CRABBING by Debi-Streett-Idell

I’ve just returned from the land of slow-talking men and soft-bosomed women.

Where my curious aunt has decided to submit to leukemia.

Where they still talk of weather, late summer tomatoes, and circumnavigation.

And give us a dozen instructions to guide us from comfortable interstates through quiet town streets to unlit rural routes.

Always deeper into darkness.

Follow the creek,

through the Rocks,

You’ll remember Hendrick’s Pond.

Pass the Five Forks.

If you cross the wooden bridge

You’ll have gone too far.

On a day before this day, before this decision, we sailed from Otter Point and I learned the delicate art of luring blue crabs to their death.

Tie a bloody hunk of warm, raw chicken to the end of a long piece of strong twine.

Dangle it over the side of the boat and watch it disappear.

Drink cold beer and wait.

Wait to feel the tug

Wait to feel the first tentative nibbling and then

Wait to feel a greedy, unconcerned gnawing.

Inch by slow inch, finger over finger, wind in the twine.

Fool the crab into believing the currents in the bay are causing the motion.

We must be most careful as we bring them into the light and warmth of the surface

Where the deception and brutality of our plans will become as clear as the glimmering water.

If we pull too quickly, if we rise and cast a shadow,

The crab will drop away and sink back into the depths,

Avoiding our nets and kettles.

Declining the invitation to our family dinner where everyone feeds on each other.

Joking and judging choked-up and struggling.

Always deeper into darkness

Follow the creek

Through the Rocks

I don’t remember Hendrick’s Pond

Pass the Five Forks

If you cross the wooden bridge you’ll have gone too far

to find the house in the woods where the table outside

is piled high with the glowing red shells of steaming Chesapeake Bay blue crabs

crusted with spicy, salty Old Bay seasoning as thick as the mud they dwelt in that morning, ancient and impervious

But not so now, as over ice tea and beer we casually twist their legs from the sockets,

Split open their backs and scoop away their sodden lungs and curled, cooked entrails

Before digging, pulling and sucking sweet fragments of flesh away from the thin, sharp, bony filament inside.

Chatting and laughing, counseling and lying.

After midnight, under gathering clouds,

gliding back past the Five Forks, swiftly following the creek through the Rocks,

A tawny and white doe, propeller-like ears spread wide,

leapt from the road in front of us but did not flee.

She watched us from the bank as we drove on,

Always deeper into darkness,

Ever wondering about the light.

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WHERE WILL YOU GO? by Julia Fogel

On Frazier street, in our own city

Stand some apartments, not very pretty.

The units are old, the units are small,

And roaches probably crawl down the wall.

Who lives there, you might want to know.

It’s those who help our gardens grow.

It’s those who with their loving spouses

Build and clean our stately houses.

But they stand on the street, the neighbors complain.

They take our jobs, the familiar refrain.

Their children we must educate,

While they send their money to a Mexican state.

A few blocks over is Canton Street

Where the wealthier folks meet and eat.

While having their fun, they seem to be able

To forget who sets their restaurant table.

Wouldn’t it be nice, wouldn’t it be right

If we could get rid of this urban blight?

Call on the council to take some action,

We don’t want this foreign faction.

Luxury homes are just the ticket,

The illegals that live there won’t dare to picket.

This is progress, after all,

Bring on that great big wrecking ball.

So the humble apartments now lie in a heap.

Do those who lived there sit and weep?

To find a new home is their biggest task,

And I have a question that I must ask.

Where did you go when they knocked on the door?

Where did you go when they tore up the floor?

Where did you go when the walls tumbled down?

Did you leave with a smile or leave with a frown?

Where will you go with money so tight?

Will you sleep on the street this cold winter night?

Will you find an affordable place for your bed?

I can’t get these questions out of my head.

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2 EXCELLENT POEMS Read by Jodi Roney

The approach of a man’s life out of the past is history, and the approach of time out of the future is mystery. Their meeting is the present, and it is consciousness, the only time life is alive. The endless wonder of this meeting is what causes the mind, in its inward liberty of a frozen morning, to turn back and question and remember. The world is full of places. Why is it that I am here?

—Wendell Berry, The Long-Legged House

Spared by a car or airplane crash or

cured of malignancy, people look

around with new eyes at a newly

praiseworthy world, blinking eyes like these.

For I’ve been brought back again from the

fine silt, the mud where our atoms lie

down for long naps. And I’ve also been

pardoned miraculously for years

by the lava of chance which runs down

the world’s gullies, silting us back.

Here I am, brought back, set up, not yet

happened away.

But it’s not this random

life only, throwing its sensual

astonishments upside down on

the bloody membranes behind my eyeballs,

not just me being here again, old needer,

looking for someone to need,

but you, up from the clay yourself,

as luck would have it, and inching

over the same little segment of earth-

ball, in the same little eon, to

meet in a room, alive in our skins,

and the whole galaxy gaping there

and the centuries whining like gnats—

you, to teach me to see it, to see

it with you, and to offer somebody

uncomprehending, impudent thanks.

 — William Meredith, “Accidents of Birth”

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WHAT HOME MEANS TO ME by Barry Hacker

When I saw the topic of today

I thought, I really don’t have much to say

But as I sat down to see what I could do

These thoughts appeared to share with you

They may not be what you expect

But let me simply be direct

When all is said and all is done

The unexpected is much more fun

They say a house is not a home

Cause it doesn’t have that touch

Of all the things you call your own

That place you love so much

A house can simply be a structure with a roof over your head

But a home can be that place of comfort for you to lay your bed

When people say “You can’t go home,” they may mean a state of mind

A feeling of nostalgia of the experiential kind

A home can be a simple hut built upon some dirt

Or a Turkish tent all covered up that’s formally called a yurt

A home can be up in a tree or on a boat that sails upon the sea

A home can be out on the range, if you really need a change

They say that home is where the heart is and perhaps that may be true

But it may not be the same for me as it may be for you

I think a home may simply be that very special place

Created from your heart with love and with your own true grace

No matter where you travel

No matter where you roam

There really is no better place

Than your own home sweet home

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**Poem – Thoughts on Home**  by Ralph Peters

Up there in Washington State,

The plantation Doug firs

Felled by bearded, big-booted men wielding shrill chainsaws and thumping axes

Dangerous work in a piney, resin-scented clearing

Dragged by massive chain and clanking donkey engine out of the rough wood-chip carpeted glade

Loaded on logging trucks and then loaded again on rolling stock

Heading by unhurried train chugging easterly to the boisterous mill.

Limbs lopped, bark stripped, 2x6’s, 2x4s sawed, stacked, and bound.

Brought south by flatbed K-Whoppers and Peterbilts, belching and gears grinding as they surmount the grades.

Lumber yards and depos; sorted and distributed to framers, builders and contractors;

Pallets and stacks bought by the gross.

Shipped to a job site on an old WWII AAF dispersal field,

Later, a large nursery.

Survey crews mapping elevations; civil engineers calculating drainage plans

Graders with their belching Cat D-8’s;

Soils engineers with clip boards claiming 90% on their sand cone compaction studies.

Curbs and gutters sited and poured

Tenon sleeves laid out; post-tension slabs poured; concrete screeded and leveled.

Wet wood, whining saws, the staccato echoing sound of framing hammers pounding 16 penny nails.

Work place chatter and musings; the muted idle of the Roach Coach playing its own sound track of Nortena music

A wooden skeleton of some sort taking shape in the lambent San Diego sun.

Soon to be clad in plywood, OSB, building paper,

Three coat Stucco and red roof-tile; and topped with chimney and spark arrestor.

Properly fenestrated (first gen double glazed) and flashed,

With solemn tribute to Title 24 and R factors.

Blaspheming drywallers put in a quarter acre of gyp-board, then tape and mud;

The plumbers and the painters move in, and do their hurry-up work;

Tile setters always on a work-around schedule, always with the best lunches.

Superintendents and foremen arguing about charge backs and change orders.

(And let’s not forget the electricians – the prima donnas of the construction trades, pulling wire, installing GFS circuits)

A spider’s web – a welter - of sprinkler lines;

The front yard sodded with fescue

A carrotwood and a camphor tree thrown in.

Final permit, NOC issued. And recorded. The SOL starts to run.

An edifice ready to sell.

**But is it a home? Not yet.**

18 miles to the South, amongst the Mission Hills wannabees,

A young couple has a decision to make.

Commute convenience, with private schools for the kids

Or the opposite.

Kinder kommen zuerst, as they say in German. [zoo-ehert]

Purchase made, oatmeal Berber and floor installed, move done.

If the walls could talk:

Birthday parties; children’s illnesses, Halloweens a plenty, the red bowl, visits by parents, friends and relatives, barbecues, Little League parties, landscaping decisions, matching Frazee Shell White, moving away from Frazee shell white, Deke and Edith building the porch overhang, graduation parties, grandchildren and Lincoln logs; arguments and making up in Mary’s walk-in closet, tomatoes and basil from the garden; kitchen remodels, merit badge classes, the kids sleep-overs, Sponge Bob and the Simpsons, watching TV and eating popcorn, Eagle Scout celebrations, choir practice, plumbing leaks, auction dinners, ant attacks, the mouse invasion, the green mouse tongs, the annual parental gift of Sunnyland Nuts, Silvana’s garden party, the Cob oven, walking in on cavorting teenagers, multiple stepladders hanging, Mary’s home office, Christmas lights, bicycles in the garage, clutter, red steps, weed block, four cubic yards of tumbled river rock, the parental furniture; the Frida Kahlo blue door….

**Home.**

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AUTUMN LEAVES by Gerrie Henchy

I sat and listened

To the piano.

It was an old upright,

But I heard a Baby Grand.

And I became a child again.

Music folding round my heart,

And a light shown from each note

As it hung suspended in the air,

Floating me upwards

Carried on the melody.

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GREATNESS by Joe Henchy

Human greatness is heroic.

Action that makes a mark in time.

Human greatness is millions of small acts

that weave the fabric of the human spirit.

A little girl pirouettes and curtsies

To show off her new birthday dress.

A young boy puts on his first baseball uniform.

His eyes are so wide his dreams are showing.

A widower, living by himself,

Teaches his young neighbor to bunt.

A widow plants flowers in an empty lot

To brighten the days of those passing by.

A small child tells a fallen bird,

“It’s OK, I’ll take care of you.”

A nine-year-old sees a tornado strike

And raises thousands for the victims.

A husband brings home flowers

Without needing an occasion.

A wife brings dreams

To an ordinary day.

A women’s garden club in Iowa

Writes letters to the guys overseas.

A peace rally jams Balboa Park

To bring the guys home alive.

A gay couple look proudly at their wall and

Doesn’t see a shadow on their wedding certificate.

A skinhead doesn’t scare us the way

His hooded sheet-wearing forebears did.

A single pregnant teenaged girl

Fights daily fear to have her baby.

A woman who smoked for eighteen years

Quits when she learns she is pregnant.

A man turns down an invitation to tennis

So he can drive Meals on Wheels to shut ins.

An eighty-something invalid wills her arthritic hands

To knit a scarf for the man who brings her meals.

A boy sixteen searches feverishly for a way

To ask a special girl out, without being rejected.

A girl sixteen searches feverishly for a way

To let that boy know the answer will be yes.

A beaming bride and groom embrace and

Unite their destinies in a common trust.

An elderly couple walking in the park

Look at each other with a look beyond love.

Such is the human spirit.

A wonderful mosaic of beauty and strength.

And each of us is part of it.

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(continued)

HOME by Marilyn Alberts

The last of dinner’s milky tea finished,

Grandpa settled in his chair by the gas stove,

Polished his glasses, and dispatched me to

“Fetch the book.” I clambered into his lap

and together we entered the world of The

Hundred Acre Wood, created by A.A. Milne,

where Winnie the Pooh (a bear of very little brain)

lives with his friends Owl, Rabbit, Eeyore the donkey,

Tigger, Kanga and Roo, Christopher Robin.

and -- my favorite – his loyal buddy Piglet.

(I’d been given a plush yellow Piglet doll

who eventually was loved to shreds.)

The scraggly pines, scrubby thorn bushes

and tangled oak branches were brought to life by the

pen-and-ink sketches of Ernest H. Shepard,

and those woods were as real and true to me

as any place I have ever known or dreamed of.

How I loved it –

It was home.

Grandpa West died when I was five.

The first of my heart’s homes would never

live in quite the same way, but at summer’s end

I found another – Miss Eunice Tuttle’s kindergarten

classroom. Floor-to-ceiling windows nourished

lush ferns; Lightning blue, gold and scarlet life

flashed through its aquarium and bird cage.

Smooth wooden blocks were big enough to sit on,

Easels and paints waited; music, stories and – BOOKS!

How I loved it –

It was home.

Eighty years and many worlds later, I find myself

on the rim of the Ngoro Ngoro Crater in Tanzania.

Each day we travel the steeply winding road down

the crater’s sides into the plain teeming with

wildebeest Cape buffalo, giraffes, zebras, antelopes,

elephants, baboons, hippos, black rhinos, and –

LIONS. In this world of constant births, mating,

rivalries, and deaths, we did not see an actual bloody

fatality, though its evidence was clear. We are

interlopers here in our Land Rovers, very much

strangers in this world, except for our game drivers.

I am privileged to ride with Nur, who is well-educated

but wisely says:

“This is my world.

It is my home.”

We see this protected animal world each day as we

pass thatched-hut villages set in rolling green hills,

men tending their cattle herds in traditional robes.

They are still “Masai Warriors” as they teach

their boys to handle spears and nightly patrol the

ramshackle fences enclosing the herds against lions.

We can hear the soft voices and laughter of the

women as they teach their daughters the art of

beading bracelets, collars, and earrings. I feel a

strange kinship with these people – Yes, they have

cell phones and send their children to college, but

bear a connection to this land from time immemorial,

with memories of a world so different from mine. It is

part of them and they will always be part of this

ancient earth, these clouds, grass and sky.

Then I realize that this very land is the original

birthplace of my own species – Homo Sapiens –

long since spread over the earth – even beyond.

Are we not each of us born from this ancestral home

of earth and sky?

How I have loved it all.

In the words of a beloved old hymn:

“Now may I find a settled rest,

Where others go and come,

No more a stranger or a guest,

But like a child at home.”

🙘 Finis 🙘