POETRY SEATTLE

A new showcase for the Northwest's best poets

[Image of a group of women dancing]

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"debuts".
End of the hunt

By Ivan Doig

Each day and all day, the pair of us lobbysat at the clinic. I thumbed magazines and tried without showing it to watch my grandmother beside me. She kept her eyes on the waiting patients, studying the ones who could barely puff their way across the room to the reception desk, who sat hunched with their chests moving for each windy breath, who toddled into the waiting elevator with a nurse balancing them at an elbow.

When my father appeared, there was the relief, a quick lifting in the both of us, of seeing that he was so much sturdier than the others, his Montana ranchman's stride almost too bold among the gaspy shuffle.

And again we would set off walking, up over the floors of the clinic to the next probing test.

My father had come to Seattle that midsummer of 1967 with the preliminary diagnosis that the trouble burning beneath his breastbone might be emphysema. If that verdict was correct, the queer clumsy word would spell the soon-to-come end of more than I could bear to think about.

Of the two decades we had shared since my mother's death he had left my father with a 6-year-old son to raise. Of the alliance he had formed, 15 years ago, with my grandmother — my mother's mother, so that I would have a household to grow up in. Of the life linked most directly to my own.

Now he arrived back to us again and again in the clinic's reception area, often in surprise:

"That wasn't so bad, they just had me lay down under some machine. Could of had a nap except it was so damn cold.

"But other times, he became pale and grim and taut.

"They gave me one of those barium deals, and I heaved it right back up."

My grandmother would give her resentful "Hmph!" against the medical profession for dosing such torment into anyone, and I would try to talk him calm, keep him seated with us until the whiteness went from that handsome uneasy face.

Then the three of us would move through the clinic once more, like a search party off to the next lair of apparatus for Dad to patrol into for us.

At last the tests were finished. In the doctor's office, side by side, Dad and I waited. This day Grandma had not wanted to come, had said I should be alone with Dad.

The slim room was as neutral and toneless as if we were its first visitors ever, newcomers into a vacuum chamber. But outside the single thin window and below the clinic's roothold on its hill, the towers of Seattle marched to the dockside, and then the blue of Puget Sound pooled, rimming far off at a shore of timber and glacier-whetted peaks.

My father, my one closest pulse back into time, sat looking at the towers and the blue and the staggering mountains. Finally he said, in the worrying burr I had heard fret over vanished sheep and surprise blizzards and much else:

"Ivan, I'm just afraid of what he's gonna say."

One earlier instant, my father and I had been beside each other this way, in the sight of mountains and under the shadow of what was to come. Five years before, in Montana...

At dawn, the pewter sky beginning to warm to blue above the Castle Range across the valley, the two of us already were stepping from the Jeep at timberline on Grassy Mountain.

Grandma had climbed out of bed when we did, given us coffee and sweet rolls, slabbled together sandwiches out of her thick crisp-crusted bread, then saw us out the door with:

"Don't bring home more grouse than all of the town of Ringling can eat."

September frost underfoot, a testing frost, the lightest dust of white on the broad bunchgrass crest of mountain. Dad handed me the single-shot .22, then the small box of cartridges to put in my jacket pocket. I shook out a cartridge barely longer than my thumbnail, clicked it into the breech. Carrying the light rifle underhand on the side of my body away from Dad, I started along the mountain slope beside him.

He had a hunter's voice, which could soften just enough not to carry far and yet be heard clearly. My own nosedived in and out of mutter as I answered him.

He showed me sheep-camp sites remembered from three decades before, game trails winding up and across the summit like age lines on a vast forehead, homestead splatters on the aged skirts of our home valley far below us.

In trade, I told him everything I knew of my half year ahead, now that journalism school was behind me, basic training at the Air Force base in San Antonio, a technical school probably some in Texas for the rest of those months.

The first grouse caught us both in midstep as it flailed like a hurtled wad of gray leaves into the air in front of us.

"That must've been one of yours," I said.

"And who's carrying the gun along like a crowbar froze to his hand?"

As ready and free a laugh as I could ever remember flowed from my father.

"'Ye could at least have threw it at him."

In minutes, I shot the next grouse before it could fly. I handed Dad the rifle.

"Here, see if you learned anything from that."

I put the bird in the sack, he held out to me, followed it seconds later with the one he shot from the top of a log 50 yards away.

"I like to give mine a bit of a chance, ye see, instead of sneakin' up till I'm standin' on their tail feathers."

The rifle traded back and forth, we each missed shots, made more. At midmorning four birds apace, we knew the hunting was over, but kept walking the mountainside. At early noon, we sat on a silvered log and ate our sandwiches dry.

"You leave for the service — when, day after tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Scared any of the plane ride?"

"Some. You know I'm like
A sneaky look at the trade balance

The Dow Jones teltype machine down the hall just ratcheted out another copy of my squib of international economics. The dollar had slid down against the yen, down versus the mark, down vis-a-vis the franc. Another downdraft.

I looked down at my feet and a pang of guilt shot through me. My Tigris. My red, white and blue Tigris. Mei culpa, mei culpa, mei culpa.

The dollar is going to hell and it is all my fault. Well, maybe not all. But in part it is my fault. I went out last week and bought a new pair of sneakers. On the same day, I heard some senator telling a news panel the real cause of the sagging performance of the dollar was our persistent negative trade balance.

That is, we were buying more foreign goods, he said, than foreigners were willing or able to buy from us. I had that in the back of my mind when I went to buy my sneakers.

Now, the sneaker is an American institution. There is hardly anything that is anywhere near as out-and-out American as the common sneaker.

After all, the sneaker was invented in the United States in 1968. Furthermore, Charles Goodyear, while not its inventor, was surely its godfather. Goodyear, after a good many years of trying to develop a rubber that would not melt in heat and get brittle in cold, isolated the key to the American sneaker when, in 1839, he had an accident over a hot stove.

He spilled some India rubber and sulfur onto the top of a stove and discovered vulcanization. It was a long way from that to custom-made shoes, but the line is straight, and sneakers came in between.

The first one had a rubber sole, canvas uppers, eyelets and laces. Clearly, a sneaker. However, in 1868, sneaking was not socially respectable. The shoe was called a croquet sandal. It sold for $6.

Of course, in those days you had to charge $8 for a fine croquet sandal. But by 1873, a few pedestrian advertisements were calling the shoe a sneaker. In 1897, Sears Roebuck put them in the catalog and the price was cut down to playground reality: 50 cents.

As long as the sneaker was cheap and in the Sears book for anywhere near 60 cents, the economic future of America was sure and strong. The sneaker became a symbol of the nation. Like, E pluribus unum.

Indeed, so much was the sneaker an American institution that the Chinese army entered the Korean War wearing sneakers, everybody laughed because they thought they had got them in a seconds sale from U.S. Keds.

Keds, by the way, were not always called Keds. They first were produced in (1917) by the National India Rubber Co. But few basketball players could be persuaded (or tutored) to ask for a pair of Pro-National India Rubber Company, so the company got discouraged.

It asked for name-change suggestions and the overwhelming favorite was Peds. It was all set to begin making millions of Peds when it was discovered that someone else already had the name.

So, hoping to attract the kid-die market, they borrowed the "x" and called the sneaks Keds. As for the rest of the company, it also got sick of being called National India Rubber and eventually became Uniroyal.

U.S. Keds cranked out 25 million and sold them all in the first year. That same year, one Marvin M. Converse, a rubber-overtop shoemaker from Mal- den, Mass., decided to make the best basketball shoe in creation. He called it the Converse All Star.

The sneaker was king; the sneaker was American. And so it remained. For a while. But in 1925 a relatively minor but ambitious company was founded in Germany by two brothers, Adolf and Rudolph Dassler.

The Dasslers set out to build a better shoe, but not with each other. After a series of upheavals they split. They haven't spoken to each other since 1949. But they still liked making sneakers.

So Rudolph Dassler took off on his own and founded a line of sneakers called Puma. Adolf, sniping a syllable of fire from his still last names, began another company, Adidas. A generation later, Adidas was the world's premier sports shoemaker in the world; Puma, the second largest in Europe.

Nike was begun in Oregon, but most of its shoes were later sold using labels indicating Far Eastern manufacture. Nike bought the Gola; Italy the Lotto; Brazil the Cobra and France the Pat- rick and Germany the Bauer. What was happening to the sneaker in America?

They were still being sold. We buy 220 million pairs of sneakers a year in this country. And this is when some of the sneaks are to blame.

According to "Sneakers," a book by Samuel Amicuri Walker, 75 million pairs of sneakers are imported from Taiwan; 31 million from South Korea; 3 million pairs yearly from Japan and 1.3 million from Hong Kong. That's just from the Far East.

The growth of the European and South American sneaker and cleverly that most Americans are now transporting themselves, dressed in these shoes, to foreign bottoms when they run out to play.

And these days, everybody is running outside to play — or at least to run. Even me. So, I picked up my little shoes and the other day and drove down to the Athlete's Foot (225 stores in 44 states).

The senator's complaint of unfavorable trade balances was in a way correct. The Foot had dozens of shoes, hundreds of styles, thousands of combinations of stripes and stars and swooshes.

I picked out a pair of lovely white ones with three blue stripes and one red stripe. They were as soft as an Indian maiden's caress and as stylish as a Perrier at a disco. They had the rugged old American name of Tiger. As in: "Princeton Tiger," "Tiger Rag" and "Howl at the Tiger!" I plunked down $30 and bought them.

I drove home in my little red truck, warm in the feeling that I had just a little way — helped the trade deficit. I glanced over at the sneakers. They had a tag on the tongue. TIGER, it said in white letters on a red tag. And up above in smaller red letters was the manu- facturer's name: Onitsuka. I didn't feel much like running anymore. I parked the Toyota, ambled into the house, and my Seiko, clicked on the Sony and poured myself a Sapporo.

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