

STEP Please excuse my case of airplane throat
and the husky voice.

You maybe never had thought of
me possessing a Lauren Bacall-like
HUSKINESS OF
voice before, but hey, use your
imaginations.

I have two ^{BRIEF} stories to tell you. In one, art imitates life, and I come out of it with the makings of a novel. In the other, life imitates art--and let's see, when we get there, what's been gathered in by that second parenthesis of fate.

Tale number one begins at a campsite, as I say in the book, "in a mountain valley as old as the visit of glaciers," about 5:30 on the morning of the Fourth of July, 1977.

I say:

“Frost on the tent, huh?

My wife Carol, beside me in the sleeping bag,
says:

“Nope. It’s inside the tent.”

That summer of 1977 I was trying to find a reconciliation with the Montana I had left, 15 years before. Economic propulsion had sent me out of the state, and then as my father's life dwindled into his long dying, Montana became for me a site of sickness, sadness, strain. But now I was back, trying to write about it--and determined, too, to do something none of us in our family had had time or freedom to do: to go deep into the Rocky Mountain Front, the neighboring family of mountains behind the little town of Dupuyer during our sheepherding years, my high-school years.

Carol and I backpacked into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, that start of July, along a little-used packhorse trail, which of course spells unbridged streams. Three fordings of Birch Creek in the first four hours, the water at the last crossing ~~up~~ toward our waists.

After we had earned our way onto some actual trail, everywhere around were the mountainsides, of colossal reefs and deeps like the ocean bottom tipped empty and left on its side. Day on day, dodging weather by the hour, we hiked, camped, fished, enjoyed--and I tucked away the "write stuff" in a pocket notebook.

The morning of that sparkling frost inside our tent, we started to hike out of the Bob with brilliant blue above. Before noon, on a section of trail where, behind us, below us, lay the Continental Divide, we were in a sleet squall. When the squall cleared, the view was waiting: the Rockies blading up in all directions, peak upon peak upon peak, with a notch of view eastward to the patterned farmland of the plains.

There at noon on our Fourth of July high, Carol asked:

“So where does the map say we are?”

I traced the contour lines with my finger and told her:

“On a place named Family Peak.”

We aimed ourselves for that notch between the peaks and hiked out of the Bob with the wind thumping a farewell against the backs of our packs. As it had for five days, the trail remained empty except for us. We had, in our ^{“HIGH LONESOME”} time in that wilderness area, seen not a living soul.

Something, though. By whatever token, the standard journalist that I was when I went into those mountains came out to not only complete the memoir **This House of Sky**, but to write novel after novel about a century of people on the hem of those mountains and those plains. The contemporary arc of this latest one, **Mountain Time**, takes place with a sense of the immense clock of earth--the patient witness of mountains as they look down ^{AT} ~~as~~ the briefer existences that are our human fate.

PACE

And I think it's more than a coincidence that the book's plot of family--of the Baby Boom generation reaching its time of reckoning, jelly-sandwiched between children who taking their own oft-times inexplicable routes in life/and aging parents who are losing command over their lives--is keyed to the view, back there in '77, from a place called Family Peak.

Now to that other story I have for you. **Mountain Time** is about divides of various kinds, not simply the geographically unarguable Continental Divide but the territory between individuals and segments of society, and since I live in the Seattle of the 1990's, one of those societal slices has money all over it. The latest cybernaire, as invented by me, is named Aaron Frelinghuysen and he's described this way:

IN AUGUST OF LAST YEAR

thrown by Allen, ~~HAD A~~ and the guest list of Robin Williams, Dan Ackroyd, Steven Spielberg, Carrie Fisher, Debbie Reynolds, Penny Marshall, Terry Gilliam, George Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, Dennis Hopper, Bill Gates, probably half a dozen future Nobel Laureates of science, and four hundred or so others. Through some toss of the godly dice I was one of two writers invited--

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THE BAND,
LITTLE
FEAT

THE MUSICIANS
LOU REED AND
VERNON REID,

(CLYDE
DREXLER)

(JACK
VANCE)

“...The guy had more money than most nations. Frelinghuysen had piranhaed his way into the techieville food chain with a bit of wonderware called ZYX, and from Silicon Valley to Silicon Alley the deals had lined up for him.”

/ No sooner had I finished having my characters encounter this latest computer bigfoot and sent the manuscript in to Scribner than life did a little imitation of art for me. I was plucked out of my orderly, ordinary routine of sitting there pecking out words and wafted to Alaska on the wings and keels of money. Major money--the fortune of Paul Allen. That cruise ship bash

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16
2

sort of like winning a lottery you didn't know you had a ticket ^{ON} ~~it~~.

The days Carol and I spent with that shipload are in my diary under the heading, "Afloat with half the money in the known world." But the example I wanted to bring to you tonight is the heightening ^{THE STRETCHING,} that a writer--I think--has to try to do when handed something like that.

FROM THE BIG PAUL ALLEN FLOATING PARTY,
Out of many, many scenes, let me give you just the final night potlatch, when the upper deck of one of the

most posh cruise ships in the world was transformed into a mammoth replica of a coastal Indian longhouse--with a rock band playing, and gorgeously caped performers of the Tsimshian tribe dancing, and Hollywood starlets slinking by in slinky gowns, it was like the Star Wars bar.


There at the edge of the dance floor sits Candace Bergen, watching in ^{OPEN} utter fascination as the greatest

PACE

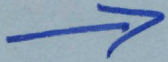
BEING HERSELF RATHER
THAN MURPHY BROWN,

artist of the Tsimshians, Nathan Jackson, performs his raven dance.

There is Jeff Goldblum, not in Jurassic Park or in The Big Chill, but in the buffet line with roast buffalo on his plate.

// And there on the rotunda next to the dance floor with the totem pole carved specially for this night  is a man dancing alone-- a man who in an earlier turn of his life, he'd told me, had been a commercial fisherman in Alaska, and

EMPHASIS



(INTENSE)

(NOD)

survived the sinking of a crab boat that plunged him into these exact cold northern waters now cut by the keel of the cruise ship "Crystal Harmony." / He dances and dances with the passion and privacy of a man who was handed his life back--and his movements on the rotunda set the thunderbird totem pole / to nodding / in rhythm / with him.

And, over along the wall, unabashedly standing on top of a chair to see out into this scene, is a white-BEARDED

writer, on a ladder of life where he surely has never been--but up there writing, writing, into a pocket notebook, to tuck away that high moment/inside the parentheses of fate.