made.

"Can I roof it for you tomorrow?" I asked after a while.

"No," he said.

And that was that.

The next morning, by the time I woke up, Dad had already gone to the lumberyard, returned, and installed the last board. The sun was bright, and it was going to be hot that day. Felina wanted to find Grandpa, so I took her down to the porch where he was sealing the wood with fifty-fifty mix of turpentine and linseed oil. I held her close to me and we watched a moment as he dipped his rag into the pickle jar and rubbed the thin syrup into the wood; the grains darkened and the soft wood glowed a golden hue and stayed wet-looking for a long time. "Grandpa, that's stinky!" Felina said. Its smell was something I too had disliked all my life, but I had never told him so; it smelled chemical, like citrus and burned garlic.

He turned and frowned at us; sweat poured from his brow. His arm froze over his head, the way he had always said had hurt him most. A dribble ran down my father's arm until it was staunched in his sleeve. "Looks great though, doesn't it?" he said, then he smiled.

The rest of the visit went like those before; we talked about work and drank together. I mentioned the Mennonites and told Dad about the food I'd tasted at church, but he didn't know what to say about his mother's cooking either. It just was, and maybe she didn't know why she cooked or what to call it. I wasn't even sure anymore what to ask about the Mennonites.

One Sunday near Halloween after we'd been attending the church for about six months—summer had long passed, the pain of that last visit to my parents' had faded, and the second year of graduate school was underway— a lady at church called for a barn raising sponsored by Mennonite Disaster Relief Services. A family in Corvallis was about to go through the winter without a roof, and the lady flashed photos of the

family on the wall. They were just like us: young parents. The man was an engineer and the wife was a conflict mediation counselor. They had a two year old daughter who, like Felina, loved books. They also had a newborn, the lady said, and they were good friends of hers. The house itself was pale blue; its windows were boarded up, and without a roof, it looked like a cardboard box that had been left out in the rain. Construction was set for the following Friday and Saturday, and it just fit with my teaching schedule.

"I'm going to do it," I whispered to my wife. "Maybe it will lead to work next summer," I said thinking about something to fall back on after grad school. I also wanted a new friend and playmate for my daughter. Our new family friends had just moved to Colorado, and Felina talked of seeing her Hannah again every time we left the house.

That Friday came and I dug all my tools out of storage. I took my father's framing hammer, his flat bar, and his old chalk line, and my addition—a speed square which replaced the framing square and the combination square. I packed up my nail gun and compressor.

When I got to the jobsite, I was glad to see that the family lived in the garage, but the skylight was coated with a layer of their breath which had condensed on it in the chilled fall night. They took showers in the crude stall between their garage and their house.

I met the homeowner, Clark. He turned out to be an ambitious designer who had run out of time and was too busy with his engineering job to work on his house. He wore tan Carhart pants, the good kind, and he tucked his shirt in. The project coordinator, Wil, was an elderly church member, a retired contractor who had gone into building retirement homes around the country. When I got there, Wil was ramming the lumber pile with his tailgate to make more room for parking. He and I looked at the plans and we decided they were too complicated for two days work, so we convinced the homeowner our goal was to stick frame a roof over the roomy attic-like second floor. We wiped out his double dormers and convinced Clark he could add them in later. Clark said he couldn't afford the windows now anyway. I deferred

to experience and let Wil take the roof framing in the front of the house, and I took to framing the pony walls in back.

Soon, men were showing up from across the neighborhood. I was the youngest man there, and oddly enough, I found myself telling several of them what to do. Everyone found something to do, and men, including myself, admitted when we were lost from the plans or needed help. There were men down at the cutting station; there were men who passed cut lumber from the ground; there were people recording numbers for the cutter's cut list, and there were ladies serving orange juice, coffee, and cookies. I had five guys helping me stand up walls. While I worked I relished having so many men around on a jobsite. Usually, on most jobs I'd been on, only a two or three men could legally and for insurance purposes work on the jobsite. Here, we laid aside all legalities; the community had come to build a house. It wasn't so much work as it was a conversation. A man found a nail to drive, then he'd stop and help the others, sharing the weight of standing walls. Word of mouth spread a question for Clark or Wil, and a messenger would bring an answer. Work was moving fast, of its own rhythms, like eddies and currents of a river.

Most of the guys framed with their hammers. I had preferred to step up the pace, thinking back to my days framing, and I set up a nail gun. I started to hear comments, and I could hear Dad speaking in their voices.

"You out of air?"

"I don't want eight nails in my head."

"Can't feel if your nail is driving into what it's supposed to."

"This gun don't jam. This gun don't run out."

"Oops. Now you got to pull twenty nails."

While I shot nails, I could hear the rhythmic sound of men pounding toenails and I started to feel like I was going at too frenetic a pace with my gun. The blasts of air hurt my ears; I'd forgotten my ear plugs, so I kept my hat pulled down. Men were standing around who could have been drumming steel into wood with melony thunks, who could have felt the nails sinking as they pinned the house together with the skill of their hands and the swings of their arms. The dozens of hammers pounding anyway

felt like music, and out of that erupted the blast of air as I bounced the gun along the wood. I started to wonder why I was in production mode, why efficiency and speed had become such a driving force.

And I slowed down, pulled out Dad's old framing hammer, and I started to drive nails, to add to the tolerable beating of human rhythms. As I nailed again by hand, as I had once done for hours when I shingled houses with Dad, I felt membranes of my soul catch on the green vinyl nail tips and sink into the wood with each hammer blow, with each synapse fired along my joints.

When lunch time came around, everyone stopped and tried to wash the pitch from their hands in the functioning kitchen down inside the house. The walls were stripped bare, and the chill in the air was just as vapory inside. Hot water came from the tap and moved wood sap across the skin. No one stopped us to pray for the pizza. Men chewed and their jaws clicked, free lunch was their only reward for being here. I doubted Dad had even gotten that when he did Monty's roof.

I sat and thought about the next phase and gorged till I was full. I realized work was a prayer; it was giving me something back I would not entirely understand until I left without friends for Felina, without any contacts for future income and had returned to my teaching, hip and shoulder joints aching, until I had visited my Dad again, not caring anymore that Monty had been given a roof.

Now it was winter break and we had dropped Felina off with her grandparents at a halfway point the week before. They took her down to their Cave Junction home for a week, and during our parental hiatus, my wife and I escaped the dreary Willamette Valley to the beach. We watched the sunset over the Pacific. I watched a jet stream turn from white to peach at the day's end, from a clean fin in the sky to a jagged line smeared by the upper wind, by the spin of the earth. I stood on the shore with my wife and watched the sun go down. I felt the grief of what it would be like when our children had grown up and moved away. All that week, we thought about our daughter. She always seemed too busy to talk to us when we called.

Now we were on our way to bring her home.

This time when we walked into Dad's studio, all the skulls were gone. They'd been boxed up and stored in the laundry room. The green monster hung way up in the corner out of Felina's view. Old Gory had come down, and his desk was bare except his mother's leather-covered Bible, with the fish he'd tooled into the hide. I traced my finger over its crescents, slipping to the end of the tail and back tracking to its nose, and back again.

On one complete wall by the stove, Dad had taken the time to pin up all the water color paintings that Felina had done. He had studied each picture we had sent him in the mail and oriented himself to the shapes and colors based on what Felina had titled them, then pinned them to the wall in a collage. In the center of her paintings, there was a photo of Felina, slightly blurry because she had been stepping closer to the shutter as Heather clicked the shot. She grinned and stared, and in her hand she clutched crayons.

Below this wall, Dad had set her up a painting station, and after we had said hello and kissed her and smelled her, she climbed down and sat at her painting station. She asked for a glass of water, and she began to spread and mix the red and the black with all the other colors in her paint tubs. The she spread the brownish paint with her brush, she spread it with her fingers.

I squatted beside her, watching her move her tools. The fire felt warm on our backs.

"This is for Grandpa," she said.