

1990

Natives, a collection of fiction and poetry

Paul C. Brooke
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Natives,
a collection of fiction and poetry

by
Paul Clayton Brooke

**A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS**

**Department: English
Major: English (Creative Writing)**

Approved:

Signature redacted for privacy

In Charge of Major Work

Signature redacted for privacy

For the Major Department

Signature redacted for privacy

For the Graduate College

**Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1990**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

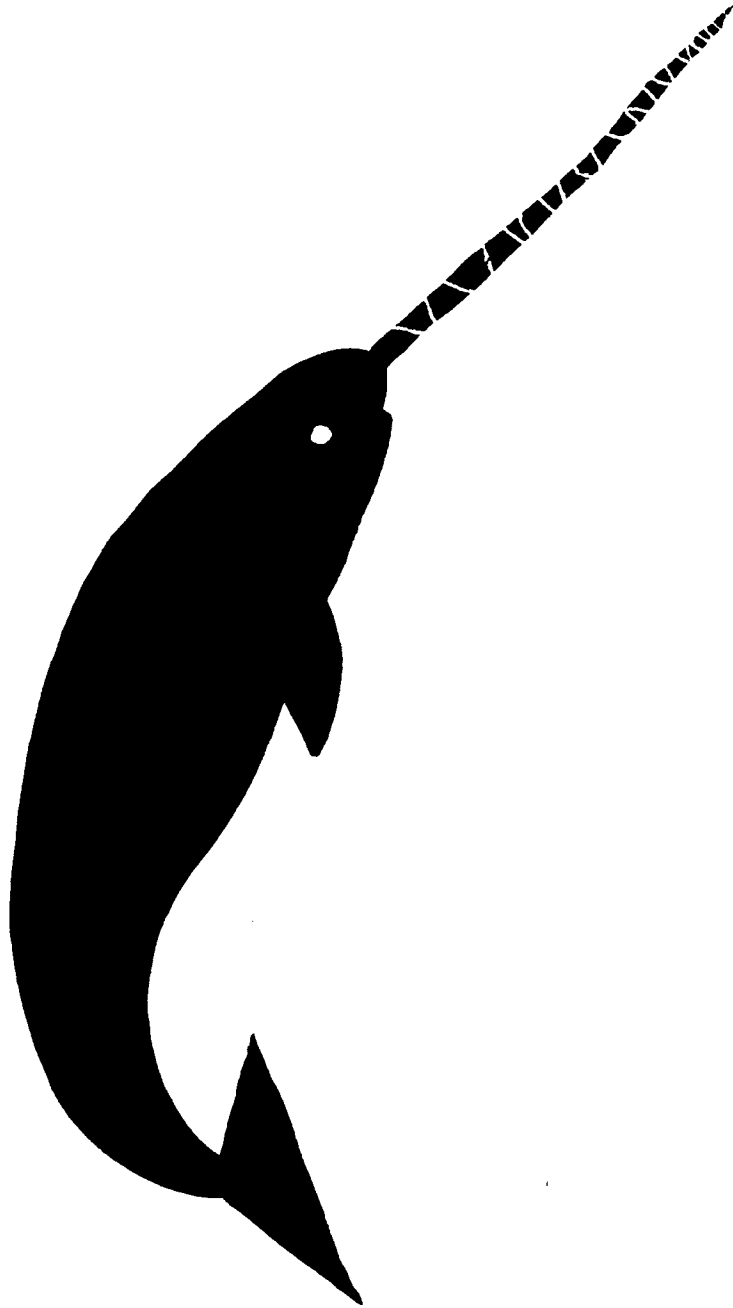
	Page
GLOSSARY	iii
SECTION 1. STORIES	1
Putigarok	3
Bear Mittens	5
The Lands of Missing Men	8
Keeping the Faith	14
Reading Bones	25
Dirty Fish	26
Hunting Grounds	27
Flight	28
One Man	29
Trapped	32
SECTION 2. STRINGS	34
Calendar Strings	35
The Truth	47
To the Reservation	48
Pieces	50
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	55

GLOSSARY

- Aneawea* - widgeon
A-no-tash - winter living quarters
Camas - quamash bulb
Dentalium - tubular tooth shell
Egohalik - black wolf
Esuksok - spirit of a dead man
Kingalik - king eider
Mikero - small one
Munguk - whale
Nez Percé - northwest Indian tribe
Ogrunok - gray mouse
Okpeek - white owl
Oldsquaw - black and white duck
Phalerope - small, red shorebird
Spilyáy - God of the Yakamas
Ugroom - bearded seal
Umiak - seal skin boat

SECTION 1. STORIES

“Egohalik watched as dark peoples gathered armloads of wood to fuel their cooking fires, as grinding metal leviathans ate at the trees and exposed the bare ground.”



Putigarok

*A game of hide-and-go-seek
played by Eskimo children*

Tanik (White Man)

An assortment
of children play on
the hillside, ducking
and giggling behind
the drowsy limbs
of a willow. Their
faces are dots of
light, reflections
of pure energy.

A young girl closes
her eyes and counts
backwards 20, 19,
18,...3-2-1 here I come
and she searches past
red brick homes
with heated
sidewalks, past
the quick shop with
pizza-in-a-minute,
past the park
where her father
taught her how
to fly a purple
bat kite.

Inuit (Eskimo)

An Eskimo girl
with a face like
a full moon
pretends to be an
old woman and
curls up to sleep,
but when she
awakens her children
are gone, taken by
a terrible polar bear.
Frantically, she
searches past
government-built
houses with caribou
skins drying
on the porch, past
smokehouses full
of fresh silver
salmon, past the
Trading Post with
candy bars for \$1.50,
past the North
Slope Burroughs
Office where her
father once worked.



Bear Mittens

The Legend of Ogrunok Kalupik

Ogrunok Kalupik was born on the first full moon after a snowfall, *soyazzuvik*, in 1913 in Point Barrow, Alaska.

At age nine, Ogrunok learned how to carve finger-sized ivory seals, walruses, and polar bears from his Uncle George Kalupik. He was a clever boy; once when his Uncle had his jaw broken while hunting seal, Ogrunok carved a straw from the legbone of a caribou. His Uncle could then drink fireweed tea without moving his mouth. The older women called his talent “a gift of the hands.” The Inuit men said “it will make him a great hunter and leader.”

At age ten, he was allowed to join the men on an *ugrook* hunt near the Arctic Ocean. He went along but stayed on shore to tend the fire, learn the knife, and to protect the valuable dried meats set aside in case of an emergency.

That afternoon, Ogrunok sat inside the small space of the cooking tent carving whalebone into a fearless Eskimo hunter. Ogrunok's hair was black and straight like a harpooner's throw, his brown face was flat yet handsome, and his fingers were sinewy like the women

who sewed the seal skins and mukluks. As he formed the man's face, small flecks of bone fell from his knife and covered the canvas floor like snow...

Something moved. Young Ogrunok picked up his caribou-skin mittens and stepped out onto the tundra. The *nanuk*, polar bear, caught the boy's scent and came closer — 300 feet, 200 feet. Ogrunok started to run but tripped and fell; the monstrous bear was upon him, but just as it was ready to bite; Ogrunok crammed his caribou-skin mittens down the bear's massive throat. The bear spun in circles then wheezed and died.



The Lands of Missing Men

It all started when a young man named Egohalik was hunting seals out on the jagged ice of the Bering Strait. The moon was bright in the daytime; Earth had swallowed the sun. Long effusive shadows stretched over thick, broken pieces of ice. The ocean floes and sky melded together as Egohalik built a snowshelter near an *allu*, a seal breathing hole.

Egohalik sat motionless — a harpoon rested in his right hand, the line curled on his lap, and a snowknife lay at his feet — patiently waiting for the ribbon seal to emerge. Frost formed lacework on his eyebrows and around the edges of his nose and mouth. Although he wore tanned seal skin and fur from the wolverine, Egohalik's body shivered in the extreme cold. It might take hours before the seal breathed. Older men during times of starvation would wait beside an *allu* for two days until the animal surfaced. Some had frozen to death as they stood determined, waiting for food to feed their families.

The seal came up, nosed the air for danger, and Egohalik moved silently to throw the harpoon. His spear killed the seal instantly. Swiftly, he

pulled the animal through the hole in the ice. A strange vapored gas rose from the body and floated above a very puzzled Egohalik (What he did not know was that there was a spirit trapped inside of the seal.). “I am Ee-sook-soak. Since you have awakened me, I must take you on an air voyage.”

Egohalik whispered, “No, I don't want to go.”

“No? Egohalik, you have no choice.”

The ice opened up and Egohalik fell in. His body contorted and dropped through prisms of light, dazzling arrays of color; through dark phantoms of cloud; and through a gaping hole that hung above Earth, empty and exhausted. The air held him up like a bird. He flew above the Earth, stopping to notice new things.

Over the ocean, Egohalik saw greedy men kill a *munguk* and tow its body into the belly of a mighty boat. They cut out the meat and blubber, drained the oil, removed the baleen, and released the carcass back into the deep water. Egohalik thought of how that whale could have fed his village all winter long.

The air carried him on, to a distant shore covered in black ooze. As far as Egohalik could see, there was black liquid. It was everywhere: on rocks, on fish, on animals. Even Egohalik's favorite animal, the wise-old sea otter was dead.

“How could this be? Who did this? Did a shaman curse the shore?” He wished he could breathe life back into the ocean, to erase this mistake; but he did not have the power.

Over the wet forests, Egohalik watched as dark peoples gathered armloads of wood to fuel their cooking fires, as grinding metal leviathans ate at the trees and exposed the bare ground. The forests seemed to evaporate like the heavy rains that gave them nourishment. In silence, Egohalik drifted, remembering the tranquility of the snow-covered forests near his village.

The winds carried him further, to a sprawling village with houses that stood tall as mountains, dazzling lights that throbbed like his own heart, and rancid air that choked his throat. People of every color and type congested the thin, transparent buildings. Others slept outside without shelter. Egohalik had the urge to go hunting, to bring fresh meat to those sleeping alone over the steam; but he would have to kill every caribou on Earth to feed them all.

Strangely, Egohalik hovered over the spot where his village once stood. Roads twisted like fishing nets and metal birds sucked at the ground. Little

remained: except barrels, food containers, and broken things. He had never seen such waste. All he wanted to do was see his family, friends, and his gentle wife. Egohalik had had enough and closed his eyes tight and the air carried him back.

And so, Egohalik finished his journey with Esuksok, landing at the same place he had left from. “Egohalik, remember the things I have shown you. Your people will benefit from your knowledge.” Esuksok turned and vanished.

Egohalik gathered up his tools and attached the seal to his harness. He shuffled across the gelid ocean, bypassing the crevices and young gray ice; traversed through steam fog, simmering from the cracks and leads like cooking smoke; and climbed over the gritty icepiles, dragging the seal behind his heels back to the snowpack of shore. He followed the *kysenegek*, the south wind, to his distant village.

Everyone was overjoyed to see Egohalik because he was believed to have frozen to death. He had been gone for three weeks during the worst blizzard of winter.



Keeping the Faith
dedicated to Tom and Feather

“And if you don't believe, hell's murky waters will swallow you whole,” Nelson paused. He looked over the congregation, wiped his forehead with his white handkerchief, and concluded, “by the grace of God, I dismiss you all.” Nelson walked down the aisle. Refractions of stained glass light filled the little church. The collection plates and wine goblets sparkled. Everyone sang, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the...” Light and music vibrated together.

Soon everyone began to shuffle out slowly. They shook hands with Nelson and talked about the warm weather. In about one hour, the church was quiet and the 52 year old Inuit minister locked the front door.

Nelson walked down the gravel mainstreet of Nuiqset to his son Ron's house. Children chased each other around in the yards of their parent's subsidized homes, teenagers rode by on their three-wheelers, and the adults sat on their porches talking and chewing caribou jerky. “There is a restful feeling here in Nuiqset,” Nelson thought. He never would have guessed that he'd still be there after transferring from Point Barrow 24 years ago. But he remained, firm and steadfast to God. He raised one child with his wife, Rosie, built a new church, and fed the poor families with donated canned

goods and produce. God had provided so much, except for a son who felt those same inspirations.

When Ron wasn't driving a caterpillar for the North Slope Burroughs Company, he was lying on the sofa eating junkfood and watching All-Star Wrestling. He never went to church, either. Nelson tried to keep him from swearing, tried to convert him. It never worked. Years ago, Nelson and Rosie adopted Ron from a chubby fifteen year old Point Barrow girl, who lived in the parsonage until her son was born. The villagers questioned Nelson's decision, almost voted him out of the church; but he wanted a son, a son that he could teach how to carve whalebone, how to shoot a rifle, how to love God like he did. But Ron was so different. At 5'7," Ron weighed over 300 pounds. All of the men in Nuiqset were frightened of him. Two summers ago, Ron shot a bull caribou, picked up the entire 450 pound carcass, and tossed it into his boat. The men still talk about Ron's strength: "*Ong a ruit* (Very Big), they would repeat over and over like a chant.

Nelson walked past the Trading Post, the only place in town where groceries were sold. Sam Toonook, a wiry trapper and carver, unloaded a cart of candy bar boxes onto the porch. Nanna, a toothless great-great grandmother, was sitting on a bench, watching Sam work, giving him instructions between stitches. She put down her sewing and waved. Nelson smiled. One of her sons supposedly killed a polar bear by stuffing his mittens down the bear's throat.

The new schoolhouse stood across from the Trading Post: fancy red brick, fancy books, and fancy multi-colored seesaws and jungle gyms. The state of Alaska funded the million dollar project, even brought in some white teachers to educate the children. The brick was flown all the way from Seattle, Washington and the playground equipment was from somewhere in Iowa. Nelson was sad when the school was built because it meant that the children would eventually want to leave Nuiqset, so they could find good paying jobs.

Before Nelson knew it he reached Ron's three-bedroom home on the outskirts of town. A polar bear skin dried on the porch. Ron had shot it last winter when it tried to eat one of his huskies, shot it right off his back porch. Nelson surveyed the yard: it was barren, except for a few caribou bones, sparkplugs, and dog turds. Nelson knocked and Ron yelled, "It's open."

Ron was sitting in his usual place eating Doritos, drinking diet pop, and watching All-Star Wrestling. "Sit down Dad, this is the best part. Hulk Hogan body slams King Kong Bundy."

Nelson watched as a large blond-haired man picked up a walrus-sized bald-headed man and 'body slammed' him.

"Holy Shit, didya see that, goddamn that was great." Ron jostled his weight forward, intent on the match, and then realized what he said, "Sorry, Dad, I guess I was excited."

"How come every time I come over here, you have to swear? Maybe just once you could watch your language. Is it

too much to ask, I am your father and a minister, remember?"

"I said I was sorry...I suppose we're going to argue the whole time we're out hunting today. I don't want to go if you're going to preach at me. I don't need it, Dad. I really don't."

"We have to go, Ron. I'm going to take my half of the meat and give it to some of the poorer families in town. I will try to lay off the 'preaching.' We must remember that the food is needed."

Ron slipped on his boots and turned off the V.C.R. and T.V. "Well, if we're going to feed the world, we'd better get going." He walked over to the closet and got his rifle, some shells, and a coat. "Oh yah, I almost forgot."

Ron plodded over to the cupboard and grabbed a bag of chips, a box of Ho-Hos, and a six pack of Mountain Dew.

"Health food," he quipped.

"Unbelievable," Nelson whispered under his breath.

"Unbelievable."

They both climbed into Ron's GMC Jimmy and drove over to the parsonage to pick up Nelson's gear and lunch. Quietly, they loaded the truck.

Neither one spoke as they headed for the boat landing. Nelson just gazed out the window at the *kookaru*, the black-headed gulls, that swept back and forth along the road. Nelson loved all the birds: brants, teal, snow buntings, and surf scoters.

On the first day of spring when Ron was ten years old, he carved a snowy owl out of whalebone, wrapped it in white tissue paper, and gave it to Nelson. Nelson placed it on the corner of his desk and whenever he had trouble with a sermon or with the proper advice to give a married couple, he would concentrate on the owl. He would daydream he could fly high above the town and soon he found the right solution.

They loaded Ron's boat, a red 20 foot Lund. "Hey, Dad," Ron said, "Let's go get ourselves a big caribou."

Nelson undid the rope, pushed off with one foot, and jumped into the boat. He was quite nimble for his age, probably from all the walking he did. Ron started the 250 horsepower motor. "I had the son-of-a-bitch going 55 the other day," he said proudly.

"Really?" Nelson tried to ignore Ron's swearing.

"Yah, I went around old Sam Toonook like he was paddling a seal skin boat."

They both laughed. Sam Toonook prided himself on having the best dogs, the best gun, and the best boat. It was good for Sam to be humbled. Nelson laughed some more. Even though they were several miles from the Arctic Ocean, he could smell the salt. The wind tangled his thick black hair. As the boat skimmed along, it would scare up widgeons and king eiders. Nelson would point them out to Ron, naming them in Inuit: "*Anawea, Kingalik.*"

“Keep your eyes peeled for caribou,” Ron maneuvered the boat through some serrated chunks of river ice.

Nelson listened for scraping noises. There was only the low thrum of the motor. “That sure was some fancy driving,” he said.

Ron faked a smile. “Yah...” he said as he turned the boat up the Colville River towards Ptarmigan Island. The island was bare except for a few dwarf willows, pingos, and polygon ponds. “There are suppose to be a shit-load of caribou on Ptarmigan Island.”

Nelson frowned, “No kidding? Where did you hear that?”

“From Nanna, she heard Sam telling his partner at the store.”

“Oh.” Nelson pictured Ron holding a .22 for the first time. “Ron, do you remember when I taught you how to shoot?”

“Yah, Mom thought I was too young...”

“You were only five, that is pretty young.”

“I was a helluva shot, wasn't I?”

“You sure were, on your third try, you got a ground squirrel. Then you sat there poking it with a stick, telling it to wake up,” Nelson made the poking motion with his arm.

“I never did that...”

“I swear you did,” Nelson said.

“But you never swear.” Ron began laughing uncontrollably, so much so that he almost fell overboard.

Nelson shook his head from side to side. "Ron, do you think you could stop..." Nelson sat straight up. "Caribou! Look, Ron, Caribou! There must be hundreds." The caribou were crossing the Colville River, paddling across like overgrown dogs.

"Holy Fuck! Look at all those fucking caribou. Look at the male in the middle, he's goddamn huge!" Ron directed the boat towards the bull caribou. "O.K., I'll get close to him, you grab the steering wheel, and I'll shoot the son-of-a-bitch!" Ron was as excited as a child. Nelson took control of the boat and Ron picked up his rifle, a 30.06, steadied himself against the lap of waves, and squeezed off the shot, right through the bull's eye. Perfect.

"Grab him before he sinks," Nelson yelled.

"I got him. Get the boat to shore, Dad. This is in-fucking-credible! He must weigh 600 pounds!"

The boat cut into the calm of a bay when Nelson noticed that the caribou was still alive. "Let go of him, Ron, he's still..." The caribou lunged forward, bucking Ron head-over-heels. There was a crash a wave and panic. Ron couldn't swim. Grabbing for something solid, he latched onto the caribou's neck and they began to sink like two anchors. The caribou raised its front legs instinctively and sent a pair of hooves smashing into Ron's sternum. The kick freed the caribou.

Seconds later, Nelson lined up the site and shot the enraged caribou through the neck. It sank instantly. Nelson turned to help his son out of the water; but he had disappeared.

“Ron, Ron!” Nelson called out. He tore off his jacket, jumped into the murky water, and his breath was knocked right out of him. Pausing, he dove under water and began searching the bottom with his hands. Nothing. Nothing. Abstract swirlings. Mud. Nelson's breath ran out and he came up for air. Once again he dove under and searched frantically. Nothing. Nothing. Texture. Clothing. Ron. Nelson wrapped his arms around Ron's massive chest and pushed off the bottom. Ron's body rose like a balloon. Nelson was almost out of breath. He broke the surface and breathed in gulps of air. He raised Ron's head out of the water and sidestroked to shore. It surprised him that Ron was light, like a buoy.

Nelson got to shore and pulled Ron through the mud. Carefully he checked his breathing. Nothing. “Keep the faith,” he mouthed the words while he rolled Ron onto his side, pounded on his back with the heel of his hand, and then began C.P.R. He kept pressing on his chest, pushing air into his lungs, and praying. Nothing happened. Nothing. “Keep the faith,” he repeated it again like a chant. Wait. He pressed his fingers against Ron's thick throat — a pulse — there was a pulse. Suddenly Ron came to, spitting water right in Nelson's

face. "Thank the Lord. Thank the Lord." Nelson looked up to the sky.

Ron was shivering like a scared child. Nelson sat for a several minutes, holding his son's head in his lap.

"I'm going to get some wood and build a fire, maybe I'll find the boat. I thought I was going to lose you, lose my only son. God must have been smiling on both us today. Yes, he was smiling on us both."

Ron sat up. "Go ahead, Dad, I'll be fine. I feel okay." Nelson slogged through the mud looking for driftwood and the boat. Far, far in the distance he could see the red Lund hung up on a small grassless island. Slipping and sliding, he made his way to the spot directly across from the boat. Although he was tired and close to hypothermia, Nelson waded out in the water. He climbed in, started the motor, and turned the boat around.

He approached the place where Ron almost drowned. Ron was standing on shore, bent over, next to something large, the caribou. The caribou had washed up on shore and Ron was gutting it out. The knife flashed in the sunlight. Ron removed the entrails, cleaned the blood off the knife in the river, and washed his hands in the green half-digested lichens and grass of the caribou's intestine. Nelson slowed the boat and Ron caught the bow. "Are you all right?"

“Yah, I feel fine. I'm tough as nails. Can you believe the caribou drifted onto shore? I can't.”

Nelson got out and held the bowline. Ron waddled over to the caribou and tried to lift the carcass onto his shoulders. He struggled with the weight and dropped it. He tried again; but it was no use. Nelson stuck a paddle in the mud and tied the line. He walked over slowly, unsure of what to say.

“I can't do it. I can't pick up the stupid fucking thing. I know I'm strong enough. What the hell's the matter with me?”

Nelson asked, “How much do you think it weighs?”

“Probably 520 or 530, I'm not sure. Why?” “How much do you think it weighs in the water?”

“Not much, it should probably float. Wait, I see what you mean. I'll just drag it out to the boat, float it in a coupla feet of water, get underneath it, and pick the fuc...I'll pick it up. Right?”

Nelson held the boat. Ron slid the caribou through the thing was that his son was alive and nothing else mattered.

“Dad?”

“What, Ron?”

“Have I told you how much I respect you. How glad I am that you raised me instead of someone else. I may not be perfect but I am happy, there's nothing wrong with that, is there?”

“No, no, of course not.” Nelson wasn't sure what he should do, so he didn't say anything.

They were quiet for about 30 minutes and soon they were close to home. Nelson could see the distant lights of Nuiqset. When they reached the landing, all the villagers ran down to greet them.

Old Sam Toonook was the first one there. “Holy Moses! Look at the size of that caribou!” Everyone gathered around as Ron told how the caribou knocked him into the river. How Nelson saved his life. How he picked up the caribou and tossed it into the boat. Four men had to pick up the caribou and load it into a truck. The whole village was abuzz with the news.

Nelson went back to Ron's house to make sure he was okay. Ron had stripped down to his underwear. His belly hung over, his feet were white and wrinkled, and right in the middle of his chest were two hoof prints, purple and green. It looked painful. Ron took a hot shower and then settled down in bed.

Nelson slipped out into the dusk of evening. It never really got dark in the spring, just twilight. He made his way along the street, down past the schoolhouse, the Trading Post, and the church. He unlocked the door and let himself into the parsonage. He took off his wet clothes and put them into the hamper, took a long shower, and went to bed.

The next day Nelson awoke late, got dressed, poured himself a cup of coffee, and walked over to check on Ron. Nelson knocked on the door and Ron yelled, "It's open."

Nelson came into the living room. Ron was lying on the sofa watching All-Star Wrestling. "Sit down, Dad, it's Randy 'Macho Man' Savage against Hulk Hogan."

Nelson hesitated for a second and then sat down on a brown chair. A man with a beard hoisted up a large blond-haired man over his head. Just like a caribou. "He strong just like you, Ron."

"Yah, he's pretty strong; but I bet he couldn't pick up a 530 pound caribou."

"I doubt it. I really doubt it." Nelson relaxed, watching the men push and pull against each other.

And somewhere up in the sky a snowy owl drifted, soaring with its white wings spread wide, soaring like a God.

Reading Bones

**Once I found an arctic fox skull
along the bank of the Miluveach River.
An Eskimo taught me that bone
is solid paper and teeth are words.
“Read it like a book,” he said,
“but be careful of the ending.”**

**I saw myself dripping blood,
darting through dwarf willows,
trying to escape. The trail
was getting darker. Time
was running out. So I lay down
and pretended to be dead.**

**Two men tromped up next to my corpse.
The smaller, uglier one rolled me over
with his boot and laughed.
At that moment, I lunged forward
at his throat. I bit down and the man
began farting and gasping,
screaming his lungs out. Suddenly,
the fatter one, shot at me with his .22
and missed — killing his buddy — leaving
me to escape.**

Dirty Fish

“Ogrunok, go check the nets.”

“Yes, mother.”

Ogrunok went down to the beach, jumped into his *umiak*, and paddled to the delta. The water was murky, thick like blood soup. He pulled the nets in, extracting the arctic charr which were caught by their gills. The fish were full of sunlight: gold, cinnabar, and ocher.

When Ogrunok returned home with a basket full, the shaman told him to pour out the charr onto the ground. He wanted to see if any of the fish were evil. One particularly large charr flipped up into the air and the shaman caught it with his hand. “This fish is possessed.” So he took it from Ogrunok.

Ogrunok brought the bundle of dirty fishes to his mother, Utigrok. She asked why they were so filthy. Ogrunok replied, “the shaman had to check for evil fishes, that's why.”

“No, he didn't, he just needed dinner.”

Hunting Grounds

In 1953 under the Concentration Policy, the Danish Government moved a large number of Inuit villagers into Julianehåb, Greenland.

At the entrance of Julianehåb harbor,
icebergs slowly rub their
enormous bellies against each other,
chafing pieces of icerock into
the ocean water.

As morning begins, dark-haired men
load sheep destined for the
slaughterhouse into orange long-boats.
Uneasily, the sheep mull around,
horns turned down, scraping
at the bones of the hull.

Both old and young Inuit men
stand in line at the cafeteria
after work, waiting to buy Danish beer
with government ration coupons.

The cafeteria becomes louder;
bottles and tin cups clink
and clank. Eskimos in cowboy boots
and western jeans yell
for more booze, stagger around,
go outside to piss.

Steam rises from the dirt,
clouds Julianehåb in mist.
And through the drunken denseness,
a rifle shot sounds
as the rest of the sheep wait.

Flight

As a child, Naloo stalked phalaropes as they scuttled back and forth along the surf's edge, pecking at limp insects. When she could almost touch their tiny, red bodies, they would startle and fly a short distance away. Behind a sand dune, a small boy hid — watching — in silence.

Years later during winter, her mother made a bird bola from walrus teeth, braided sinew, and a tuft of oldsquaw feathers.

Naloo walked the shoreline, searching for sea bird eggs. The heavy teeth rested in two pouches that were strung onto her belt. The quilled handle rested behind her neck, so she could grab it quickly. From the north, a group of eiders approached, winging low over the rolling combers, flying right towards her. She spun the bola and flipped it up into the air. The six strings spread out, covering a large circle, two ducks flew into the sinewed line, the line with its weight at the end, wrapped around the delft-headed ducks, and they fell at her feet, tangled and alive. At first she marveled at their beauty: solid black eyes, orange-yellow bills, and calloused webbed feet, then she plucked a single tail feather, and pierced each bird's heart. That night as her friends and family ate the meat and drank the soup, Naloo went outside — sad — because soon a man would throw his bola and make his choice.

One Man

On the bottom of the Beaufort Sea, snow crabs snapped at settling debris, scurried for the remains of a polar cod. Rising up, tiny jellyfish parachuted,

trailing delicate fluorescent streamers that rippled the tired water with cerisian flashes. Bladed silver saffrons drifted in swirls and fed on blue-green

algae. Translucent pink shrimp pulsated near an inverted ice mountain, blue-black and ominous. A bobtail squid jetted a purple ink cloud to elude

a ribbon seal. Above the arctic ice, an old hunter stood, shivering as oyster-colored light shimmered from the curled edge of the moon. Raising a hand

up slowly, he warmed his icy face, unsure of when the seal would breathe. As the hours passed, he silently sang a hunting song to his own heartbeat.



One Man

In a forest near a nursing home, nighthawks swooped down, inhaling swarms of diaphanous-winged mayflies, red ants, and mosquitoes.

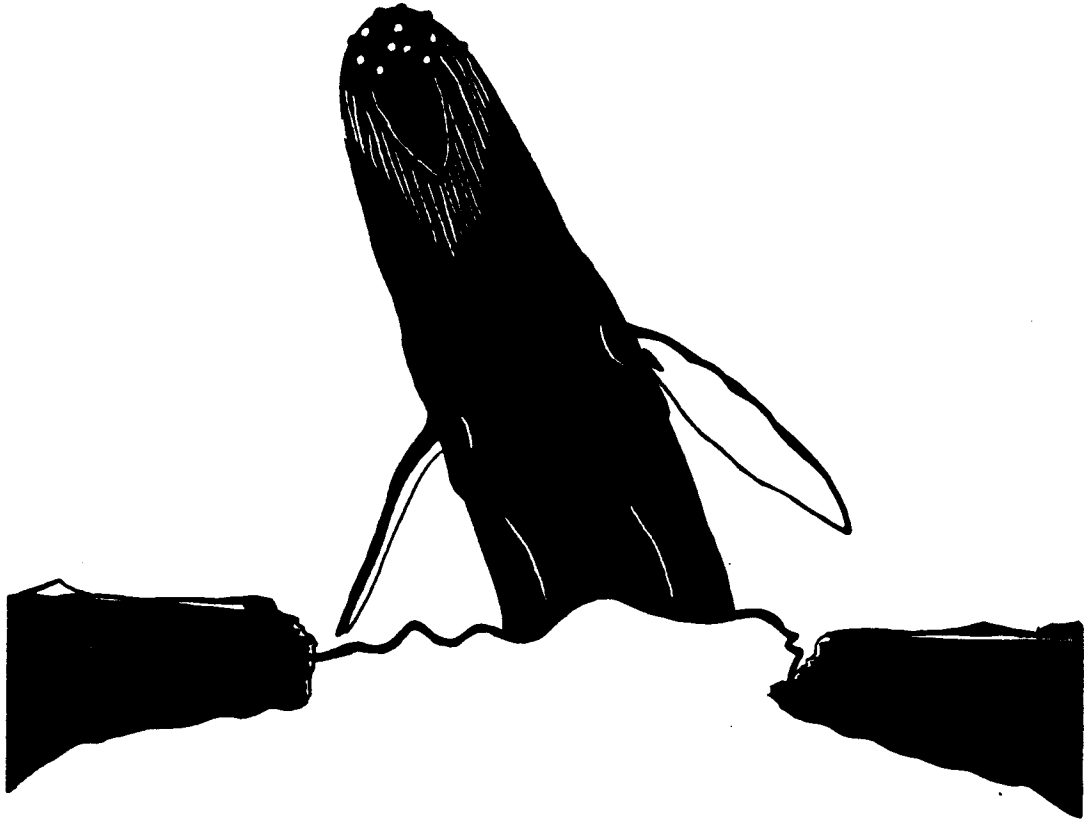
Warm airdrafts swayed the tops of sycamores and oaks. Deer waded out into the cool to drink as coyotes crept through bloodroot and water

willow. Looking out the window, an old man watched as the sky turned from yellow to orange to red. The room was ghost-white, underwater

quiet. Turning the wheelchair slowly with nimble hands, the man resumed daydreaming as two fans circulated cool air over his tepid body.

His thoughts spun: early mornings at the steel mill, home at five, drinking with friends, his new Ford, falling down in the garage, and money, money....





**Trapped
(for Matthew)**

**Somewhere in the Bering Strait,
a bowhead whale ploughs
through the upper layers
of the sea — water gushes in —
flooding tiny krill onto
porous strands of baleen,
separating food from water,
solid from liquid. The whale
feeds and grows stronger
for the journey to warm waters
while ice pieces find resting places
and the sea surface congeals
into a frozen form.**

**In Bettendorf, Iowa, I visit
my grandfather at his two-
bedroom home. In the upper
layers of the house, smells
swirl -- sweat, urine, alcohol.
He sits slouching at the kitchen
table with an unshaven face,
greasy grey hair, and four-
letter eyes.**

**Swiveling a can of beer, he
drinks in the liquid, but nothing
separates. And soon he forgets
my name, my relationship
to him. And I put him to bed,
pull the white sheet over his
skinny legs and fat belly, and
whisper "good night."**

**From the bottom of the sea,
the bowhead explodes upward
smashing into the wall
while white rips of wave
tornado, descend in lost spirals,
and disappear. In a final surge
of power, the whale catapults
all 36 feet of its length
and hammers, hammers
until the ice shatters apart,
and he breathes in huge gasps.
Alive.**

SECTION 2. STRINGS

**“children crawled through the beargrass
pretending to be coyotes after deer,
and their voices echoed off tilted cliff-faces.”**

Calendar Strings
(from 1805 to 1819)

Yakima Indian women carry a ball of string (iti tá mat) with different kinds of materials (kó-is) such as knots, yarn, or beads. Each kó-is marks a day of the year and a memory. One such calendar string was found to be 180 feet long and tied with 6600 simple knots.

knot

**Winter whistles in the reed hollows.
The medicineman drops three pebbles,
three times and sings
to soothe the storm.**

white yarn

**Two tipis rip apart in a swirling wind.
I find smoked goat and salmon
at my feet. And I feel a pulsing,
the first arrows of pain
as the baby pushes down.**

white dentalium shell

**Snow settles all afternoon.
Two boys chase a snowshoe hare**

into an underground burrow.
Deep inside me, it breathes.

All day and night I fight harder
than any man can imagine.
I want this child.

knot with grizzly hair

A grizzly bear circles the village.
Doka and the other men chase it away.

Later, Doka tells me not to be afraid. He
gives me a wooden comb
with three deer etched on its edge.

knot

Mother holds my hand
and encourages me: "More.
A little more. Good."

Then when I am weak
like a newborn fawn,
the baby appears, glistening
like a star in the dark of the tipi.

clear blue bead

Every meadow is on fire
with tiny flowers. The deer
are moving down from the mountain to
drink at the river.

**Doka tells me that he wanted a son
not a daughter. Going into
the dark woods, I cry. I love Kwona.**

button

**There are only women left
in the village when a group
of No-Sun men arrive.
Their faces are covered with hair. Their
bodies are covered with skins.**

**I touch one of their animals. It is taller
than I am, spotted from behind,
beautiful like rippling water.**

**A man turns to face me. He hands me a
small shell with two holes in it.**

yellow yarn

**We travel to the narrow river.
The salmon shoot by
as I sharpen my willow spear.
I balance on one foot,
thrust the stick forward,
and kill my first fish,
a female heavy with eggs.**

**Kwona carries the *t-kwi-nat*,
silver salmon, to Doka. The men
watch as Doka takes the fish,
squeezes the eggs**

into a stone bowl,
cuts open the belly,
and flanges the flesh back
to remove all the intricate bones.
Handing the clean meat
wrapped in mint grass
to Kwona, he smiles.

small yellow bead

I pick the last flowers of the summer.
A deer and her fawn walk
the fringes of the meadow,
drink long at a spring,
and bound away.

Kwona plays on a deerskin,
fingering a grasshopper until
it spits brown juice on her hand.

large yellow bead

Doka returns from hunting, tired.
He takes Kwona in his arms
for the first time and falls asleep.
I go outside to pound bark
into a dancing dress,
to boil roots, and to cry.

knot

More No-Sun men have traveled

through our village. They stay
long, laugh hard, and trade with us
for all the animal skins we have.
Sometimes I cook deer meat
for them after I bake camas roots
and salmonberry shoots
in the earth oven.

They give me bright strips of cloth
which I will weave
into my black and white blankets.

knot

We move down to the flatlands
for winter is close again.

Miowa's child is ill
with heat fever.

Everyone stays away
from the boy
because they do not wish it.
I tend to him
after Miowa collapses
from exhaustion. She
is a thin reed, waiting
for her son's breath
to be strong again.

knot

The first snow falls, everything

is still and peaceful.
Miowa recovers and eats a handful
of preserved huckleberries
from a wooden bowl.
We make her son drink
more water. His head
is hot like fire coals.

I am afraid he will die soon.

knot

Sometime during night
the moon is whole,
Miowa's son screams out.
His body is too hot,
so we take away
all of his blankets.

He begins to shiver like his body
has been immersed
in a winter river.

knot with dried grass

I coil black and yellow
beargrass into a basket.

When I wet the wild cherry bark
with my lips, I can taste
summer.

Miowa's son is running

*far ahead as we pick
handfuls of grass, cattails,
and rushes.*

amber-colored bead

**The medicineman drops three pebbles,
three times and sings to capture
the fever spirit.**

**He grabs the fever and smears
it onto his newted skin. As he
does, the boy's warmth
disappears.**

**Miowa and I hold each other
tightly because we know her
son will live.**

red yarn

**It rained ice last night,
glazing the evergreens
and *a-no-tash* clear,
spattering the hills
with twinkling beads.**

**Mother died last night
in her sleep.**

green yarn

**Morning is too bright;
Sun flashing off snow.**

**Mother is buried
under a black rock slope;
two thin sticks mark the spot.**

**As I stand staring,
a falcon snatches a small bird
from the air. Blinking,
I look again; but the sky
is empty.**

knot

**A spirit sacred to Doka
has returned
from the Mountain.
For five days we will dance
the Guardian Spirit dance.**

deerskin thong

**The streams are filled
with melting snow as I gather
mountain goat wool
snagged on the hillside bushes.**

**Kwona is reaching her womantime.
She does not know**

**of strange changes
that will make her different.**

**I tell her my stories,
teach her this string.**

white yarn

**Hot breezes whip the flap
on the outside of the tipi.**

**Kwona has started to bleed.
I paint her face, make a headdress
of soft fir boughs, and take her
to a meadow, close to where
mother was buried.**

knot

**The sun sets red. Kwona
sleeps far away from me
in a round bark hut. She is
alone to fast and pray,
to pile sticks, and to pick
needles off evergreen branches.**

knot

***Long ago, I too wondered
if the bleeding would ever stop...***

*To cleanse myself, I bathed
in an icy stream, ashamed
that I stained the water.*

*Later that year, Doka promised
himself to me.*

two knots

**Kwona has returned
to the round hut. She sits
quietly on the floor,
weaving a tule mat.**

**A young man has been leaving
love charms for her.**

**I saw him putting pine gum
on a hemlock, so he could tangle
the feet of a hummingbird.
It is said the miniature heart
is the best charm of all.**

blue yarn

**Around the fire, Doka and
a No-Sun man talk. Their
shadows ripple the dry air.**

**He is willing to give ten blankets,
three steel traps, one kettle,
many firesticks, and one gun
if Kwona becomes his wife.**

If she is married to this man,
I may only see her once a year.

yellow thread

At daybreak,
a young man is singing loudly
at the edge of the village,
“The sun rises,
I think of my love.
My love.”

Kwona does not look up
from her work; but I can tell
that she is smiling.

green yarn

Doka has decided to take
the No-Sun man's offer. He tells me,
“these tools will help us and
Kwona will be well taken care of.”

knot

I prepare Kwona
for the marriage ceremony:
wash her hair clean,
dress her in supple buckskin,
and tie the first knot
in her own string.

**The presents have arrived
by canoe. Doka seems happy
to have so many good things.**

**I brush Kwona's black hair.
The wooden comb is so worn
that I can only see two deer
browsing in the rich grass.**

The Truth

**He missed the turn-off,
said he didn't see the sign.**

**The morning paper came
and he passed by an article
on Indians, didn't laugh at
the comics, and finished in
no time flat.**

**While we were watching
t.v., he told me that he
couldn't read or write.**

**That he
fooled everyone at work.**

**That he
had to drive around the
block ten times until
everyone was gone so he
could take the oral test
for his driver's license.**

**Two weeks later, I forgot
that...
then I saw him pushing the
grocery cart back and forth
in front of the checkout
aisles — ice cream melting,
milk warming — waiting for
me to write his check.**

To the Reservation

On the border of the Yakima
Indian Reservation, I went
to visit my friend's family
to meet his cautious Father,
his hard-working sister,
and his simple nieces, who
played loudly in the living room
among dirty clothes, broken
toys, and empty cans of Pepsi.

Between the quiet spaces
of conversation, I noticed:
the kitchen wall, a sheet
of paper with Yakima words
for *Woman (ti-la-ki)*, *Man*
(na-ti-tait), and *Song*
(wempash).

In the thick fields that
surrounded their subsidized
two-bedroom home, grapes
grew in long rows, hops hung
from strung ropes, and
workers filled wooden boxes
with ripe apples. Then his
sister told how they had to
lease their land to make some
extra money for insulation
for the walls. "Too cold, wind
blows right through."

*Coming out of the mountains
that morning, the truck
whined and rattled then the
heater kicked on. On the roadside,
a porcupine gathered maggots
as the sun even opened
for business. Pulling over, a thin
motorist yanked out a few quills,
stuffing them into a Ziploc bag.
Scraps of bark bounced off
the highway from a logging truck
that hauled a load of Douglas firs,
150 years old. Fruitstands,
white washboard shacks
full of Jonathan and Granny
Smith apples, honey, cider,
plums, and peaches, waited
hungry for customers. Men
moved crates of produce
in the backshadows while
sprinklers began their artificial
rains. The sawmill began
operation. Wood chips were
scooped into boxcars, to be used
later as pulp for paper. Trucks
dumped their aged loads. Arm-
straight logs were hoisted up
and placed for ripping into
2 by 4's, the skeletons of too
many two-bedroom homes.*

Pieces

**“I could not recall stories if it
were not for the landmarks.”
— Celia Dick (Colville Indian)**

**Even though he can't read or write
his words make sense
and as
I follow two paces behind him
on the Pacific Crest Trail,
I feel the soft moccasin tracks
of a thousand Indians
who traveled the ridgelands
in search of deer,
huckleberries, and bitterroot.**

*At three months, his birth mother
put him up for adoption:
Howtopat into Whitefoot,
Yakima into Nez Percé.*

**At a trailsign at 4295 feet,
I help him read:
“Mountain.”**

*The white children used to tease him;
so he knows some Indian words
all right, like lucha means brown....*

**He's thirty-eight years old
and his sister, who has four
children and two jobs, balances
his checkbook, watches over
him reluctantly. Mother died in
'77 and left only one burden.**

**His agile body moves along the trail
instinctively; but he never stops
once to look at the dew-speckled
Indian paintbrush.**

**He never stops
once to notice the scenery: the rock
rising out of rivers, the turquoise
sky, or the Ponderosa Pines thick with
orange peeling bark.**

**He never stops
until we reach his father's old campsite.**

*Below Blowout Mountain seven tule
tipis once rested on a lush
meadow, game roasted on pointed
sticks, children crawled through
the beargrass, pretending to be
coyotes after deer, and their
voices echoed off tilted cliff-faces.*

*A ten year old boy worked a piece of
obsidian. Small red bits lit*

*upon the ground, eye-winking in the
sunlight. He fashioned the point
into an arrow, his first.*

**A battered old coffeepot —
abandoned — heats up
in the mid-day sun.**

A spring fills a small pond.

**A circle of basalt stones wait
for fire.**

**A rufous hummingbird zips by,
hesitating for just a
second, thinking my red shirt is
a huge columbine.**

**But all around us, clearcuts
checkerboard the forest.
Motorcycles rip up the old
Indian trail.**

Fires flickered as an elder spoke.

*Everyone gathered around. "Many
years ago Spilyáy was hunting for food.*

*The coyote searched and searched;
but he found nothing. On the third day of*

*his journey, Spilyáy came upon a
crow that was sitting on top of a high*

*cliff. In the crow's mouth was a
glob of deer fat. To Spilyáy, the fat*

looked delicious. So he sat for a

while and thought.

“Chief Crow, you are mighty and brave, let me hear your loudest war cry.”
The crow seemed pleased and made a loud “Caw.” Spilyáy was not impressed.
“Chief Crow, you are mightier and braver than that, make a louder war cry.”
The crow responded with a louder “Caw.”
Still Spilyáy was not impressed and said, “I grow impatient for I know of your greatness, Chief Crow. I ask you for a third time to make a war cry, one that will be heard over the roar of water, the buzz of wind, and the singing of people.”

The crow breathed in deeply and released a powerful “Caw,” the loudest ever heard in the woods. But at that moment, the deer fat fell out of the crow’s mouth and landed in front of Spilyáy. Spilyáy laughed loudly and then ate up the deer fat.”

**From the dirt he picks up
 a flake of stone and
 hands it to me.**

**“My relatives came here
 for many years, this
 land is sacred. See up on
 that rise — we buried
 my father there, ten years**

**ago. That's what he
wanted."**

**I turn the chip over and over,
thinking about who may
have made it...wondering who
will help put the pieces
back together.**

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